

UNDERCUTTING THE BIBILICAL INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY DEBATE:  
THE HERMENEUTIC OF 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17 IN POSTMODERNISM AGAINST BLACK  
LIBERATION THEOLOGY

By

Raleigh M. Bagley III

Liberty University

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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2023

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April 06, 2023

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## Abstract

A resurgence of Black Liberation Theology has recently occurred in America, especially among proponents of Karl Barth and his contemporaries, James Cone, Robert McAfee Brown, and J. Deotis Roberts, to name a few. Black Liberation Theology and its concepts have been embraced in American culture via political, social, and economic media capable of bridging the divide between postmodernism and the church. Indeed, the avowal by certain prominent liberation theologians has been so widespread that their proposed theories have become synonymous with biblical truth among specific audiences. However, on the central issue of the denial of the authority and inspiration of Scripture, these liberation theologians' interpretations have placed them in opposition to evangelicalism. Thus, Scripture is only "inspired" when God periodically speaks to individuals, whereas one must be suitable to Scripture— we are not masters of it but only objects of it.<sup>1</sup> This inadequate belief devaluates the propositional revelatory essence of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Believing that another knowledge of God is possible, James Cone, whose Ph.D. dissertation was based on Barthian theology<sup>3</sup>, proposed a "black theology," a new concept that has taken flight as a global reconsideration of theological reflection that continues to this day. Using a thorough exegesis of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, this dissertation will argue that its components reinforce the doctrine of inspiration and authority of Scripture and undercut the hermeneutical perspective of postmodernism's Black Liberation Theology. In addition, one will

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<sup>1</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Volume 1* (Allen Park, MI.: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 80.

<sup>2</sup> Jay C. Rochelle, "Bonhoeffer and Biblical Interpretation: Reading Scripture in the Spirit," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22, no. 2 (April 1, 1995): 85-95. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed November 21, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> James Cone, *The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Northwestern University Ph.D. dissertation, 1965.

call on the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy to support this doctrinal position including diverse perspectives of inspiration from selected Scriptural and historical perspectives. The investigation will determine future dialog concerning various models that have shaped critical thinking over time.

*Keywords:* Black Liberation Theology, Scriptural authority and inspiration, hermeneutical methods

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## **Dedication**

To God be the glory for what only he could have willed for this appointed time in my life. In reflection, I acknowledge that pride and arrogance, derivatives of sin, almost prevented me from viewing Scripture in the light of God's authority. Such confession was the humbleness needed to rescue this foolish man from what he did not comprehend— that the foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of men. Though sin's depravity ruins the means of mortal men, it does not repeal God's sovereignty over them. To my wife, who sacrificed, supported, and believed in me through this process. May God continue to bless you as the loving and virtuous woman you are. I could not have imagined life's journey without you by my side. I would also like to dedicate this work to my sons, Raleigh and Matthew. May you both continue to pursue God and his righteousness in your lives.

## **Acknowledgments**

This work would not have been possible without the support of my chair, mentor, and friend, Richard Fuhr—I am deeply indebted to you. Thank you for your invaluable advice, unwavering support, and profound belief in my abilities.

## **List of Abbreviations**

Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)

Black Liberation Theology (BLT)

Black Power Movement (BPM)

Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI)

Critical Theory (CT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Social Justice (CSJ)

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)

English Standard Version (ESV)

Feminist Theology (FT)

International Conference on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI)

Liberation Theology (LT)

Nation of Islam (NOI)

Queer Theology (QT)

South African Student Organization (SASO)

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Woke Christianity (WC)

Womanist Theology (WT)



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## CHAPTER ONE—Introduction

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

— 2 Timothy 3:16-17<sup>4</sup>

Using a thorough exegesis of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, this dissertation will argue that its components reinforce the doctrine of authority and inspiration of Scripture and undercut the hermeneutical perspective of postmodernism’s Black Liberation Theology. Indeed, the basis for this examination is the weight of Scripture as the authoritative voice of truth— “all Scripture is inspired by God” (πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος). After which, one will employ the *Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy* and other scholarly writings from the church and academy to support the authority and inerrancy doctrines of Scripture while summarizing the essentials of postmodernism’s current controversy of interpreting Holy Scripture by employing social, political, and economic means that provide a “new” understanding of God’s will for his church.

On trial is James Cone’s Black Liberation Theology (known throughout this essay as BLT), an opponent of *sola Scriptura* delivering that God’s love can only be expressed by admitting biblical error and embracing Jesus as the liberator of the poor, oppressed black and brown people, and other marginalized groups. Cone abhors the gospel message— a conclusion evident by his own words and denial of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ:

“Delores Williams, a womanist theologian, challenged interpretations of the Christian faith that placed the cross at the center... She rejected the view common in classic texts of Western theological tradition as well as in the preaching in African American churches that Jesus accomplished human salvation by dying in our place. According to Williams,

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references have been sourced from the English Standard Version, 2016.

Jesus did not come to save us through his death on the cross but rather he ‘came to show redemption through a perfect ministerial vision of righting relationships... I accept Delores Williams’s rejection of theories of atonement as found in the Western theological tradition and in the uncritical proclamation of the cross in many black churches. I find nothing redemptive about suffering in itself. The gospel of Jesus is not a rational concept to be explained in a theory of salvation, but a story about God’s presence in Jesus’ solidarity with the oppressed, which led to his death on the cross. What is redemptive is faith that God snatches victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair, as revealed in the biblical and black proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>5</sup>

For the apostles, the gospel was of first importance (Acts 2:22-24; 1 Cor. 15:4). However, woke Christians, many of them pastors, and scholars from the academy, reject recanting Cone’s heretical teachings. “There are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:7). Scripture clearly shows that James Cone’s gospel rendition fits Paul’s description of a distorted gospel. Subsequently, BLT’s interpretation of the gospel is antithetical according to Scripture’s authority and inspiration question.

Understanding the responsibility and difficulty in one’s quest to undercut any consideration of BLT as an alternative way to re-tool what God has said concerning man’s depravity is a weighty matter in this hour as it has been in the past, given the scarcity of methods for approaching the doctrine of inerrancy. Therefore, in its view of inerrancy, as expressed by 2 Timothy, the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy presents that it denies the legitimacy of separating the authority of Christ from the authority of Scripture but affirms the normative authority of Holy Scripture is the authority of God himself.

The investigation of Black Liberation Theology is still virtually unfamiliar to many who willingly and unknowingly parrot its doctrinal claims. It is contentious to compare CSBI’s former statement with BLT’s presumption that one has the authority to change Scripture’s

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<sup>5</sup> James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2013), 149-50.

meaning without honor and regard for its distinctiveness as the written word of God. Even more contentious is taking the liberty to do so as often as new generations face new problems.

According to G. Clarke Chapman, for BLT, there is a “continuing dynamic reciprocity between the message of God’s self-revelation and each contemporary relevance of that message.”<sup>6</sup>

However, if God is to be honored, one must understand that the hermeneutical task must correspondingly acknowledge the discontinuity of inner-biblical and post-biblical interpretation of the former’s uniquely authoritative role— the aim of this chapter’s research.

Every word of the Bible is authentically God’s words. Each has been articulated and God-breathed. Hence, to disbelieve or oppose any word in Scripture is to disbelieve or oppose the sovereignty of God. This view from Scripture indicates the whole integrity and trustworthiness of God’s words are particularly relevant at this point. “The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined, exposed to the earth, clarified sevenfold (Ps. 12:7), designates the entire credibility and purity of Scripture. Correspondently, “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him” (Prov. 30:5), shows the integrity of God’s spoken word. “The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. This definition does not mean that the Bible tells us every fact there is to know about any one subject, but it affirms that what it does say about any subject is true.”<sup>7</sup>

The preeminence of *all Scripture* is the power of Paul’s viewpoint of inspiration (3:16). The emphasis of θεόπνευστος provides that God was actively engaged in revealing his truth to the apostles and prophets who wrote it down. God is the Author of Scripture and all of its

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<sup>6</sup> G. Clark Chapman, “American Theology in Black”, *CrossCurrents* Vol. 22 No.2 (Spring 1972), 139-157.

<sup>7</sup> Millard J. Erickson., *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 91.

revelation to man. Thus, Scripture is authoritative, inspired, and true in all that it affirms. Studying God’s word profits in doctrine (διδασκαλίαν, correct teaching; doctrine), reproof (ἐλεγμὸν, conviction; truth above argument), correction (ἐπανόρθωσιν, improvement of life or character), and instruction (παιδείαν, instruction which aims at increasing virtue). Of these four, only doctrine is focused on knowledge or information, while the others involve a change of life. Emphasizing the knowledge of God (who he is and his expectation of man) results in this necessary change.

Comparably, the view of God’s communication spoken through sinful human beings is never false; neither does it assert fallacy. However, error and at least partial falsehood is the nature of every human being: “God is not a man that He should lie, nor is He a mortal that He should relent. Would He say and not do, speak, and not fulfill?” (Num. 23:19). These words were spoken by wicked Balaam, particularly concerning the prophetic utterance that God had revealed through his mouth. For this reason (and others), the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy is the substratum for the church, past and postmodern, wherein the Holy Scripture’s sufficiency produces comprehensive righteousness. This view is the premise of the apostle Paul’s summary of 1 Cor. 9:19-22: “that I might win more; that I might win those under the law; that I might win those without the law; and that I may, by all means, save some.” The inerrant word is God’s truth, both written and incarnate.

The impact of ἐξηρτισμένος (*exartizō*, fully equipped) is one’s proficiency in God’s word— “but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh. 1:8; see also Ps. 1:2-4). Paul highlights correct doctrine with proper practice— an

idea that links the emphasis of one knowing God’s word and then applying it to one’s life. The result is what Jesus says, “Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:15-20).

An earlier generation of evangelicals was familiar with two principles that compelled their hermeneutical and theological examination of the Bible—the formal principle, the authority of Scripture—the material principle, the gospel, and the substance of Scripture. To be restrained by using only one of these individual principles leads one to drift into the murky waters of suppositional and suggestive theology absent from total resignation to the Bible’s authority. D. A. Carson expressed that the trustworthiness of Scripture should be more than a mere technical advance of ideas that in many ways dilute God’s emphasis of his salvific wisdom by faith in the Son.

The idea of an inerrant or even an infallible original text of Scripture has been a matter of wide controversy. In part such controversy has merely reflected fundamental divisions over the nature of Scripture, its historical reliability, and the extent and essence of its authority. However, it is the contention here that the controversy has partly been complicated by the multivalence of key terms being used by advocates of inerrancy. This means that, while advocates of inerrancy are carefully presenting nuanced arguments that are exegetically well grounded and compelling, there are stumbling blocks to their message other than the sheer offensiveness of a doctrine of inerrancy.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Scripture works powerfully in the heart when combined with “faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). Paul further provides, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). Motivated by this biblical framework is the CSBI and its affirmation of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture, providing its clear understanding and warning against its denial.

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<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson., *The Enduring Authority of Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 387.



### The Attrition of Biblical Authority and Inspiration

If the Bible is unable to produce a sound doctrine of Scripture, then it is thus incapable of producing, with any degree of believability or credibility, a doctrine about any other matter. If the human writers of Scripture have erred in their understanding of Holy Writ's purity, then they have disqualified themselves as writers for any other area of God's revealed truth. If they are so disqualified in all areas, then every preacher is thoroughly robbed of any confidence and conviction concerning the alleged true message he would be relaying for God.<sup>9</sup>

Postmodernism has seen a formidable theological drift motivated by hostile hermeneutics that denies both Scripture's authority and inspiration. Perhaps today's most significant threat against the Christian church in America is BLT. It parades itself as progressive, "woke," and "inclusive" and exploits Scripture as the authority for its justification.

Black Theology's answer to the question of hermeneutics can be stated briefly: The hermeneutical principle for an exegesis of the scriptures is the revelation of God in Christ as the liberator of the oppressed from social oppression and to political struggle, wherein the poor recognize that their fight against poverty and injustice is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ the liberator, the helper and the healer of the wounded, is the point of departure for valid exegesis of the scriptures from a Christian perspective. Any starting point that ignores God in Christ as the liberator of the oppressed or that makes salvation as liberation secondary is ipso facto invalid and thus heretical.<sup>10</sup>

BLT has a false view of Christ because "He knew what was in man" (John 2:25). The source of exploitation for all of creation is the depravity of sin in revolt against its Creator, God, and the

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<sup>9</sup> John F. MacArthur., *The Mandate of Biblical Inerrancy: Expository Preaching.*, This essay was initially given as a response at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Summit II (Nov 1982). It was subsequently published under the title "Inerrancy and Preaching: Where Exposition and Exegesis Come Together" in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (ed. by Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 801-831. It has been updated to serve as the foundational article for this inaugural issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal.*, 14.

<sup>10</sup> James Cone, "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence." *Interpretation* 28, no. 4 (October 1974): 422–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096437402800403>.

oppression and hatred associated with man's will in which God hates (Rom. 8:20).<sup>11</sup> How can Cone's false Christ, whose mission is the anthropocentric emancipation of poor and oppressed black and brown people, make them more favorable in God's eyes than their white oppressors? The answer is BLT's controlling authority to colorize any element of Scripture in favor of its ideological perspectives. Not only does this affect the interpretation of Scripture utilizing BLT's cultural lens, but it also provides that the interpreter influences God's authority over Scripture. Thus, the attrition of biblical authority and inspiration in postmodernism is akin to Buthelezi's comments concerning the relevance of BLT's hermeneutical claims:

Blackness is a life category that embraces the totality of my daily existence. The totality of the only life I know has unfolded itself to me within the limits and range of black situational possibilities... it is my only experience of life, and this fact determines the hermeneutical setting for the Word of God, which is designed to save me within the context of my real situation.<sup>12</sup>

Christian theism does not consider race, nor does it consider color. God created one race of people for his glory. This statement counters Buthelezi's claims citing BLT as an alternative hermeneutic posture for Scripture. Man is God's crowning glory. All are one in Christ as one body of believers, his church. "But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of

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<sup>11</sup> Martin H. Scharlemann, *The Ethics of Revolution* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 34.

<sup>12</sup> Manas Buthelezi, "An African Theology or a Black Theology," in *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, p. 33. Original publication: "African Theology and Black Theology: A Search for a Theological Method", in H.J. Becken, *Relevant Theology for Africa* (Durban: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973).

the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Eph. 2:14-16).

As a result, man has inherent value, dignity, and worth expressed by Christ’s redemptive work and the administering of reconciliation for all who are justified by faith in him alone. The confines of Christian theism do not make room for racism or classism. However, some will question this fact based on what has been practiced by some in American culture and in other cultural instances— many who embraced Christian theism yet embraced racism, classism, and slavery. What should we do with this reality? One’s answer is nothing citing that narrative is not normative. However, one fact checks all differences and opinions amongst men— the supremacy of Christ. In this regard, the behavior of men will bow to the will of the sovereign God.

Infallibility and inerrancy indicate that the original texts of the Bible are “God-breathed.” Scholars who are advocates of biblical inerrancy concede that there is a possibility for human error in exposition and translation, and consequently only uphold as the Word of God interpretations that “faithfully represent the original.”<sup>13</sup>

Reliance in the divine inspiration of Scripture was one of the two essential premises at the core of Origen’s exegetical, theological, and apologetic determinations. He was resolutely persuaded that “the holy books are not the composition of men, but as a result of the inspiration (epipnoias) of the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father of the universe through Jesus Christ, these were written and have come down to us.”<sup>14</sup> The weight on the action of the Holy Spirit: Origen

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<sup>13</sup> *The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy*, Article X.

<sup>14</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 4.2.2. Greek text: GCS, Vol. 22 (ed. P. Koetschau, 1913) Eng. Trans.: G. W. Butterworth, *Origen: On First Principles* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973).

speaks of the Spirit as the one who “composes” or “supervises” the formation of Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who is the author of the holy books.<sup>16</sup>

This miracle of inspiration was not restricted to certain portions or just on a Testament of Scripture. Each portion of both Testaments was proportionately inspired: “The divine character of Scripture extending through all of it.” (εις πᾶσαν αὐτήν).<sup>17</sup>

### **Black Liberation Theology’s Concept of Biblical Authority**

Black Liberation Theology confronts the inspiration of Scripture and approaches the Bible from Barth’s Neo-Orthodoxy, which confronted nineteenth-century liberalism. Along with Barth, Emil Brunner renounced the Bible objectively as God’s authoritative word, noting that Scripture was merely a collection of human documents. Both Barth and Brunner agreed that the Bible becomes the word of God through God’s “encounter” with the reader as they interact with these human documents.<sup>18</sup>

However, Orthodox Christianity declares that Scripture is objectively true, emphasizing that one must have a personal relationship with God. There is no contention between these two realities. Thus, regarding Scripture, these statements are intrinsically revelatory and authentic with or without a response from the reader.

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<sup>15</sup> *Homily on I Samuel 2* (PG 12.1017), cited by R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1959) 193; cf. *De Prin.* 4.2.9

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the *Philocalia*, 2.4 (ed. J. A. Robinson; Cambridge: University Press, 1893). Eng. Trans.: G. Lewis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911). Cf. also F. Prat, *Origene, Le Theologien et L’Exegete* (Paris, 1907) 117-120.

<sup>17</sup> *De Prin.* 4.1.7

<sup>18</sup> R.C. Sproul, “The Neo-Orthodox View,” *Ligonier*, January 1992, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-neo-orthodox-view> [accessed October 14, 2022].

Barth's continued concern with inerrancy was the question of human error. He never seemed to realize it is because of sinfulness that one is prone to human error, requiring the superintendence of God. This fact alone ensures that God's "breath" upon the biblical writers ensures that Scripture's writing is error-free.

In Cone's explanation, the Old Testament is a book that finds Israel struggling to gain liberation from oppression. In his analysis, he neglects to distinguish between what is factual in the character of history books and the fictive makeup of the OT mystic text. One must focus on the issue of what forms the nature of theological claims concerning historical claims. This distinction is necessary, and one must examine the conceptual divide that immediately impacts history's ontological and epistemological understanding.

J. I. Packer's observations are relevant in this analysis. He submits to the Protestant reformers' acumen and challenges that the Bible's authority is grounded in God's ability to speak through it, revealing himself and conveying redemption. Accordingly, the meaning of inerrancy is not determined beforehand, *a priori*, but in the development, after one has encountered the Bible, listened to it, and illuminating the readers of its primary intent and purpose: salvation.<sup>19</sup> Though Packer is a member of the executive council the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy, his view is close to that which the ICBI's statements are formed to exclude—views like those of Jack Rogers.<sup>20</sup> The opposing observations are notable in two books— one co-authored by Jack Rogers and Donald McKim. They both contend that historically, the church has declared the Bible's infallibility for faith and tradition, but not inerrancy in the matters of

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<sup>19</sup> J. I. Packer., *Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1975), 3-12.

<sup>20</sup> Article 16 of the 1978 ICBI statement says, "We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism..." The latter is a point Rogers makes, e.g., in *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, 187, 188.

science, history, and geography.<sup>21</sup> The other book by John Woodbridge, whose view corresponds with the ICBI statements. Woodbridge refutes the distinction made by Rogers and McKim. He asserts that the central tradition within church history is both the infallibility of the saving message and the inerrancy of the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

Others who oppose the Chicago Statement are critics who hold a new perspective on its view of the inerrancy of Scripture. The challenge is outside of the evangelical viewpoint of MacArthur, Sproul, Mohler, Packer, and others. Ecumenical Reformed Theology proposes that biblical inerrancy divides evangelicals—a thought shared by Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, C.H. Dodd, N.T. Wright, and especially Cone, who opposes evangelicalism altogether. This new perspective is not so new but embraces various theological perspectives, including Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Liberation theologies. By utilizing the statements of leading evangelicals (described as divisive inerrancy quotes), such as MacArthur and Mohler and their defense of the inerrancy of Scripture, several statements have been published to oppose the Chicago Statement and its supporters. One such statement states that “Inerrancy only exists to divide the Church.”<sup>23</sup>

Biblical Inerrancy is a divisive system of affirmations and denials, and its proponents led us to believe that all *true* Christians affirm it, and only *false* Christians deny it. Proponents describe Biblical Inerrancy as a *line in the sand*, that separates true Christians from false teachers, and if any *true* Christian were to deny it, then they are on the road to perdition. Biblical Inerrancy is a second order doctrine (*adiaphora*), but proponents elevate it to be a religious test for orthodoxy (*shibboleth*). Public and private disputes over theological and biblical ideas are good and necessary, because of the truth! Biblical Inerrancy ceases to be a dispute, and becomes divisive when it accuses its opponents of

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<sup>21</sup> Jack Rogers and Donald McKim., *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1979), 120.

<sup>22</sup> John D. Woodbridge., *Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 103.

<sup>23</sup> <https://postbarthian.com/2017/06/17/errors-inerrancy-10-biblical-inerrancy-divides-evangelicals/> [accessed August 21, 2020].

denying the Christian faith! (After all, the "accuser of the brethren" isn't a Christian calling.) The tenth Error of Inerrancy is that it divides evangelicals.<sup>24</sup>

In Cone's view, BLT is at odds with evangelicalism in that its revelation of God's Christ has been redefined as an activist and not the Savior. "He is God himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing man from ungodly principalities and powers that hinder his relationship with God... Jesus' work is essentially one of liberation."<sup>25</sup> As previously stated, Cone's views are foundationally Barthian, but considering his close alliance with other scholars who deny inerrancy, his views are yet another attempt to cry foul on the Scriptural authority and inspiration question.

A closer analysis of Cone's interpretation of Barth's Neo-Orthodoxy provides further evidence to refute BLT and its contemporaries. Though many pastors, theologians, and Christians are not aware of the dangers of BLT, Cone's fingerprints can be seen throughout many major university's religious studies curriculums providing its expression as a viable hermeneutic for communicating the Bible in postmodernism's inclusiveness of both religious and secular ideas. For illustration, Cone said,

The weakness of most Christian' approaches to anthropology stems from a preoccupation with (and distortion of) the God-problem, leaving concrete, oppressed human beings unrecognized and degraded. This is evident, for instance, in fundamentalist and orthodox theologies when they view the infallibility of the Bible as the sole ground of religious authority and fail to ask about the relevance of the inerrancy of scripture of the wretched of the earth. If the basic truth of the gospel is that the Bible is the infallible word of God, then it is inevitable that more emphasis will be placed upon 'true' propositions about God than upon God as active in the liberation of the oppressed of the land. Blacks, struggling for survival, are not interested in abstract truth, 'infallible' or otherwise. Truth is concrete.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> <https://postbarthian.com/2017/06/17/errors-inerrancy-10-biblical-inerrancy-divides-evangelicals/> [accessed August 21, 2020].

<sup>25</sup> James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>26</sup> James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Press, 2007), 88.

C. F. Stewart, opposing Cone's theology and the denial of Scripture's authority and inspiration, suggests that God cannot be known on the basis of reason alone, but revelation and experience are essential to gainful knowledge of God. He notes that reason is not a central principle of BLT but that it leans upon several rationales in the formation of "black" experiences, history, culture, revelation, scripture, and tradition.<sup>27</sup> Cone, he argues, "does not embrace reason as a principal source of Black Theology. Why? Because reason as a separate formative factor is too malleable and moot to be considered a reliable source of theology. In the black religious tradition, one cannot affirm the primacy of reason alone, without simultaneously emphasizing the importance of the heart and soul."<sup>28</sup>

Cone's emphasis on the "black experience" as a springboard for BLT can be challenged because of its basis on black culture and history hanging upon the history of oppression and racism. These ideas are prescriptive positions of the black experience, where culture and history are good ways of examining black reality. They prove that the reality of black people's condition in America contradicts Cone's hypothesis that God favors the oppressed more than others. Thus, the historical accounts of black and brown peoples in America favored by God in this way must hold a relationship of a "suffering servant" or "co-sufferer" with him to meet or explain community suffering. Cone's theological propositions are the antithesis of Jesus Christ, as "suffering servant" and propitiation for sin—the atoning work of the Savior. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). According to Cone, biblical authority and inspiration are not

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<sup>27</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Carlyle Fielding Stewart, *God, Being and Liberation: A Comparative Analysis of the Theologies and Ethics of James H. Cone and Howard Thurman* (New York, NY: University Press of America, 1989), 23.



central to BLT, but rather a synthesis between Scripture and culture as the necessity to build its foundation. God's nature is known within the human world by the former, and the latter makes the former essential.<sup>29</sup>

### **Weight of the Analysis**

The proposal that Jesus is silent on the inerrancy of God's word is the basis for those who reject the argument for Scriptural inerrancy. The view taken by the ICBI in the CSBI, the following statement is significant: "We deny that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science."<sup>30</sup> In the former "Short Statement," of the 1978 article, the subsequent is affirmed:

Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.<sup>31</sup>

A critic of this view, John R. W. Stott stated, "Simply to say that the Bible is inerrant may be misleading because there are things contained in the Bible that are not affirmed by the Bible. What does it affirm in Genesis 1, 2, 3? Is it affirming that the world, the universe was made in six days or not? So, we have to argue about the hermeneutical question."<sup>32</sup>

Those who oppose the inerrantist's viewpoint contend that the Bible embraces and declares certainties regarding science, history, and geography. The view from inerrancy:

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<sup>29</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 21-23.

<sup>30</sup> The 1978 ICBI statement is found in Norman L. Geisler, ed. *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 493-497. The first quotation above is from Article 12 of the statement.

<sup>31</sup> "The Short Statement," *The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy*, International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Chicago, IL., The Short Statement.

<sup>32</sup> "The Church in the Modern World," *Mission Journal*, (October 19, 1985), 3-7.

Scriptures affirm soteriological matters, not matters of a scientific, geographical, or historical perspective, except as these latter questions are inevitably associated with its soteriological cases. In the second Chicago Statement of 1982, Article 6, the ICBI reemphasizes its position: “We deny that, while Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation, biblical truth should be defined in terms of this function.”<sup>33</sup>

Harold Lindsell argues that it is a “gross distortion” to assert that individuals who consider the inerrancy of Scripture presume each statement made in the Bible is true (as opposed to accurate).<sup>34</sup> He expresses that there are false statements in the Bible, but they are reported accurately.<sup>35</sup> He said, “All the Bible does, for example, in the case of Satan, is to report what Satan actually said. Whether what he said was true or false is another matter. Christ stated that the devil is a liar.”<sup>36</sup>

Norman Geisler proposes another view of inerrancy that echoes Lindsell’s indications against inerrancy, though he suggests that the literal interpretation of Scripture should be examined in considering both scientific and historical information.

Many who believe in the *inspiration* of scripture teach that it is infallible but not inerrant. Those who subscribe to infallible believe that what the scriptures say regarding matters of faith and Christian practice are wholly useful and accurate. Some denominations that teach infallibility hold that the historical or scientific details, which may be irrelevant to matters of faith and Christian practice, may contain errors. Those who believe in inerrancy hold that the scientific, geographic, and historical details of the scriptural texts in their original manuscripts are entirely accurate and without error. However, the

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<sup>33</sup> Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, ed., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 892.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Lindsell., *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 38.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

scientific claims of scripture must be interpreted in the light of its phenomenological nature, not just with strict, clinical literality, which was foreign to historical narratives.<sup>37</sup>

Advocates for biblical inerrancy teach that God used the “distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers”<sup>38</sup> of scripture and that God's inspiration guided them to project his message through their language and personality flawlessly, not that the Bible was dictated directly by God. If these statements uphold the inspiration of Scripture, then what historical implications shifted the understanding of biblical inerrancy?

Murray Rae argues that there is a “disengagement” between truth and history. The basis of this separation is the effect of seventeenth-century rationalism. As a result, “theology and history have been torn apart.”<sup>39</sup> The divorce of the two has initiated disbelief about the inerrancy of the Bible. According to Rae, the conjecture is that history should be safeguarded in contradiction “of certain theological claims.”<sup>40</sup> The truth of historical statements cannot be comprehended by the deployment of “theological categories in our accounts of what has taken place.”<sup>41</sup>

The divorce of theology and history is one of the major theological shifts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From a philosophical perspective, the shift in the theological view of inerrancy began with Rene Descartes (1596-1650), proceeded by Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), and G.E. Lessing (1729-81). The works of

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<sup>37</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix., *A General Introduction to the Bible*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 17.

<sup>38</sup> *The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy*., Article VIII

<sup>39</sup> Murray Rae, *History and Hermeneutics* (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2005), 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

these epoch-making scholars lay a foundation for skepticism in both the inerrancy and historical claims Scripture.

Spinoza “represents a fateful turn for Christian theology for it is under his influence that there arose in biblical interpretation a separation between history and faith.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, Reimarus, claims that one cannot know anything about the historical Jesus from the writings of the apostles because they intentionally prevaricated their accounts of the resurrection to preserve the vision that Jesus had for himself.<sup>43</sup> Lastly, Lessing resolves that the nature of historical claims can never be conclusive regarding ultimate or absolute truth.

The fateful turn of events regarding biblical interpretation not only delivers the basis of Cone’s hostility toward the gospel, but its meaning. Provided that the gospel’s foundation stands on the resurrected Savior, for BLT the gospel’s focus is social, political, and physical liberation. Therefore, Jesus is not the emancipator for sinful man, but a liberator of black and brown people from white oppression in American society. In this frame, the revelation to judge Scripture is the individual’s cultural interpretation rather than God being both its Author and authority.

Looking at the New Testament, the message of the gospel is clear: Christ came into the world in order to destroy the works of Satan (I John 3:8). His whole life was a deliberate offensive against those powers which held man captive...It was not until Christ’s death on the cross that the decisive battle was fought and won by the Son of man. In that event, the tyranny of Satan, in principle, came to an end. The Good News is that God in Christ has freed us; we need no longer to be enslaved by alien forces. The battle was fought and won on Good Friday and the triumph was revealed to men at Easter... The white structure of this American society, personified in every racist, must be at least part of what the New Testament meant by the demonic forces.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Rae, *History and Hermeneutics*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 40-41.

BLT addresses the symptoms but never the cause of the postmodern world's misfortunes. Cone's foundation, another gospel, is not biblical and has no biblical anthropology. Sin is the root of what is wrong with man, and evil, its by-product, affects everything in the world's economy. Inequality is one of life's facts. Therefore, equality of any sort will not make everyone whole. Only the blood of the crucified and risen Christ can solve this issue. In the biblical sense, justice is always connected with God's righteousness and not a social context of outcomes defined by BLT. Thus, in God's economy, he alone is sovereign, and the authority of his word is inspirational.

There is one mind behind the Bible, and the standard by which to judge it is by Jesus Christ. One identifies and interprets the Scriptures in light of Jesus' revelation of them. One's grasp of Scripture itself, therefore, must be apprised and sculpted by Jesus' viewpoint. The method in which the New Testament responds to the following questions will, consequently, develop a reliable biblical basis for one's individual interpretation of the nature of Scripture. What did Jesus say about Scripture? How did Jesus make use of Scripture? Did Jesus recognize the inerrancy of Scripture?

Based on the foundation of relevant passages in the Gospels, responses can be uncovered to the first two inquiries. Because the word inerrancy does not exist anywhere in the Bible, nevertheless, the answer to the third question will appear by assessing Jesus' view of Scripture with the theory of inerrancy. Al Mohler asserts inerrancy means "when the Bible Speaks, God speaks." Concerning the Chicago Statement, he said the document is the preeminent evangelical explanation and affirmation of the doctrine of inerrancy of the Scriptures.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Southern News," The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary., *Mohler defines, defends classic view of biblical inerrancy*, March 13, 2014. (Interview with Al Mohler, President by Ruth Anne Irvin and Matt Damico). <https://news.sbts.edu/2014/03/13/in-new-book-mohler-defines-defends-classic-view-of-biblical-inerrancy/> [accessed August 21, 2020].

Given whether Jesus recognized the inerrancy of Scripture, one could determine that he did. Thus far, one has proposed that Jesus asserted authority over Scripture and that he believed in its jurisdiction. Additionally, a different proposal submitted that Jesus did not debate the authority of Scripture concerning salvation, redemption, and man's relationship with God. Though these are critical arguments for the inerrancy of Scripture, the debate amongst conservative moderates and fundamentalists brought about questions as to whether there is a Scriptural basis to determine if Jesus was an inerrantist.

CSBI defined the term inerrancy in which some leaders of the Southern Baptist Churches described as general and bland, but attached to it several qualifications for its definition. Inerrancy declared: "signifies the quality of being free from all falsehood or mistake and so safeguards the truth that Holy Scripture is entirely true and trustworthy in all its *assertions*."<sup>46</sup> Taken alone, The Chicago Statement could find considerable agreement between moderate and fundamentalists in similar ways. The Chicago Statement acknowledges that:

Since, for instance, non-chronological narration and imprecise citation were conventional and acceptable and violated no expectations in those days, we must not regard these things as faults when we find them in the Bible writers. When total precision of a particular kind is not expected nor aimed at, it is no error not to have achieved it. Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.<sup>47</sup>

The claims of inerrancy exceed what the Bible declares for itself and surpasses what Southern Baptists and other Protestants have declared in their historic confessions. Inerrancy is a

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<sup>46</sup> *The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy*, International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Chicago, IL., October 26-28, 1978, published in *Inerrancy*, ed., Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, IL: Zondervan, 1980), 500.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 500-501.

contemporary theory concerning the accuracy of the original writings of the Bible in concerns that are unrelated to its fundamental message.

The argument, accordingly, is not whether Jesus declared the reliability of Scriptures in issues of salvation, faith, and doctrine, but whether he affirmed the inerrancy of the Scriptures or their fundamental writings, wherein Jesus said nothing. However, God's words are his breath. His inspiration is the word of God. Given, θεόπνευστος, *theopneustos*, the sacredness and divine origin of Scripture is expressed along with its power to sanctify believers.

### **Chapter Explanation and Summary**

A recapitulation of Chapter One has introduced the broad field of research and the specific research problem for this dissertation's aim of undercutting the authority and inspiration debate and refutation of postmodernism's BLT. Critical to this effort, the proper methodology is core to delivering an outcome that exposes improper hermeneutical practices that disrespect God as Scripture's *originator* and proposes that he needs the help of human counsel.

In continuation of the thesis' objective, Chapter Two provides methodological direction with the question of authority and inspiration, then delivers the strategy and framing based on scholarly research of these initial issues. After which, the formal investigation of the Bible's meaning of authority and the inspiration of Scripture contesting that of Black Liberation Theology forms in Chapter 3 with an exegesis of Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; John 10:34-35 weighing in on the evidence from Scripture's voice, while the CSBI model provides support from the academy. CSBI's first three articles and their Scriptural basis are considered.

Chapter Four assesses the biblical doctrine of revelation with an exegesis of Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39 and Heb. 10:7. The examination of CSBI's articles 6-8 provides support for revelation from the scholarly viewpoint, while research continues in Chapter 5 with the exegesis

of 2 Peter 1:20-21 as the basis for the biblical view of interpretation in support of the authority and inspiration of Scripture. CSBI's articles 9-11 provide an overview of historical biblical challenges.

Chapter Six, beginning with the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 1 John 1:3, provides Scripture's voice contesting BLT's presumption of biblical "error" in view of fallible human authorship. A final overview of the authority and inspirational question occurs at this juncture. CSBI's last articles are examined as the supporting voice at odds with the hermeneutical lens of Barth's influencing Cone's gospel perspective. In Chapter 7, a final exegesis of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 provides support for Jesus' Old and New Testament references of inspiration. Echoes from the Councils and the Reformation are discussed in relation to biblical orthodoxy and evangelicalism, after which a contrasting view of BLT's doctrinal considerations, its gospel, and eschatological views are dissected according to the authority and inspiration questions of Scripture versus Cone's expressions.



## CHAPTER TWO—Methodology

### The Question of Authority and Inspiration

Jesus believed in the authority of the Scriptures and defended this premise, but he also exerted an autonomy from them that was so profound that the religious authorities of his day colluded to kill him. However, since Jesus had the highest authority for Scripture, why then did the authorities reject him and ultimately had him crucified? The Gospels leave no suspicion: the religious authorities collaborated against Jesus for the reason that he violated the Law of Moses and put his own authority above Scripture. The early Christians were also persecuted for speaking “blasphemy against Moses and against God” (Acts 6:11).

Jesus asserted his authority over Scripture in a manner that was inexcusable to the religious authorities of his day. At times, the argument is raised that Jesus’ references to persons or events in the Old Testament certify that he believed in the inerrancy of Scripture in every historical detail.<sup>48</sup>

The New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ is the incarnate God. For example, John 1:14 proclaims him the eternal Word who at the Incarnation became flesh and dwelt among men as Jesus of Nazareth. If then, Jesus was mistaken in regarding the Old Testament as completely trustworthy, reliable, and inerrant in matters of doctrine, history, and science, it must follow that God himself was mistaken about the inerrancy of the Hebrew Scriptures. And the proposition that God was mistaken is surely a theological issue if there ever was one! It turns out, then, that errancy in matters of history and science leads inevitably to errancy in matters (and very important matters!) of theology as well. Once the dike has been breached, it is eventually washed away.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> John W. Wenham and Norman L. Geisler, *Christ’s View of Scripture, Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 6-7.

<sup>49</sup> James Montgomery Boice., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (London: Pickering & Inglis Press, 1978), 92.

In summary, Jesus directed the Jews beyond Scripture to its fulfillment in himself. Except one understands that the Scriptures point to Jesus, one has not comprehended them, and they are incapable of granting eternal life (John 5:39, 40). As a paradigm, the synagogue at Nazareth did not acknowledge the fulfillment of Isaiah 61.

On January 7 of the year 367, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, wrote what he considered a "festal" letter to position his people into the right frame of mind for the celebration of Easter. He repeated this task every year, but this time, he understood that his people were reading books that alleged to be scripture but were not. Some inquired about the *Epistle of Barnabas* while others asked about *The Gospel of Peter*, a Gnostic Gospel. It is noteworthy to share that the Gnostics believed that they had secret knowledge of God. Athanasius concluded that the most reliable defense against error was an explicit knowledge of Scripture. The question arose concerning which writings were divinely inspired?

Inasmuch as some have taken in hand to draw up for themselves an arrangement of the so-called apocryphal books and to intersperse them with the divinely inspired ...it has seemed good to me...to set forth in order the books which are included in the canon and have been delivered to us with accreditation that they are divine.”<sup>50</sup>

Athanasius had high regard for Scripture and submitted to the premise that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired word of God.

These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words that they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take anything from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.” And he reproved the Jews, saying, “Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of me.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 323.

<sup>51</sup> *The Masters Seminary Blog*, “Sola Scriptura and the Church Fathers” doi: <https://blog.tms.edu/sola-scriptura-and-the-church-fathers> [accessed August 21, 2020].

Therefore, there can be no question of the historic Christian church's belief in the biblical doctrines of authority and inspiration even if inerrancy's modern meaning was not used.

In a brief examination of the methodical question of the Bible's authority and inspiration, one has provided two examples from history—the latter from Scripture and the former from the early church fathers. An additional appeal for the biblical standard is the exegetical analysis of B. B. Warfield's study of "inspiration." He submits that inspiration's use in the fourteenth century as a noun seems to be only theologically referenced until the sixteenth century. However, in a technical sense, inspiration refers to biblical writers and books, where the books mentioned indicate the Divinely resolute actions of inspired men breathed into by the Holy Spirit. The resultant product of Scripture transcends human powers and becomes God's authoritative word<sup>52</sup> "which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:13).

A more exhaustive study of Warfield's description of inspiration's derivative into Middle English provides that the word "inspire" originated from French and is employed in many meanings, from physical to metaphorical or secular to religious. In one's former examination of the methodological question of authority and inspiration, the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries' noun use is theological. Since then, the use has multiplied into an extended application of varied usages suggesting influence without producing consequences above its native or ordinary powers. The governing of inspiration's theological usage is the Latin Bible's employment of its derivatives. For example, the Latin Vulgate Bible uses the verb "inspiro" (Gen. 2:7; Wisd. 15:11; Eccus. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1: 21) and the noun "inspiratio" (2 Sam, 22:16; Job 32:8; Ps.

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<sup>52</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. James Orr in "Inspiration," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, v. 3, p. 1473-1483, Chicago, IL: The Howard-Severance Co, 1915).

17:16; Acts 17:25)<sup>53</sup> more than four times in diverse applications. In a technical sense related to theological terminology, both representations are synonymous with biblical books or writers. Scripture is called inspired, referring to the divine writings delivered by inspired men breathed into by the Holy Spirit. Scripture's result surpasses the actions of human powers and becomes divinely authoritative. Thus, inspiration's meaning results from God's supernatural influence wielded upon human writers of sacred Scripture. Under God's Spirit, their writings provide divine trustworthiness.

Meanwhile, these terms have nearly ceased to be Biblical for those speaking English today, naturally passing from the Latin Vulgate to English Bibles translated from it. For example, the word "inspired" has decreased from the number of Scripture references in the Latin Vulgate to only two instances in the Authorized Version: Job 32:8, "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding" and 2 Tim. 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." In other English versions of the Bible, "inspiration" is limited to one verse: 2 Tim. 3:16, whereas other versions substitute "breathed" or "God-breathed." Warfield categorizes these changes as "a distinct and even misleading mistranslation."<sup>54</sup>

A closer look at the phrase "inspired of God" in 2 Tim. 3:16 is the restored Latin rendering, *divinitus inspirata*, from the Wyclif and Rhemish Vulgate versions. The Greek meaning of the word *theópneustos*, usually associated with the Authorized Version's translation, is not the original meaning. However, Tyndale renders it, "All Scripture given by inspiration of God," along with other successive English translations (such as the Geneva Bible produced 51

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<sup>53</sup> Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

years afterward), is not misleading but is relatively an awkward rephrasing of the Greek term comprehended in the theological terminology of that day. Thus, if the meaning of 2 Tim. 3:16 is to be understood in Greek or otherwise, the correct interpretation would be that Scripture is “breathed out by God” and is the product of God’s creative breath, making Scripture a Divine product without indicating how God worked in his exposition of them. This terminology describing the Divine production of Scripture is perhaps the most emphatic declaration employed in this biblical text.

### **Methodological Framing**

The methodological framing for this study seeks to explain the Christian faith dressed in modern words and not to propagate modern beliefs dressed in Christian terms. Church history considered two primary schools of thought, citing the proper interpretational method. These competing methods consisted of the grammatical-historical or literal method and the allegorical method. A literal method searches for the original author’s intended meaning of a biblical text by employing its ordinary, natural, and customary words seeking to understand the passage with its context. According to Rolland McCune, the Bible has the ability to speak for itself when word meaning is found according to the text’s cultural setting, grammar, syntax, and in its interrelationship with the rest of Scripture.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, the allegorical method explores spiritual meaning outside the original author’s purpose by aiming to comprehend the passage’s words in a more in-depth and vague way. According to Roy Zuck, searching for a text’s

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<sup>55</sup> Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 1:61.

underlying hidden or secret meaning is allegorizing. One's pursuit is isolated from and irrelevant to facts to the clear text's meaning.<sup>56</sup>

Historically, the two methods sparked a debate in the early church. Origen, a proponent of the allegorical method, recognized that a secondary or lower-level search for Scriptural meaning was necessary to understand the Bible's difficult and obscure passages.<sup>57</sup> Believing that Scripture had three layers comparable to an individual's body, soul, and spirit, Origen acknowledged that each layer revealed the believer's advanced maturity.<sup>58</sup> Despite the fact that he acknowledged the Bible's literal, moral, and allegorical meanings, the allegorical was the most notable.<sup>59</sup> Correspondingly, there were adherents to the literal method during this time. The school of Antioch of Syria were proponents of the literal method but also utilized typology, whereas, in the Old Testament's point, one element foreshadowed the New Testament's more significant reality.<sup>60</sup> Augustine's fourfold interpretational method contributed to the hermeneutical debate resulting in the following steps:

- the literal understanding,
- the explanation of the passage,
- the connection between the Old and New Testaments, and
- the allegorical meaning.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton: SP Publications, 1991), 29.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>58</sup> Greg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 164. Allison cites Origen, *First Principles*, 4.1.11, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, 10 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 4:359.

<sup>59</sup> Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 36.

<sup>60</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 165–67.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–68.

Thomas Aquinas, an influential voice of the Roman Catholic church in the Middle Ages, aligned himself with the allegorical method. He acknowledged both the words and objects of Scripture.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, Hugh of St. Victor also stressed the importance of interpretation, which should conform to the church's view but accentuate the literal method and, as he declared, save the church from fallacy. As the Middle Ages continued, the Catholic Church became the official authority on biblical interpretation as the church's influence increased concerning the interpretive process.<sup>63</sup>

During the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin rejected the allegorical method, although Luther first settled with using it. Later, he held that the interpreter should pursue the text's literal meaning and comprehend words within their context. Luther believed that one's spirituality and the Holy Spirit's work were necessary for interpretation. John Calvin also used the grammatical-historical interpretative method accentuating the original author's intent of Scriptural word meaning and context. He also believed that all Scripture and interpretations must correlate, that the interpreter should be godly, and that the Holy Spirit's role was mandated. However, Calvin's view opposed the Roman Catholic church, which stressed that Scriptural interpretation must come from the church, and those disregarding this rule should be condemned and legally punished. Thus, according to Allison, the Reformation's central case of separation between Protestants and Catholics was the interpretation of Scripture.<sup>64</sup> For the Reformers, the trust of Scripture is its authoritative meaning, but for the Catholic Church, the meaning rests in the text and the church's declaration.

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<sup>62</sup> Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 43.

<sup>63</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 169–72.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 173–77.

### **Initial Considerations**

In undercutting the debate of the authority and inspiration of Scripture using the hermeneutic of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 refuting Black Liberation Theology, one's enterprise is to interpret and criticize postmodern thought by the gospel, not vice versa. For this reason, the grammatical-historical method of Scriptural interpretation is vital for accomplishing this dissertation's thesis objective— trusting the text.

Several elements form the grammatical-historical method. One must consider the meaning of words, syntax, and grammar of the text by seeking to understand its meaning. The importance of the Biblical author's language is stressed while being cognizant of the original intent and surrounding context. Seeking a broader context of the surrounding chapters and other related passages will provide a further understanding of the text by assisting in the interpretive process. At this juncture, one considers the importance of the historical setting as well— the major players in the text, their culture, geography, and those surrounding them all relate to this enterprise.

As introduced formerly, the Bible is inherently authoritative in its frequent use of “Yahweh says” in the Old Testament and the divinely bestowed apostolic authority of the New Testament. Therefore, the inspired word is God's alone. The goal of evangelical hermeneutics is to uncover the purpose of the original Author (God) and human authors (those divinely inspired). The problem of interpretation is affected by the absence of the original authors to explain what they wrote. Therefore, today's reader often studies the text from a modern perspective. Critics argue that one cannot know the original intent and that it is lost to the reader. As one introduced a few samples of James Cone's hermeneutical suggestions, the war against postmodernism's idea that interpreting the Bible is affected by culture has only just begun.



One of the significant battles in the war against the authority and inspiration of Scripture is the use of modern interpretive tools. For postmodernism, this idea has taken on a new dynamic that has affected the church and the academy. For example, Grant Osborne's statement on sociology as a tool for interpreting Scripture exemplifies a bankrupt system of ideas that fail to describe the historical and social situation behind biblical text's literary and theological dimensions by the use of allegory and anachronism. Deprived of vetting the process of proper hermeneutics, "Paul, who springs to life in his letters, was reduced inexorably to a propagator of ideas"<sup>65</sup> and the "old 'Life of Jesus' is recast into the mold of the then-current liberal teacher."<sup>66</sup> [However], the desire is to reproduce not just the thoughts but the thought world of the biblical text."<sup>67</sup>

Critical Race Theory (CRT), a close relative of BLT, argues that a socially constructed system of oppression that is unconscious and deliberate, instituted by white people, exists to suppress black and brown people. CRT proposes that the original sin is racism and that white people are the oppressors whose goal is to further their economic and political interests at the expense of the oppressed. This notion of a socially constructed hermeneutic is the lens by which Cone and others interpret the Bible while disregarding that the originator of Scripture and its message belongs to God alone. Ironically, Americans universally hold that certain beliefs should

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<sup>65</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutic Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 173-178. Osborne expounds on the work of O. C. Edwards and T. F. Best concerning the use of sociology and its influences and customs on the biblical text noting that a vacuum has occurred in the last 40 years effecting the church's biblical-theological study. His case study provides that various models of the sociological approach to interpretation have been misused by those who do not inquire before attempting to use them. David deSilva's observation provides the danger of anachronism being the result of reading historical situations in the light of modern theories. Norman Gottwald's theological assertions are questioned in the light of revisionism where theological assertions are treated as social statements. Further observations of Osborne suggest the tendency to generalize biblical text, the paucity of the data, theoretical disarray, and determinism as consequences of the use of a social lens as an analytical tool to determine Scriptural meaning.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

not be forced upon them. However, the irony is that these same Americans do not seem to have a problem forcing their ideas regarding abortion, child abuse, homosexuality, racism, or slavery on others while resulting in cognitive dissonance that runs unanswered. This issue is not limited to secularists, but Christians also seek to address moral and ethical problems that do not consider biblical truth.

Using any social lens to interpret Scripture is problematic and remains at odds with evangelical hermeneutics. However, BLT, like its cousin CRT, is now being discussed more in the evangelical church. Why one may ask? Cone's allegorized approach to Jesus Christ (the activist), and the gospel view everything through the lens of oppression. One can only understand theological issues through the lens of the Black experience of oppressed people. Cone's departure from historic Christianity is intentional. He views historic Christianity as an example of White American theology and white people intrigued by their images and unable to see an immoral world. Cone's *ideology* of whiteness is defined as "the symbol of antichrist," and white theology is not Christian—white theologians cannot see beyond themselves.

In contrast, BLT is God's salvific story and plan of liberation for the oppressed. The God of BLT can be manipulated, as the discussion is permissible *only* when concerned with the "revolution," which manipulates God with his theology. What is the acclivity of black theology's distinctive reflection? Cone replies, "the need for black people to define the scope and meaning of black existence in a white racist society"<sup>68</sup> is the evident necessity of religion to answer secular "black power." Characterizing this existence from theology's perspective originated from

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<sup>68</sup> James H. Cone, "Black Theology and Black Liberation," In *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, p. 48.

the late 1950s and early 1960s Civil Rights Movement,<sup>69</sup> where American blacks sought their past and present identities because of physical and mental slavery. With this in mind, they also sought their African roots and tried to understand their standing in society.<sup>70</sup> According to Alistair Kee and Hayward Henry Jr., for black people in America, their “lifeblood” was their religious experience which could not be divorced from their secular and religious questioning. “Whatever theology says about God and the world must arise out of its sole reason for existence as a discipline: to assist the oppressed in their liberation.”<sup>71</sup>

BLT’s view of the black church is its creation by black people. The inference of the church’s presence in black America is the existence and reality of white power encountered daily by black people, which Cone describes as brutalizing and overwhelming. The black church was the center of freedom and equality and the only black experience free of white power. It was the source of identity for enslaved people and their communities. Similarly, for blacks, the unity between the church and politics is a theological idiom for social freedom.<sup>72</sup> One will discuss this historical importance in more detail in following chapters.

Given the grammatical-historical method, several hermeneutical problems immediately surface in one’s brief investigation of BLT. Since the premise of one’s investigation is trusting the text of holy Scripture, BLT fails to consider the Bible as authoritative and inspirational.

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<sup>69</sup> Alistair Kee, *A Reader in Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 113. Henry states, “Indeed, the church has been and still is one of the few places black people can congregate and feel any sense of human worth and dignity. It was no accident that the civil rights movement, with all its limits, was largely a church-based movement. That is where black people are!” (Hayward Henry, Jr., “Toward a Religion of Revolution,” *The Black Scholar* 2 [December 1970]: 28).

<sup>70</sup> Cone, “Black Theology and Black Liberation,” 49.

<sup>71</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> Cone, “Black Theology and Black Liberation,” 92-96.

Therefore, its doctrinal claims of God favoring black theological anthropology, as communicated by Henry McNeil Turner, a forerunner of Cone, is questionable: “a people’s creator must be a reflection of themselves, and therefore, the God of his people must be Black.”<sup>73</sup> Turner’s words echoed the sentiment amongst blacks in the nineteenth century abolitionist movement where BLT’s roots can be traced. William Lloyd Garrison and Theodore Parker abandoned biblical theology because many Christians used Scripture to defend slavery in America, which was an obstacle to many black abolitionists. This practice influenced Garrison and other abolitionists to stand against the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Garrison stated:

There are two dogmas which the priesthood has attempted to enforce, respecting the Bible, from which has resulted great mischief. The first is – its plenary inspiration...the other dogma is – the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice; so that whatever it teaches or allows must be right, and whatever it forbids must be wrong, independent of all other considerations.... Hence, if slavery is or war is allowed in the book, it cannot be wrong.<sup>74</sup>

Frederick Douglas, a close friend of Garrison’s, embraced liberal theology. Black Liberation theologian Anthony B. Pinn clarified in “By These Hands” that Theodore Parker, a unitarian preacher, Robert Ingersoll, an agnostic writer, and William Lloyd Garrison, his mentor, persuaded Douglas to reject biblical Christianity.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, among black abolitionists, liberal theology became recognized as rejecting biblical Christianity. Sojourner Truth, a black abolitionist and women’s rights activist, rejected the

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<sup>73</sup> Sekhmet Ra Em Kht Maat, “Looking Back at the Evolution of James Cone’s Theological Anthropology: A Brief Commentary”, *Religions*, 28 October 2019: Department of History, Political Science, Geography and Africana Studies, Tennessee State University, Nashville, TN 37209, USA; cmcalli1@tnstate.edu.

<sup>74</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison* (London, Forgotten Books, 2012), 225-226.

<sup>75</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, *By These Hands: A Documentary History of African American Humanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 89-96.

divinity of Christ. In a speech at the 1851 Ohio Women's Convention, she stated: "How came Jesus into the world? Through God who created Him and woman who bore Him."<sup>76</sup> The twentieth century witnessed many black church leaders, particularly those affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, endorsing a social gospel formed by an amalgamation of black liberation theology and Marxism. These church leaders included Henry McNeal Turner and Reverdy C. Ransom.<sup>77</sup>

These initial theological movements within black America formed the basis for BLT, reminiscent of Walter Rauschenbusch's social gospel communicated in "Christianity and the Social Crisis." Years later, after Rauschenbusch, Martin Luther King Jr. penned: "Christianity and the Social Crisis...left an indelible imprint on my thinking by giving me a theological basis for the social concern which had already grown up in me."<sup>78</sup> Rosa Parks, one of King's peers and deacon in the AME Church, also embraced the social gospel. In 1952, King's letter to his wife, Coretta Scott King, delivered his hope in the social gospel: "Let us continue to hope, work, and pray that in the future we will live to see a warless world, a better distribution of wealth, and a brotherhood that transcends race or color. This is the gospel that I will preach to the world."<sup>79</sup>

Like his predecessors, Cone, an ordained minister in the AME Church, rejected biblical theology. Thus, BLT is formulating his idea of the gospel based on social and political ideologies. BLT rejects the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Cones words are proof of this

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<sup>76</sup> Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I A Woman?" (Originally delivered at the Ohio Women's Convention, 1851). Reproduced at Sojourner Truth, <https://www.sojournertruth.com/p/aint-i-woman.html>, accessed 2022.

<sup>77</sup> Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 256.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," *Fellowship*, September 1958.

<sup>79</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "To Coretta Scott" (1952).

refutation of Scripture: “if the basic truth of the gospel is that the Bible is the infallible word of God, then it is inevitable that more emphasis will be placed upon ‘true’ propositions about God than upon God as active in the liberation of the oppressed of the land.”<sup>80</sup>

Cone’s definition of racism is based on reductionism, BLT’s disposition regarding sin. This concept of sin alone reflects why BLT cannot deliver anything further than a social gospel. BLT majors on social issues because sin is minor in its presentation. Black-centered (which are man-centered) ideologies form BLT’s total theological system. It cannot liberate those it purports to liberate. It is the antithesis of what Paul wrote in Rom. 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” BLT is conformed to the world, and its proponents cannot be transformed unless God’s authoritative word renews their minds.

Therefore, there is no discernment of God’s perfect will— period! Nevertheless, Cone writes:

But there is no perfect guide for discerning God’s movement in the world, Contrary to what many conservatives say, the Bible is not a blueprint on this matter. It is a valuable symbol for point to God’s revelation in Jesus, but it is not self-interpreting. We are thus place in an existential situation of freedom in which the burden is on us to make decisions without a guaranteed ethical guide.<sup>81</sup>

BLT provides no Savior for sin, and neither does it offer eternal life. The biblical gospel, which provides for the believer’s power in the resurrected Son, has been exchanged for earthly black power and offers no liberation from the oppression of sin of its proponents. The supremacy of Christ has been exchanged for black supremacy, which is set to indemnify evil for evil. BLT is a false gospel that is liberal and social. Thus, Cone wrote:

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<sup>80</sup> Cone, *A Theology of Black Liberation*, 88.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

As in 1969, I still regard Jesus Christ today as the chief focus of my perspective on God but not to the exclusion of other religious perspectives. God's reality is not bound by one manifestation of the divine in Jesus but can be found wherever people are being empowered to fight for freedom. Life-giving power for the poor and the oppressed is the primary criterion that we must use to judge the adequacy of our theology, not abstract concepts.<sup>82</sup>

Jemar Tisby, a contemporary of Cone communicates BLT through the social movements of today. Unlike yesterday's Civil Rights Movement that sought the need for black power, Tisby, and other pastors like him have adopted social justice as a gospel issue echoing Cone's view:

A father of black liberation theology, Cone helped pioneer a field that dealt with the racism at the core of much of American Christianity... He shows that black people could understand Christ's suffering by recalling their own sorrow related to the lynching tree. At the same time, the cross provided comfort because black people could know for certain that in His life and death, Christ identified with the oppressed.<sup>83</sup>

Then, again from his book, Tisby elaborates more regarding Cone's gospel:

James Cone penned *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* as a theological reflection on racial terrorism. 'Both Jesus and blacks were strange fruit', he wrote. 'Theologically speaking, Jesus was the first lynchee,' who foreshadowed all the lynched black bodies on American soil.' Cone goes on to explain, 'The cross helped me to deal with the brutal legacy of the lynching tree, and the lynching tree helped me understand the tragic meaning of the cross.'<sup>84</sup>

BLT's framework brings about an interpretive method of Scripture influenced by a postmodern turn. The outcome is a theological perspective centered on community and its tradition (in this case, *black* America), which reflects, reforms, and delineates its belief structure into an integrated and prescriptive set of doctrines. Cone's advance echoes historical-critical

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<sup>82</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Jemar Tisby, "James Cone, the cross, and the lynching memorial," Religion News Service, last modified April 30, 2018, <https://religionnews.com/2018/04/30/james-cone-the-cross-and-the-lynching-memorial/>.

<sup>84</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2019), 131.

methodology with an allegorized view of God, Scripture, and the church. Though the community is a central theme of the NT, where nearly every command is in the plural and intended to be fulfilled in this setting, the community does not possess criteria for affirming belief, nor can evangelical truth be found in its traditions.<sup>85</sup> When done cooperatively, the church lives out its theology in the community where all think together in fellowship. The community's heart is the relationship, where love and unity in the Godhead are deepened first in the love and unity in the family, medially in Christ and the believer. Then love, and unity must be reflected in the family of God (Jn. 13:34-35; 14:15-16, 23-24; 15:4-5, 7; 17:21-23). Here, the critical takeaway is that BLT's meaning of family, namely the body of Christ, is the antithesis of the NT's version of community. If Cone's theological viewpoint only includes black Americans and the oppressed, including its groups, what about others who do not fit this criterion?

With this, correct doctrine corresponds to truth (when stemming from Scripture itself) and stands above the community, not beneath it. Moreover, this does not mean each community can discover its own truth and that truth is as reliable as any other community's "truth." Communities can be wrong and must be judged on their correspondence with what the inerrant Bible actually teaches.<sup>86</sup>

Forbidding Scripture's authoritative and inspirational voice, Cone's insidious hermeneutical exercise touches basic biblical tenets. First, God's plan of salvation and Scripture's view of redemption is exploited: Scripture is manipulated to provide the means of "revolution," as freeing the oppressed from white power, and is both politically and socially motivated and not bound by the confines of God's authoritative word. Secondly, the black church, a creation by black people, is a social construct that provides for the needs of its created body of overcoming

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<sup>85</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutic Spiral*, 402-403.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



white power and the liberation of the oppressed. This idea is the antithesis of God's church, comprised of born-again believers whose faith is in Jesus Christ alone (*Solus Christus*). Lastly, the amalgamation of the church and politics delivering social freedom provides that the foundation of BLT is not freedom from sin but a God and a world whose sole reason for existence is to assist the oppressed.

Allegorizing is apparent in Cone's interpretation the Bible. For example, in Exodus. His use of Egypt's freeing the Hebrews from slavery becomes a critical archetype and historical inference of God's known move of assuring freedom for the oppressed. By fusing God's act of solidarity with blacks against their white oppressors and the gospel, the basic premise of BLT's Scriptural hermeneutic is "God has chosen to make the Black condition God's condition."<sup>87</sup> Cone's allegorizing redefines the true meaning of God's authoritative gospel by shunning the Creator's voice for what he calls "transcendent presence," referring to the suppressed anger that caused him to focus on the injustices regarding African American people— a fit of consuming anger and rage within that caused him to write about the cries of "black blood" and white theologian's silence.<sup>88</sup> Though Cone's zeal for his new stream of theology provides a framework for communicating blackness, it puts race first, not the gospel. If that is not enough to label Cone's gospel as *ανάθεμα* (anathema), then a second critical point is that his gospel is not for everyone, as God is on the side of the oppressed. According to Cone, God's blackness aids oppressed people in understanding him, which is the antithesis of Paul's view of the ministry of reconciliation: But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in

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<sup>87</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 26.

<sup>88</sup> James Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood: The Rise of Black Liberation Theology" (Yale Divinity School, April 10, 2017).

his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Eph. 2:13-16).

Significant to biblical understanding is comparing Scripture with Scripture, its best commentary. Because Scripture is authoritative and inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17) in the original manuscripts, it is without error (John 17:17) and at no time disputes itself. Luther declared two areas for fundamental clarity of Scripture: external, applying the laws of grammar to the text, and internal, the act of the text’s interpretation by the Holy Spirit illuminating the reader, which Luther calls the spiritual aspect.<sup>89</sup> For clarity, he meant the final product, which is the gospel message, rather than the process of interpretation.

Today’s interpretational choices are significant, as past choices affect theology in the present era. The interpreter’s hermeneutical choices affect understanding God’s will and have implications for coming ages. Because God is the Author of Scripture, studying his word is a sacred conviction. Remembering one’s former statement concerning earlier evangelicalism’s familiarity with two principles that compelled their hermeneutical and theological examination of the Bible delivers the necessity of being bound by both the formal and material principles. The authority of Scripture is its formal principle, and the gospel, the substance of Scripture, is the material principle.

For a high view of Scripture, one must have an informed, confessional grasp of what the gospel is saying. Knowing this bears weight on the text’s shaping and what is seen within. The material principle delimits the understanding and temptation for one to go beyond the original

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<sup>89</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutic Spiral*, 27.

author's intent— not allowing one to reshape biblical truth. At this point, one has shown that Cone seems to hint at recognizing the formal principle, but the location of the material principle in his use of the gospel is lost in its restructure. The interpreter of Scripture is bound by the word of God, the material principle, and its overview of the gospel. Thus, it binds the interpreter to God, Jesus, human beings, the purpose of the cross, and God's self-disclosure in Scripture, to name a few— all of which are engaged in the biblical text. Failure to be bound by the formal and material principles always tends to end in severely lacking, shallow, psychological, or moralistic exegesis.

## CHAPTER THREE—The Word of God and Authority

### Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; John 10:34-35

Though the Scriptures are referenced and discussed numerous times in the Gospels, Jesus had surprisingly little to say about the nature of Scripture. In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus establishes the authority of Scripture while in preparation to redefine that authority regarding his teaching. “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Undeniably, he acknowledged the authority of Scripture as the history of God’s revelation to man, as did numerous pious Jews of his time. Jesus trained his disciples and others with the Scriptures (Luke 24:27, 32, 44-45), but many moments he decided to tell parables as substitutes. He proclaimed the divine authority of Scripture: “Have you not read what was said to you by God...” (Matt. 22:31). Jesus justly claims that he is the Son of God in his own words while exposing the malice of his critics and by clearing any charges set against him. Those denying the power of the exalted Christ are malicious and false expounders of Scripture by denying its power and abusers of their authority and power for their own sinful passions. Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken...” (John 10:34-35).

Contrastingly, Jesus did not debate the authority of Scripture in subjects that did not relate to salvation, God’s redemptive work, or man’s relationship to God. James Boice accentuates *Christ’s unqualified acceptance of the Old Testament*:

Jesus of Nazareth clearly assumed the errorlessness of the Old Testament in all its statements and affirmations, even in the realms of history and science. In Matthew 19:4, 5 he affirmed that God himself spoke the words of Genesis 2:24, with reference to the literal, historical Adam, and Eve, as he established the ordinance of marriage. In Matthew 23:35 he put the historicity of Abel’s murder by Cain on the same plane of historical

factuality as the murder of Zechariah the son of Barachiah. In Matthew 24:38, 39 Jesus clearly accepted the historicity of the universal flood and Noah's ark.<sup>90</sup>

Given this brief synopsis, the Bible supports that Scripture is authoritative because of Jesus' proclamation. This premise is shared through the gospel, its embracing category, holding Scripture through creation, lostness, and redemption, of which Jesus is its fulfillment. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (5:17). Here, Jesus' statement is interpreted as the proper view of Scripture, making it impossible for anyone to think they are without sin. "For I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). One emphasizes that the latter verse necessitates *conviction* before the text and its interpretation according to divine authority.

### **Authority**

The spiritual maturation of the one who interprets Scripture begins with the conviction that it is the word of God and that one should obey it. Closely related to this statement is one's submission, first, to the sovereign God, then one taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions to always abide in the truth. Anything that reduces one's trembling before God, one should avoid. Submission to God's sovereignty engages one's actions and decisions by employing them to bring about God's will for both the individual and those whom he calls. Thus, the apostle Paul declares God's sovereignty in 1 Timothy 6:15–16 as "the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in

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<sup>90</sup> James Montgomery Boice., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (London, UK: Pickering & Inglis Press, 1978), 91.

unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. In Psalm 95:3, He is “a great King above all gods.”

By being submissive, the biblical maxim is to present one before God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, one’s reasonable service (Romans 12:1). Yet, as biblical as one’s acclaim is, the maxim of one’s submission is often one’s negligence in the study and interpretation of Scripture. One often declares one’s performances passionately, but sorrowfully, similar statements typically speak louder than one’s submission and obedience to the Father’s will. “Here, if anywhere, in considering the hidden mysteries of Scripture, we should speculate soberly and with great moderation, cautiously guarding against allowing either our mind or our tongue to go a step beyond the confines of God’s word.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, the interpretation of Scripture requires one’s humbleness, allowing God’s voice to become more significant than his own. How can anyone be arrogant when one stands beside the cross?

John Calvin articulates that one’s submission to Scriptural authority begins with humbleness. Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Given Jesus’ words, an echo of “but I chose you and appointed you” (John 15:16) and “today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb. 3:15) makes one’s humility possible by God’s election. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (Col. 3:12). God’s people must reflect godly qualities. One’s enjoyment of privileges is not because one is wiser or better than others but ultimately because of Jesus’ selection and setting one apart. “It is with one aspect of humility that we are here concerned, humility was largely meant as a restraint upon the arrogance and infinity of the appetite of man. But what we

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<sup>91</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*: Volume 1, Chapter XXXIII, XXI (Philadelphia, PA: Nicklin and Howe, 1816), 155.

suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Man was meant to be undoubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth.”<sup>92</sup>

Christ expects men with specific qualifications to lead his church, of which the framing and necessitate is holiness. Men endowed with this trust must be full of the Spirit and well-grounded in Scripture interpretation. As an interpreter, one regards spirituality as partially a gift and somewhat an acquirement by one’s effort and individual discipline. The employment of all ethical and divine qualities, character, and accomplishments is beneath this cover. To be spiritual is the possession of a higher moral character that distinguishes man from the barbarian and gives him the capability to know and love God. God’s word grants one the ability to meet this spiritual nature’s wants. The antithesis is a wicked heart and carnal mind that resists God’s thoughts. “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:14).

One committed to proper interpretive procedures has a keen understanding of the use of appropriate hermeneutic principles. The faithful interpreter holds the power to grasp the author’s thoughts by taking its full authority and heading at a glance while possessing the ability to sharply observe the text with a clear understanding of the import of words, phrases, historical data, and the author’s drift. One who leads God’s people must be careful, knowing that Scripture delivers propositional revelation for those desiring to follow God in obedience and that one’s nourishment is dependent upon the proper interpretation of God’s word. “Therefore, in the text above Sacred Scripture is commended for three things: First, for the authority with which it changes: ‘This is the book of the commandments of God.’ Second, for the eternal truth with

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<sup>92</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 2007), 23.

which it instructs’, and third, for the usefulness with which it entices, when it says: ‘all that keep it shall come to life.’”<sup>93</sup>

Countless critics often believe that the Bible is not trustworthy due to the numerous faulty interpretations promoted by those unqualified to interpret it correctly. This assessment would be accurate if the Bible were any ordinary book and not God’s actual word. “The Bible will never be a living Book until we are convinced that God is articulate in his universe. To jump from a dead, impersonal world to a dogmatic Bible is too much for most people.”<sup>94</sup> One may recognize that one should trust the Bible as God’s word and may attempt to admit it as accurate, but one actually may find it impossible to believe that the words on the page are for the good of one.

From the view of Scriptural authority, the interpreter must be intentional and deliberate in one’s defense that God’s word is truth delivered to man in various genres interpreted through the lens of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. According to its storyline, there are numerous principles in interpreting Scripture correctly. When cases within Scripture match those of one’s encounters, the biblical directives apply, though there are cases where they do not. Peter’s suggested understanding of proper Scriptural interpretation is that the original authors’ writing was not a cleverly devised story, but that God is the originator of what they prophesied. “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as the Holy Spirit carried them along” (2 Peter 2:20).

Jesus’ words are never in conflict with the rest of Scripture. Because he is God, he speaks from the whole Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, his coming was to fulfill

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, ed. Ralph McInerny (London WC2R 0RL, England: Penguin Books, 1998), 5-6.

<sup>94</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Essential Tozer Collection: The Pursuit of God, The Purpose of Man, The Crucified Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2013), 77.



Scripture and not to abolish it. If there were religious rules in conflict with Scripture, Jesus was never hesitant to correct them. By adopting this view, one must seek to please God above all others, counting the cost to follow him (Luke 9:23-24). “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Three things are evident concerning the church in this present world: entertainment over holiness, the absence of self-denial, and the postmodernist’s claim: the locus of truth resides within the interpreter of Scripture. One’s view is that of the Scripture: if the church is to be the world’s conscience, it must become the world’s antagonist (Matthew 7:21-23).

### **Scripture and Tradition**

There is no unbiased interpretation and approach to Scripture that comes to the text with conservative, overtly theological inclinations following the text’s subject matter and interests. “Much of the work is wrapped up already in the preunderstandings that we bring to the text before we even begin to read. Add it up, and the sum is clear. There is no such thing as ‘pure reading’ innocent of interpretation.”<sup>95</sup> Providing the reader is accepting of the likelihood that these prejudices may be contested or annulled by one’s encounter with the text, a clear theological interpretive position is a reasonable and productive methodology for biblical interpretation that keeps God as the authoritative voice.

There are various texts of the Bible that explain that its origin is not solely human authorship but are “breathed out” by the Spirit and are God’s word (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21) — “Ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who is the author of the holy books”<sup>96</sup> and that the

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<sup>95</sup> David Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship: How the Bible Shapes Our Interpretive Habits and Practices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 1.

<sup>96</sup> *Cf. the Philocalia*, 2.4 (ed. J. A. Robinson; Cambridge: University Press, 1893). Eng. Trans.: G. Lewis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911). Cf. also F. Prat, *Origene, Le Theologien et L’Exegete* (Paris, 1907) 117-120.

LORD is the one true God and creator of all things (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6–9). “Jesus asserted his authority over Scripture in a manner that was inexcusable to the religious authorities of his day. At times, the argument is raised that Jesus’ references to persons or events in the Old Testament certify that he believed in the inerrancy of Scripture in every historical detail.”<sup>97</sup> From the inception of the Christian church, therefore, the reading and teaching of Scripture has involved a circular movement of thought in which the meaning and significance of a particular biblical text are understood in light of the larger shape of the biblical story, its climax and fulfilment in the events of the gospel, and the basic convictions about God and the world that are the presuppositions and entailments of that story.<sup>98</sup>

Irenaeus’ contribution to biblical interpretation is a consequence of the practices of the early church and a representation of its fundamental doctrinal beliefs and exegetical practices. His Christological interpretations of the Old Testament and quotation of the apostolic writings as authoritative “Scripture” held an effort to rid the church of Gaul from the Gnostic influences of Marcion and other heretical influencers of that day. There are two primary keys in his plan that may be deemed as parameters for interpretation: the idea of the rule of truth/faith and the purpose of tradition. As Jonathan M. Armstrong highlights,

It is true that the rule of faith served as hermeneutical principle for Irenaeus, and therefore it would seem incorrect to conclude that for Irenaeus the rule of faith represents the Scriptures themselves. Nevertheless, as Christoph Marksches notes, insofar as Irenaeus maintains the Scriptures to be complete and comprehensible in and of themselves, it is clear that the canon of Scripture and the rule of faith are very closely associated for Irenaeus.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> John W. Wenham and Norman L. Geisler., *Christ’s View of Scripture, Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 6-7.

<sup>98</sup> Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship*, 23-91

<sup>99</sup> J. Armstrong, “From the κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας to the κανὼν τῶν γραφῶν: The Rule of Faith and the New Testament Canon,” in *Tradition and the Rule of Faith in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Joseph T. Lienhard*,

In further examination of this point, Irenaeus' historical contribution to Scripture interpretation, one registers that his presentation of both the Old and New Testaments—two anthologies of sacred Scripture fundamentally conjoined and interpreted in light of each other, and inside the grand scheme of salvific history as distinctly authoritative, as opposed to Marcion's severing of both Testaments, and the use of the Epistle of Barnabas as a gathering of types and figurative interpretation. "The Old and New Testaments are one corpus. The content of this Scripture is one because its divine author is one, as opposed to the Marcionites and Gnostics, who posited a different god behind the Old Testament."<sup>100</sup>

Considering the Gnostic interpretation of Scripture, including only remnants of the original text, and the negligence for order and connection, truth is maimed and imperiled. Irenaeus connects this approach to one's rearrangement of a mosaic, the actual image of a king now transformed into a dog or a fox. His illustration is a Gnostic method created from pieces of the system found in Scripture. Notwithstanding, Irenaeus stresses that those who earlier understood the correct design of Scripture can recognize the biblical elements without being deceived by the false mosaic.

Suppose one assumes that the rule of truth/faith in Irenaeus and Tertullian is a pure oral summary of the apostolic teaching. In that case, its use in biblical interpretation has two main limitations: the rule's scope and the exegetical ambiguities of this method. The rule could be

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*S.J.*, eds. Ronnie J. Rombs and Alexander Y. Hwang (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 45.

<sup>100</sup> Keith Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From Early Church to Modern Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 30.

considered “a reliable guide to the correct interpretation of a given biblical text,” since it “was a summary of the overall scriptural story.”<sup>101</sup>

Theological interpretation of Scripture underscores the hypothesis of the rule of faith, endeavoring to reveal the tradition of the early church (particularly Irenaeus and Tertullian) of reading Scripture driven by this rule in the early church— “the sum content of apostolic teaching,” a confession that outlined “the authoritative articles of faith.”<sup>102</sup> In the context of evangelical theological interpretation of Scripture, one affirms the identity between the rule of faith and Scripture derived from an evident system in Scripture where one believes the practice should be situated within the boundaries of the apostolic tradition without the addition of post-apostolic or cultural branches. The emphasis is on apostolic tradition over ecclesiastical tradition, where the former being the foundation of the latter.<sup>103</sup>

The philosophical seeds of modern errancy were sown over a hundred years after the Reformation. A century later, theologians within the church had capitulated to the emerging fruit of alien philosophical presuppositions. Consequently, the development of an errant view of Scripture did not occur from the revelation of factual data, making trust in an inerrant Scripture indefensible. Instead, it sprang from the unnecessary approval of philosophical assumptions that threatened the historical trust in an infallible and inerrant Bible. “Much confusion exists in

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<sup>101</sup> Bryan M. Litfin, “Tertullian’s Use of the Regula Fidei as an Interpretive Device in Adversus Marcionem,” in *Studia Patristica: Papers Presented at the Fourteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2003*, ed. Frances M. Young, M. J. Edwards, and P. M. Parvis (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 410.

<sup>102</sup> Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “Rule of Faith,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 703 (hereafter DTIB).

<sup>103</sup> Scott R. Swain, “A Ruled Reading Reformed: The Role of the Church’s Confession in Biblical Interpretation,” *IJST* 14 (2012): 77.

evangelical circles regarding grammatical-historical and historical-critical approaches to exegesis.”<sup>104</sup>

The chasm separating the historical-grammatical method and the historical-critical method of hermeneutics rests with the position where one may ascertain the truth. Two schools of thought exist. On the one hand, skeptics regard all traditions as questionable until they can be proven true by reason to neutral (or, in severe instances, hostile) parties. On the other hand, reformers regarded the canonical texts in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek were true, and that tradition diverged from that truth. One can gather that the historical-grammatical method holds sway with protestants, and the historical-critical method, amongst secular scholars. Assuming that both of these methodologies assume that the initial audience is primary is a stretch of the imagination, especially in the view of Scripture.

Case in point, the independence methodology affiliates itself with the grammatical-historical hermeneutic entrenched in the Reformation of 1517. In *History of the Christian Church*, Schaff treads “three fundamental principles of the Reformation,” the supremacy of the Scriptures over tradition, the supremacy of faith over works (*sola fide* or “by faith alone”), and the supremacy of the Christian people over an exclusive priesthood (“the common priesthood of every believer”).<sup>105</sup> The antithesis, the historical-critical hermeneutic, is deep-rooted in deism, rationalism, and the Enlightenment. Krentz, agreeable to the method, willingly acknowledges in his *The Historical-Critical Method* relates that “the Historical method is the child of the Enlightenment.”<sup>106</sup> Maier, an opponent of historical criticism, argued, “historical criticism over

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<sup>104</sup> Robert L. Thomas, “Current Hermeneutical Trends: Toward Explanation or Obfuscation?”, *JETS* 39 (June 1996): 241-256.

<sup>105</sup> Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 7, 1888, repr. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 16.

<sup>106</sup> Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1975), 55.

against a possible divine revelation presents an inconclusive and false counterpart which basically maintains human arbitrariness and its standards in opposition to the demands of revelation.”<sup>107</sup> Maier’s point made simple is this: historical criticism attaches its prime importance to humans’ potential value, goodness, common needs, and rational problem solving) rather than divine matters.

Throughout the Renaissance, most humanists were religious. The work of Valla and “the questions that he asked reflected the values of Renaissance humanism, which would have a profound impact on the church and its reading of Scripture.”<sup>108</sup> Inspired by Valla, “Erasmus’ biblical interpretation epitomizes the methods of Renaissance textual scholarship and encourages readers to rise to the level of spiritual things and despise what is visible in favor of that which is invisible.”<sup>109</sup> Another vision during this period was to return ad fontes (“to the sources”) to the simplicity of the New Testament, bypassing the complexities of medieval theology.

In agreement with this sentiment, “Luther is not complimentary of standard medieval exegesis.”<sup>110</sup> “Luther’s view on the authority of Scripture is summed up in the following words: “Scripture is its own authority because it is clear. No other authority is needed to see through its meaning.”<sup>111</sup> Although the papacy did not, in words, refute Luther’s application to the authority of Scripture, as an alternative, they avoided the question of Scripture’s authority. In ritual, by

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<sup>107</sup> Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1974), 25.

<sup>108</sup> Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation*, 115.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>111</sup> Kenneth Hagen, “Martin Luther,” in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. by Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 215.

establishing a magisterium, the church's power gives an authentic interpretation, which alone could serve as the arbiter of the meaning of Scripture. "As a result, there came to be a sharper separation between the ever-developing tradition of the church and its stable biblical text."<sup>112</sup>

Humanists continued to use their scholarship in the church's service into the middle of the sixteenth century and beyond. The sharply confrontational religious atmosphere following the Reformation resulted in the Counter-Reformation that sought to silence challenges to Catholic theology, with similar efforts among the Protestant denominations. However, several humanists joined the Reformation movement and took over leadership functions, for example, Philipp Melanchthon, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Luther, Henry VIII, John Calvin, and William Tyndale.<sup>113</sup>

Contrastingly today, humanism denotes "a worldview which denies the existence or relevance of God, or which is committed to a purely secular outlook."<sup>114</sup> From this humanistic point of view, man is the ruler of all things, and the mind is the ultimate test of all requirements. As a religious system, humanism holds its views with zest and conviction with a worldview that deifies man. These developments began with the idea that Scripture could be interpreter's hermeneutic without authorial consent. With the rise of humanism's historical-critical exegesis, the marginalization of the divine author of Scripture is the antithetical backlash of the wholesale rejection of spiritual senses and the concept of fuller meaning. "Without any spiritual meaning, the Bible could be viewed merely as a historical document"<sup>115</sup> with churchmen applying biblical

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<sup>112</sup> Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation*, 126.

<sup>113</sup> "Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library & Renaissance Culture: Humanism". The Library of Congress. 2002-07-01. Retrieved 2021-04-25

<sup>114</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 30.

<sup>115</sup> Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation*, 181.

texts however they like. By focusing on the human author and rejecting the spirit's inspiration of Scripture, the divine word of God ceases to be for the church.

One may ask, how did the church get here? The answer is bundled in a history of “turns” that have catapulted biblical interpretation into the postmodern abyss. Given the former brief history of interpretational methods of Scripture and their traditions, one recalls Gerhard Maier's point that historical criticism attaches its prime importance to humans' potential value, goodness, common needs, (and rational problem solving) rather than divine matters. On the other hand, the grammatical-historical method considers the historical context and setting, grammar, and word usage of the examined passage. Additionally, one must consider “literal interpretation,” which means “according with the letter of the scriptures; adhering to fact or to the ordinary construction or primary meaning of a term or expression; free from exaggeration or embellishment (the literal truth)”<sup>116</sup>— not allegorical or metaphorical.

The Bible does have elements of allegory, but it is not an allegorical book where its characters and events symbolize other things. Allegorical works symbolically convey the more profound, usually spiritual, ethical, or political sense. For illustration, George Orwell's “Animal Farm” is deemed a political allegory. However, literal interpretation recognizes biblical writers' frequently used figures of speech, such as nuances, hyperbole, similes, word play, and metaphors, but not at the expense of changing biblical interpretation. Thus, to avoid misunderstanding “literal interpretation,” its meaning must be plainly stated.

Since God is the Author of Scripture, and Scripture is authoritative and inspirational, he does not intend that diversity of meanings should be affixed to what he has said or written.

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<sup>116</sup> *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*, s.v. “literal interpretation,” accessed October 18, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/literal>.



Scripture has one meaning, and its readers should understand that first and foremost. Oswald T. Allis said, “No literalist, however thoroughgoing, takes everything in the Bible literally. Nor do those who lean toward a more figurative method of interpretation insist that everything is figurative. Both principles have their proper place and their necessary limitations.”<sup>117</sup>

The literal or historical-grammatical hermeneutic is the commonly practiced method for interpreting literature and is the standard method used for ancient or modern, sacred, or secular texts. However, postmodernism’s interpretational approach does not consider nor seek the originating author’s intent. Thus, a new standard of hermeneutics expresses that the interpretive voice is the individual or the community giving the text meaning. As a result, Bible-believing churches continue to be plagued by these effects in the forms of Critical Theory, Standpoint Epistemology, Feminist Objectivity Conceptualism, Black Liberation, and Womanist Theologies, etc., as well as the social movements that seek to interpret Scripture through their lens.

Could this marginalization have been avoided? One supposes yes based on two points. First, the interpretation of Scripture should be from God’s perspective and, therefore, not from the human author’s intent. Again, God is the authority over his word. Lastly, the literal sense of interpretation should be submitted to the spiritual sense, not vice-versa. “If doctrinal, moral, or eschatological concepts were not explicit in the text, then those interpretations were eventually abandoned.”<sup>118</sup> Recovery of the spiritual sense of Scripture is today’s challenge. “It must be recognized that Cone presents his theological work in an ideological tone because he is committed to the proposition that the theologian’s experience in the world implicitly and

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<sup>117</sup> Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy, and the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 17.

<sup>118</sup> Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation*, 181.

explicitly governs his theology. For Cone, identifying these influences clearly from the beginning of theological discourse is a matter of intellectual integrity.”<sup>119</sup>

### **The Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy**

Perhaps one of the greatest declarations regarding the authority and inspiration of Scripture is the premise of needing a biblical statement on inerrancy. The ICBI Statement expresses that “no extra-biblical statements or creeds are infallible” — only the Bible is.<sup>120</sup> Thus, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is an effective representation of the components of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and its significance to the Christian life. The signatories declare that faith in biblical inerrancy is not required for salvation but advises that there are severe consequences to denying the trustworthiness of the Bible, both for the individual and the church at large. Considering Luther’s conflict at the Diet of Worms, *sola Scriptura* (“Scripture alone”) is the reformer’s stance on Scripture’s inspiration and authority. Luther’s perspective, rightly gauged, will reveal his attitude toward Scripture, that is, the proper authorization and measure of the Christian faith and life. His view applies to theological study today. For Calvin as well, God’s authority is his word: “Here, if anywhere, in considering the hidden mysteries of Scripture, we should speculate soberly and with great moderation, cautiously guarding against allowing either our mind or our tongue to go a step beyond the confines of God’s word.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Joseph W. Caldwell, “A Starting Point for Understanding James Cone: A Primer for White readers,” *Review & Expositor*, 117, 1 (2020): 25–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637320903046>. Caldwell uses Cone’s words when stating his premise of theological interpretation where the theologian, not the original author dictates the interpretation. For a direct quote see: James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), xix.

<sup>120</sup> R. C. Sproul and Norman Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy: Official Commentary on the ICBI Statements*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Christopher T. Haun (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2013), 7.

<sup>121</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*: Volume 1, Chapter XXXIII, XXI, 155.

Those opposed to the Chicago statement suggested that the attendees of the summit on inerrancy, signatories and their supporters were there “to give the document binding authoritative force (that stinks of collusion) to empower and propel the divisive program of Biblical Inerrancy that has been dividing evangelicalism ever since.”<sup>122</sup> Robison James, an opponent the Chicago Statement concludes,

Inerrantists of the stricter sort, many of whom reject all higher criticism of the Bible, are convinced that their view of Scripture is absolutely essential. For that reason, they are genuinely bothered by the question, “How far can I cooperate with those who do not agree with my view of Scripture? But what if inerrantists recognize, that their approach to the Bible has limitations, just as every other human approach to the Bible has its limitations? In that event, though remaining committed to their view, they would be able to cooperate in genuine fellowship with others.”<sup>123</sup>

Conceivably, those holding a position opposite the Scripture’s inspiration are another work at hermeneutical practice devoid of the Spirit’s administration—a reminder of the historic church antagonized by heretical challengers. One proposes the Gnostic, and Marcionite deviations from Scripture are a direct result of this malpractice by opposing forces in contradiction of the doctrine of inerrancy. “God did not produce his word before men for the sake of sudden display intending to abolish it the moment the Spirit should arrive, but he employed the same Spirit, by whose agency he had administered the word, to complete his work by the efficacious confirmation of the Word.”<sup>124</sup>

Heresies that deny the divinity of Jesus Christ are not new to the Church. Throughout church history, men have proposed divergent beliefs on the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To support this fact, 1 John 2:18 warns against denying the Son and to remain

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<sup>122</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume II, Chapter IX, 155.

<sup>123</sup> Robison B. James., *The Unfettered Word* (Waco, TX. Word Books, 1987), 72.

<sup>124</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*: Volume I, Chapter IX, III, 40.

faithful to the message that they have heard because there are many antichrists who are seeking to deceive them. In 2:19, “they went out from us, but they did not really belong to us” is the actuality of secession as a result of heresy, and that “they” had never really been true members of the Christian church. “The context shows that John is trying to repel the influence of the false teachers who, John avers “are trying to lead you astray” (2:26). The assumption seems to be that these teachers claim a certain inside knowledge (*gnosis?*) that they wish to impress on the believers.”<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, upon evaluating the texts in First John, historical analysis, and theological distinctions of each heretical group, one of the two emerges at least to be most probable the group described in the apostle’s epistle. Based on this evidence alone, the hermeneutics of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others would provide needful council to uphold the inerrancy of the holy Scriptures. Did these teachings originate in or outside of the church? One believes yes. Cross and Livingstone testify, “Some think it originated within the Church, as an erratic development of Christian teaching (as the Fathers thought). Others claim that the movement had already begun before the Christian period, but there is no Gnostic document which in its present form pre-dates the New Testament.”<sup>126</sup>

“It is certain that we cannot handle Scripture adequately in the pulpit if our doctrine of Scripture is inadequate. *But in Scripture we are handling the very words of God*, “words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:13).”<sup>127</sup> The inspiration of Scripture is under attack—more so than any time in church history where one sees the social movements

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<sup>125</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on The New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1065.

<sup>126</sup> F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 687.

<sup>127</sup> Daniel Akin, David Allen, and Ned Matthews, *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 89.

becoming the lens of Scriptural interpretation. Of course, this was not done in a corner and the warning signs were posted along the corridors of church history. “Devoid of any and all emotion, the exercise of interpretation seems futile at best. The point is not just to have knowledge but to put that knowledge to good use. Thus, it seems what has occurred over time of attempting to get at the true meaning of the text is ‘the exclusion of faith from biblical interpretation.’”<sup>128</sup> In doing so, it has led to the marginalization of the divine Author and the deadening of Christian faith. This is the reality of preaching without a “license”—that is that Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17, and is given by the inspiration of God, θεόπνευστος).

One has provided a short overview of the CSBI. Now, the formal investigation begins by examining its Scriptural basis. As emphasized in this chapter’s beginning, the Gospels are the foundation supporting the authority and inspiration of Scripture, considering Jesus’ perspectives, examining the CSBI Articles 1 and 2, respectively. The emphasis of one’s examination is to support the inerrancy of Scripture from the signatories’ point of view.

R. C. Sproul, one of the three original framers of the CSBI, and Norman Geisler stated that the progression of time affects eyewitness accounts of events that eventually die off, followed by the introduction and eventual progression of myths.<sup>129</sup> Sproul and Geisler played pivotal roles in the CSBI’s development as an external document upholding the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Their statement is timely considering the apostle Peter’s report: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16).

The CSBI is broken into two main categories: *Explaining Inerrancy: A Commentary on*

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<sup>128</sup> Stanglin. *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation*, 202.

<sup>129</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 6.

*the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* and *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics: Articles of Affirmation and Denial*. The categories each have corresponding articles and their statements.

Article 1 states: “We affirm that the Holy Scriptures are to be received as the authoritative Word of God. We deny that the Scriptures receive their authority from the church, tradition, or any other human source.”<sup>130</sup> The corresponding subheading “Authority” appears under the heading “The Word of God and Authority,” where in Article 1, the CSBI’s initial idea, establishes the degree of authority attributed to the Bible. Along with Article 2, it is a Protestant statement. Though the Roman Catholic Church has always and historically held a high view of the Scripture’s inspiration, an unresolved problem remains regarding the church’s uniqueness and sufficiency of biblical authority. Besides the church’s traditions, Rome established a source of special revelation beyond the Scripture’s scope. With the Roman Catholic Church’s establishment of the New Testament and Old Testament canon’s extent and scope, the continuous assertion is that the Bible’s authority is subordinate to and conditional upon the church’s consent. Both of these problems concerning the church and canon’s relationship and the numerous citations of special revelation questions are given in Articles 1 and 2.

The canonical question regarding the scope or the number of books included in the Bible continually problematizes many people used to a clearly defined listing by their individual church confessions. Some claim the unbelief of a divinely inspired Bible when a particular book's canonicity is questioned. One clear example from church history is Martin Luther’s strong compunction and inquiry into the canonicity of the New Testament’s book of James at one point in his ministry. Luther believed in the inspiration of Scripture. However, he questioned in any

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<sup>130</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 15.

case if a particular book belonged in God's inspired word. His inquiry concerning the book of James led to several scholars repudiating that Luther believed in the Scripture's inspiration. Here, the dissimilarity must be made between the question of the canon's scope and the inspired books recognized and included in the canon are two different matters that should not be confused.

The appearance of the keyword "received" is significant in Article 1. The original declaration that Scripture is to be received by the church in the initial draft of the CSBI was modified by removing "church" to make clear that Scripture is to be received by the church, and everyone. This change accentuates the historical significance of the word "received," (the Latin word *recipimus*, meaning "we receive"), alluding to the church councils' statement of including books in the canon. The point made was not the church's declaration of the authority of certain books but rather the straightforward acknowledgment of the Word of God to be the Word of God. "Receive" meant that the church regarded the Scripture already as God's and willingly submitted to that idea. This premise eliminated any notion that the church created or is superior to the Bible. Thus Scripture, received its authority from God only— not the church or any human source.

Article 2 states: "We affirm that the Scriptures are the supreme written norm by which God binds the conscience and that the church's authority is subordinate to that of Scripture. We deny that church creeds, councils or declarations have authority greater than or equal to the authority of the Bible."<sup>131</sup> Article 2's corresponding subheading, "Scripture and Tradition," also appears under the heading "The Word of God and Authority," showing the correlation between both affirmation statements— Article 2 reinforces Article 1.

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<sup>131</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 27.

The significant component of Article 2 is *sola scripture*, the classical principle of Protestantism that emphasizes the Bible's unique authority to restrain men's consciences. The affirmation of Article 2, "the supreme written norm" refers to holy Scripture, although other written documents are seen as important to the church's life. For example, the church's creeds and confessions construct the foundation of subscription and faith conformity in numerous Christian denominations and communities. Within a specific context, these creeds and confessions stimulate binding consciences, deemed an illustration of normative authority. However, for Protestants, the classic tenant acknowledges that all creeds and confessions are fallible and incapable of binding the individual believer as only the authoritative word of God can. Though the church has other written norms identified by different Christian bodies, the articles accept that these written norms, considering that they are true, are subordinate to holy Scripture, the supreme written norm.

The denial unquestionably states that no authority is equal to or greater than the Bible in any form, be it a creed, council, or declaration, as well as the repudiation of church officers or the idea of any tradition of an equal authority level. For example, authority structures and the Christian's obedience to them were discussed dramatically in this article, bearing that though the Bible exhorts all to obey civil magistrates, one must also acknowledge that the world's authority derives from and is dependent upon God's intrinsic authority. This idea is the same authority given to Scripture as God's inspired word. For example, authority within the Reformed church is regarded as ministerial and declarative rather than ultimate and intrinsic. Thus, "God and God alone has the right to bind the consciences of men. Our consciences are justly bound to lesser authorities only when and if they conform to the Word of God."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 28.



The Bible both contains, and is, in whole and in part, God’s word. Thomas Aquinas said, “natural reason cannot be contrary to the truth of faith, as has been shown. A singular way of convincing one’s adversary of such truth is from the authority of Scripture, for we can only believe what is above human reason if God reveals it.”<sup>133</sup> The focus on Scriptural interpretation without a spiritual meaning leads to marginalization of God. “A book is not the word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the word of God. That is, God gives the book its divine authority, not the people of God. They merely recognize the diving authority which God gives to it.”<sup>134</sup>

### **Black Liberation Theology’s Concept of Biblical Authority**

At this late hour, Christianity is herded into a pigpen of activism. The church’s worth today is the busyness of orphans, soup kitchens, and politics, where Jesus Christ, the Savior, is now being compared to Gandhi, Buddha, and Mother Theresa. The moment that he becomes more (when distanced from other religious figures), a problem ensues. The language of social justice and equality have now become the church’s focus, and the fallout questions the infallibility of Scripture by interpreting it through a lens lacking sound hermeneutical and theological principles that uphold its inerrancy as God’s authority.

Postmodernism’s worldview is in opposition to the gospel where the fixation is human achievement rather than the truth of divine accomplishment. The pastor that falls prey to this narrative will lose sight of the reason that these and other cultural issues exist— sin. At day’s

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<sup>133</sup> Thomas Aquinas: *Selected Writings*, 244.

<sup>134</sup> Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life Changing Truth for A Skeptical World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 22.

end, it is the gospel that empowers transformation. “It is the nature of Scripture itself that demands a text-driven approach to preaching.”<sup>135</sup>

Up to now, one has examined holy Scripture concerning the breadth and meaning of authority and inspiration according to its original Author, God. The hermeneutic of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 communicates the original Author’s intent of Scripture to shape and develop Christians according to his will. Considering the larger context, Paul not only gives the source of authority, *Scripture*, but explains why— “All scripture” is a God-breathed thing, and for what— it is *all* profitable (teaching, reproof, correction, and training one in righteousness).

Following, one has provided from the academy critical scholarship’s support of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the CSBI’s first two affirmations founded on the biblical view of inerrancy to challenge BLT’s concept of biblical authority. “The biblical and theological foundation for all preaching is the fact that God has revealed Himself,”<sup>136</sup> as revealed in Hebrews 1:1: “God, having spoken in times past to the fathers by prophets in many portions and in many ways, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son.” Daniel Akin emphasizes, “Text-driven preaching that is faithful to Scripture not only will expound the text but also will, of biblical and theological necessity, apply the text.”<sup>137</sup> “The beginnings of scriptural interpretation are to be looked for within Scriptures themselves. One learns to study it by following the ways in which one portion of the text illuminates the other.”<sup>138</sup> Equally important, is not interpreting Scripture through a lens other than that of the Author, God. R. C. Sproul said, one’s authority is not in one’s

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<sup>135</sup> Akin, Allen, and Matthews, *Text-Driven Preaching: God’s Word at the Heart of Every Sermon* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 3.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>138</sup> Starling, *Hermeneutics as Apprenticeship*, 11-12.

experience, but only in the word of God. “It is the interpretation of experience that tends to go against Scripture.”<sup>139</sup> Meekness is wed by a spirit of humility and a reflection of 2 Timothy 3:17. “If man’s problem is unrighteousness, we rely on the gospel”<sup>140</sup> “so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The formal examination of BLT’s concept of biblical authority begins with its basic definition: “Liberation theology represents attempts to move theology from the abstract to practical life situations, to call attention to the social implications of the gospel that have generally been ignored by Western nations.”<sup>141</sup> “It begins with people— specific people, in a specific situation, and with specific problems to face...”<sup>142</sup>

As stated previously in this dissertation’s introduction, the authority for BLT is the “black experience,” not the authority of the Bible. Its believers are made aware that theology must find practical expression if it is going to be biblical and emulate the Lord. Practical expression, in this connotation, is understood as “love” according to BLT’s interpretation of 1 Cor. 13:1, where the believer is described as a noisy gong possessing only wisdom and knowledge without practical expression. “Black theology will accept only a love of God which participates in the destruction of the White oppressor.”<sup>143</sup> Thus, BLT’s core epistemology is “an effort— in a white-dominated society, in which black has been defined as evil— to make the gospel relevant to the life and

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<sup>139</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier, 2018), 131.

<sup>140</sup> Voddie Baucham, *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 64.

<sup>141</sup> Emmanuel McCall, “Black Liberation Theology: A Politics of Freedom,” *Review and Expositor* 73 (1976): 323–33.

<sup>142</sup> Basil Moore, “What Is Black Theology?” in *Black Theology: The South African Voice* (London: C. Hurst, 1973), 6.

<sup>143</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 74.

struggles of American blacks and to help black people learn to love themselves.”<sup>144</sup> However, Paul’s purpose of 1 Cor. 13:1 is that one’s use of spiritual gifts (in this case, speaking in tongues, referred to as “the tongues of men” (γλώσσαις τῶν ἀνθρώπων)), must be expressed in love. Otherwise, one’s expression is noise (resounding gong (χαλκὸς ἤχῳ)).

### **James Cone’s Conception of the Authority of Scripture**

A more in-depth plunge into Cone’s view of Scripture’s authority is the black experience of oppression. This idea is not the biblical authority of Christ and the Bible but rather an anthropocentric concept that regards a prior authority connecting all black people exceeding their theological and doctrinal differences in Protestant denominations. BLT elevates the shared experience of black people in America as the supreme test of truth. As for authority in religious matters, there is no experience more binding than oppression, its ultimate authority.<sup>145</sup> Cone explains:

The fact that I am black is my ultimate reality. My identity with blackness [a term for one who is oppressed], and what it means for millions living in a white world controls the investigation. I cannot surrender this fundamental reality for a “higher, more universal” reality. Therefore, if a higher, Ultimate Reality is to have meaning, it must relate to the very essence of blackness.<sup>146</sup>

God’s identity and Scripture’s authority, as interpreted by Cone, are unfailingly tied to the state of affairs and lived truths of the poor, outsider, and stranger. As for the Christian, one is required

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<sup>144</sup> “Black Liberation Theology in its Founder’s Words”, *NPR VPM*, March 31, 2008, Live radio interview with James Cone, <https://www.npr.org/2008/03/31/89236116/black-liberation-theology-in-its-founders-words> [accessed Sep. 21, 2022].

<sup>145</sup> Celucien L. Joseph, “The Meaning of James H. Cone and the Significance of Black Theology: Some Reflections on His Legacy,” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 18:2 (2020): 112-143.

<sup>146</sup> John H. McClendon III, *Black Christology, and the Quest for Authenticity: A Philosophical Appraisal* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 45.

to know God through the lens of the African American human condition, where one's duty is to function as a change agent for social, political, and economic freedom against white supremacy in America. Cone's theological ideas evolved according to his Scriptural view that the word of God changes as the culture necessitates. Therefore, according to Cone, Scriptural authority is not limited to the original intent of the Author/authors, but one can be inspired to exercise hermeneutical freedom. Ultimately, his theological perspective of liberation grew to include those oppressed by capitalism, heterosexism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. According to Cone's former student, Womanist theologian Reverend Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, attested to the fact that in later years, Cone included centering on his gospel interpretation supporting racial justice, gender, and class equality.

Cone consistently and unapologetically declared that according to scripture, God has always identified with conditions and lived realities of the stranger, the outsider, and the poor. So, for Cone, to be Christian, one must see God in the African American human condition and work to bring about social, political, and economic freedom for African Americans who suffer from white supremacy in the American empire.<sup>147</sup>

According to BLT, his communicative efforts eventually led to the expansion of Womanist and African American queer theology.

Cone credits the Western theological tradition for BLT's theological development. While attending Northwestern University during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, he was influenced by the writings of Karl Barth, a Swiss-German theologian, and other white theologians. According to Cone, his mastery of Barthian Theology was the means of him successfully graduating from the university despite faculty reluctance to discuss the association between theology and racism.

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<sup>147</sup> Sekhmet Ra Em Kht Maat, "Looking Back at the Evolution of James Cone's Theological Anthropology: A Brief Commentary", *Religions*, 28 (October 2019): 3.

J. Kameron Carter provides insight into Cone's use of Barth's theology in thinking about the relationship between God and humanity. The historical development of Cone's African American theological anthropology positions him as an innovator in this field of study. According to Carter, Cone's interpretation of the human condition concerning God can be best understood by reading his Northwestern dissertation in which "The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth" serves as its backdrop. His use of Barth in no way diminishes his commitment to Black power and the liberation of blacks in the American struggle for liberation. Carter explains:

Cone was not seeking to do "white theology" in (Barthian) blackface. Rather, he was starting to develop a style of theology specific to this early moment of African American theological anthropology and to deal with the problem and inventions of man . . . .[As] Frantz Fanon developed an oppositional relationship to psychoanalytic theory (particularly, to Jacques Lacan) to address the problem of the colonization of psychic space, so too Cone and early African American theological anthropology was forging an oppositional relationship to theology itself in order to conceive and reframe the task of theology itself under conditions of civil rights, Black Power, and decolonization efforts around the world.<sup>148</sup>

Carter concludes that Cone's use of Barth's theology was only a tool to developing his own theology of "African American suffering and grounded in liberation, eventually challenging and therefore turning Barth's doctrine on its head."<sup>149</sup>

Cone regarded BLT as the required method to combat what he noticed as racism in the black experience. His overall framework to communicate this understanding, especially in the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of God, emerged into "two separate Gods and creations" for the oppressors and the oppressed, respectively. Furthermore, for Cone, Scripture's authority is the

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<sup>148</sup> Katie G. Cannon and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *The Oxford Handbook on African American Theology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 178-79.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

black experience of oppression, emanating into a biblical message that is difficult to reconcile. For example, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deut. 6:4), according to Cone’s point of view, will take on a new hermeneutic against the original Author’s intent, as well as Jesus’ words: “I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one” (John 17:11).

In these examples, Cone suggests “two Gods and two Christianity(s).” As a result, these hermeneutical views counter the Bible’s doctrine of the authority and inspiration of Scripture. Critical to this research is investigating this concern in more detail. Before doing so, one key question comes to bear. According to Cone, since God is obviously not the Interpreter of Scripture, but a man in some manner is, is there an interpretive method(s) that binds the responsible party to certain hermeneutical limitations, or are changing cultural settings the determinant? At the heart of Cone’s statement is his unpacking of the theological anthropology of Barth’s examination of the Epistle of Romans as written in *Church Dogmatics, III/2*, where he explores Barth’s conception of the human being. Cones rationalizes Barth’s liberal theological and historical framework to which Barth is answering:

In liberal Christianity, it is not God who determines the religious relationship; it is [thinking] man [who relies on reason to know God]. We must not forget that Barth began his career as a liberal theologian. The first World War [however] shattered his hope of the Kingdom of God on earth. In due time Barth was led from his anthropocentric conception of Christianity to a thorough-going theocentric conception.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Cone, “The Doctrine of Man in the Theology of Karl Barth”, 3. Cone’s initial research concerning the anthropologic theology of Barth is examined. Barth’s initial ideas and experiences are considered, although he changes his view on concepts in the “Doctrine of Creation” located in *Church Dogmatics III/2*. One will provide additional details exploring Barth’s effect on Cone’s final development of BLT’s theologies of sociological and theological imperatives.

The previous evidence has shown Barth's framework in liberal theology influenced Cone's disdain for the authority of Scripture. Accordingly, humans can inaugurate to understand themselves past their egos through God's Word, Jesus, that God sent to earth in human flesh. However, given Scripture's authority, "Cone's two-God framework and two-Christian" supposition do not align with historic Christianity. Both oppose God's just nature (Deut. 32:4; Psa. 89:14). God is not Black nor White, and neither does he support the cause of one ethnic group of people against another— in this case, black, oppressed, and marginalized standing against whiteness, wealth, and capitalists. These assertions recreate the gospel into a message solely favoring the poor and oppressed, which withstands "For God does not show partiality" (Rom. 2:11).

### **Scripture is not "the" Word of God**

Cone's view of truth is not biblical truth. Though he does not describe a full orb, for him, objective truth does not exist in relationship to God or Scripture— it cannot be known theologically, but one can only know the truth by social standing. The truth of the oppressed is different from that of the oppressors. This social concept is postmodernism's "my truth," a typically employed vernacular associated with CRT and other woke movements today.

Like White Theologians, Black Theologians do theology out of the social matrix of their existence. The dissimilarity between Black Theology and White theology lies at the point of each having different mental grids which account for their different approaches to the gospel. While I believe that the social priori of Black Theology is closer to the axiological perspective of biblical revelation, for the moment the point is simply the inescapable interplay between theology and society—whether White or Black Theology. This means that theology is political language. What people think about God, Jesus Christ, and the Church cannot be separated from their own social and political status in a given society.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 41.



God is both originator and authority of Scripture. From the apostolic authority's position, Peter's words bind both reader and interpreter of God's word that it is divinely inspired and authoritative. "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21). Given the nature of Scripture's inspiration in 2 Timothy 3:16, Peter's words are God's method of influence upon human authors.

According to his interpretative suggestions, reconciling Cone's theological and historical perspectives seems at an impasse when placed alongside the doctrine of authority and inspiration of Scripture. At this examination's point, undercutting Cone's views using the hermeneutic of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, with the support of the CSBI, has resulted in several specific observations. Osborne's view of the last century's application of Scottish Common-Sense Realism assumes that the reader of Scripture can interpret it by the surface text's information alone without the need for hermeneutical principles. Cone's individualized Scriptural interpretation of inspiration seems to lack hermeneutical perspicuity. He disregards the basic principles of interpretation. "Therefore, in the text above Sacred Scripture is commended for three things: First, for the authority with which it changes: 'This is the book of the commandments of God.' Second, for the eternal truth with which it instructs', and third, for the usefulness with which it entices, when it says: 'all that keep it shall come to life.'"<sup>152</sup>

Considering Luther's conflict at the Diet of Worms, *sola Scriptura* is the reformer's stance on Scripture's inspiration and authority. Luther's perspective, rightly gauged, will reveal

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, 5-6.

his attitude toward Scripture, that is, the proper authorization and measure of the Christian faith and life. His view applies to theological study today. For Calvin as well, God's authority is his word: "Here, if anywhere, in considering the hidden mysteries of Scripture, we should speculate soberly and with great moderation, cautiously guarding against allowing either our mind or our tongue to go a step beyond the confines of God's word."<sup>153</sup>

One's observance of the place of the reader in interpretation is that of one joining a discussion. One is not the author of it, there one cannot force upon the discussion a set of views, ideas, and prejudices that are not relevant to the conversation— "everyone brings to the task a set of 'preunderstandings.'"<sup>154</sup> Considering the authority of Scripture and the reader's place in interpretation, one regards spirituality— as partially a gift and somewhat an acquirement by one's effort and individual discipline. The employment of all ethical and divine qualities, character, and accomplishments are beneath this cover and will determine how one values one's place beneath Scripture. It is one's possession of a higher moral character that distinguishes man from the barbarian and gives him the capability to know and love God. The antithesis is a wicked heart and carnal mind that resists God's thoughts. "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

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<sup>153</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*: Volume I, Chapter XXXIII, XXI, 155.

<sup>154</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 29.

## CHAPTER FOUR—The Word of God and Revelation

**Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Heb. 10:7**

There is no natural path for unaided man to receive God. It is naturally a stumbling block and foolishness to think that a sovereign God would kill his Son for sinners. A dead Messiah?...unheard of or unthinkable for the Jews. For the Gentiles, the sign of a god was immortality. Jesus could not fit their wisdom understanding because he was crucified. However, God is the sovereign King by creation and personally by revelation written in the moral law of the conscience. He rules over those who respond to special revelation and rules man's inner spirit by the mediation of Christ. Thus, natural revelation needs no mediator. God's sovereignty never mitigates human responsibility, such that human beings are morally responsible.

Jesus shares God's revelation of Scripture with his disciples concerning himself and repeats this message after his crucifixion as a reminder of his suffering and resurrection. Luke's Emmaus account reveals that the disciples on the road regarded Jesus as the Revealer of God's way and the Doer of his work—the promised Messiah and Redeemer of Israel—no physical body was found in the tomb, and no decisive proof of his resurrection. Nevertheless, an accompanying Stranger, veiled from their human insight, rebukes, and reminds them of the things taught by the prophets, and God's plan being fulfilled in him. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:27, 44). God's revelation is disclosed throughout holy Scripture, where its true hero is the incarnate Jesus Christ, as revealed in the written Word, the NT's closing line. Thus, without Scripture as God's revelation, one cannot rightly know the incarnate Word.

Defining the OT's central message is key to the hermeneutical method. Without adequately knowing Scripture, one cannot know the true Messiah.

God's providence is above man's will— his will, power, and eternal plan. He stands asymmetrically behind good and evil— transcendent and sovereign. Suffering can be seen as a temporary discipline where those obedient to the Father will glean victory. However, those who, like the Pharisees and the Jewish religious leaders, diligently searched the Old Testament but were blinded, did not see Jesus as the Messiah, and did not believe in him. "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and they bear witness about me" (John 5:39).

The written form of God's special revelation for his people is holy Scripture. "The trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine and is therefore fundamental to the Christian hope and life."<sup>155</sup> The abandonment of Scripture will jeopardize the entire Christian doctrinal system's foundation by placing it upon the sand. Without the assurance of inerrancy, Scripture's trustworthiness is doubtful, and the gospel's "good news" of a resurrected Savior is worthless. Faith and application readily hang on the reliability of all of God's word. The Old and New Testaments, through the Spirit's provisioning of an abiding and permanent witness, carry them into a relationship with the resurrected and ascended Savior. Christ submits to evil to overcome and conquer it. Salvation is in his resurrection. Does one want a God who does what one wants instead of the God of the Bible who is sovereign and whose agenda is his own will? The gospel-centered response to evil is the cross, as Scripture reveals. "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of

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<sup>155</sup> B. B. Warfield, "The Inspiration of the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, v. 51, 1894, 614-40. Pub. also in "King's Own," v. 6, London. 1895, 791-94, 833-40, 926-33.

me in the scroll of the book” (Heb. 10:7). F. F. Bruce provides that these words “sum up the whole tenor of our Lord’s life and ministry and express the essence of that true sacrifice which God desires. The “scroll of the book” is the written תּוֹרָה (torah) of God; what was written there the speaker recognized to be written concerning *him*, to be God’s prescription for *him*.”<sup>156</sup>

### **Revelation**

As divine revelation, the Bible is God’s self-disclosure to man. It is God’s absolute truth and authority over one’s beliefs, values, and activities. God provides insight concerning one’s realities that could never be known independently, but only through God’s disclosure of them. The world views the Bible from the implications of prohibitions against the human will. The thought of an autonomous human contradicts the biblical view of man. Some individuals believe they have absolute control of themselves and their wills apart from the Creator. Many hate the very idea of considering the Bible as God’s word and authoritative. This original idea resulted in the fall of man and continues today based on the premise that truth is socially constructed, and any other suggestion is infringement upon the human will. Similarly, the Bible is deemed unfair, prejudicial, misogynistic, homophobic, and invades the privacy and right of one to freely choose the way one desires to live. However, the implication is that the Bible is God’s word and judges one’s actions, whether right or wrong. All are beholden in their thinking and actions. Therefore, one should allow God to speak frankly through Scripture without bias until its message is heard.

In this chapter’s launch, one delivered a brief commentary regarding God’s revelation. Further examination of revelation’s biblical meaning and its biblical application provides that the Holy Spirit is the deliverer of special revelation. “But God hath revealed [them] unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10). Paul’s use of

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<sup>156</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 242.

the word “revealed” indicates that God’s revelation is contrasted from other instructive methods, and delivered to the soul by God himself, or by the ascended Christ, especially through the operation of the Holy Spirit— κατά ἀποκάλυψιν γνωρίζεσθαι (according to revelation), or in the case of πνεῦμα ἀποκαλύψεως (a spirit received from God declaring salvation’s purpose and benefits) ... “how the mystery was made known to me [Paul] by revelation, as I have written briefly.” These paradigms stipulate divine revelation that is considered special revelation, as opposed to natural or general revelation. Special revelation distinguishes Scripture from nature, where God has revealed himself intrinsically. This knowledge involves trust and reverence. God’s Spirit leads one who deliberately submits to Scripture’s authority. The “manifestation” of Jesus after his ascension is through his word. Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me” (John 14:22-24).

Natural revelation speaks of God’s existence and alludes to this knowledge being implanted in the human mind, but does not reveal specifics about God’s character:

That there exists in the human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, as endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and he their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service.<sup>157</sup>

John Calvin’s words maintain that natural revelation is not enough to bring the gospel of salvation but only provides the general knowledge of God’s existence. Genesis 1, 2, and 3 reveal

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<sup>157</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume I, III, 22.

the condemnation of man, but the gospel is special to salvation. In nature, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge” (Ps. 19:1-2), or in God revealing his attributes, “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). Romans 1 expresses the existence and power of God in a general sense, but its informative message is not enough to get rid of the depravity of sin. Ralph Venning said, “Many people have thanked God for affliction— but no one ever thanked him for sin. Some indeed misunderstand the meaning of Romans 6:17, as if the Apostle were thanking God that men, were sinners. But this is not the case by any means! He thanks God that those who once were sinners, had now become obedient to the gospel...”<sup>158</sup> The capability of obedience to which Venning speaks of is the enabling of special revelation where God has spoken to his people directly (Gen 8:15; Ex 6:2; 20:1-17; Matt 3:17; 2 Pet 1:17-18).

At the center of St. Augustine’s certainty is the operation of revelation in relationship with grace. Revelation is facilitative to knowledge as grace as to action. Without both, the right action is impossible. His interpretation of God’s working in the world emanates from this knowledge and is the requirement for everything else in Augustine. Using the term “macrotheology” to comprehend Christianity and culture is an inquiry into the relationship between the nature of truth’s rival interpretations. Emerging societies without Christianity disagree over sense-knowledge and the nature of truth. However, regardless of where Christianity appears, particular faith claims are made, affirming that generally held principles

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<sup>158</sup> Ralph Venning, *The Plague of Plagues: The Sinfulness of Sin*, ed. (Vasil Lazar. Dascălu, Ilfov, Magna Gratia, 2017), 147.

manifest in developing civil societies. Thus, Christianity's beliefs regarding the world and how one should live in it are radically different.

Augustine communicates this concept of God's revelation in rebuke of the "naturalists," postulating that their fantasies are reprehensible in attributing what they believe as true worship as unsuitable by attempting to turn human affairs into divine activities. His observance of those trying to gain their soul's happiness by wicked means—by adoring the objects of worship in a way that does not bring material or spiritual salvation, or on the human level, winning them honor, is blasphemous to the true God. The God of one's worship is he who has created all things unto himself. He instituted the union of males and females to propagate life on the earth and conferred upon human societies the blessings of terrestrial fire to make life easier by giving man heat and light. The true God is active and operative in all things created, always acting as God, present everywhere in his totality, free from any spatial confinement, absolutely indivisible, ubiquitous, and independent from anything in the natural order.<sup>159</sup> 'See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ' (Col. 2:8). 'For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse' (Rom. 1:19-20).

God's self-identity and work throughout Scripture are secured in his Word. John's conveyance of this fact developed at the commencement of the New Testament as the word spoken throughout history and time is now embodied in the person of the promised Messiah Jesus. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He

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<sup>159</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, ed. H. Bettenson (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2003), 287-312.



was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-3, 14).

Considering God’s revelation in Jesus as the Word made flesh, the emphasis of one’s hearing, response, and holding are innate. In John’s gospel conclusion, Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure by accentuating his spoken word regarding himself, which is significant. He distinctly, to some degree, extends the interrelationship between him and Father to his disciples by placing the word central to this relationship knowledge: “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:20-21).

Calvin defines wisdom and its connection with the knowledge of God as Creator comprising two parts— knowledge of God and knowledge of self. Without knowledge of God, there is no knowledge of self.

For in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves; because it is perfectly obvious, that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves; nay, that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone.<sup>160</sup>

The perpetuity of good residing in God compared to man’s poverty because of sin’s depravity becomes increasingly apparent with the increased revelation of God’s sovereign rule over his creation. It compels one to turn his eyes upward, fearing the nakedness of one’s shame of having been stripped of the divine attire at sin’s disclosure of the disgraceful properties on full display before the Master. One is urged in his evil conscience to consider the good things of God.

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<sup>160</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume I, I, 20.

Though roused, one cannot desire to him in earnest until one begins to be displeased with himself. As one is unknown to himself, he contends with his miseries and endowments. Therefore, when one comes into the knowledge of himself, he is provoked to pursue God and be led by the hand to find him.

G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson juxtapose God’s wisdom and human wisdom utilizing a formula developed from 1 Cor. 2:6-3:4 with the theme statement appearing in 2:6, “But [in contrast to human wisdom] we [the apostles, prophets/preachers at Corinth] speak wisdom [the gospel of Christ crucified in its fullness] among the mature [knowledgeable, discerning, experienced Christians].”<sup>161</sup> Paul’s use of “as it is written” (2:9) is the OT’s exercise of this formula. However, the following words, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him,” fails to match any known text in the Greek or Hebrew Bible but may allude to an apocryphal source. Origen attributed the text to the *Apocalypse of Elijah* (no longer existing) or perhaps *Gos. Thom. 17* as Jesus’ words. An alternative hypothesis suggests that Paul is citing a wisdom tradition of his Corinthian opponents. Although there is uncertainty, a loose quotation of Is. 64:3 LXX (Is. 64:4), “From of old no one has heard or perceived in the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you” seems to assert as the earlier Pauline text suggests, that no human has the empowerment or the capability to know the divine revelation of God without the Holy Spirit’s leading. The wisdom that Paul and others preach is God’s wisdom and the fullness of his salvific plan.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 700.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

## Human Language

Some claim God cannot communicate with a man because he is all-powerful. However, God has created man in his image and communicates with him through human language though he does not limit himself in this action. Words are sufficient to understand some things about God, though their use is limited and imperfect— human language is flawed but has a divine-ordained purpose.

God spoke audibly at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 20:1), by dreams and visions (Gen 28:12; 31:11; Dan 7:1; 12:8-9; Num 12:6; Isa 6:1; 1 Ki 22:19), through angels (Dan 10:10-21), the prophets (2 Sam 23:2; Luke 1:70), the apostles (Eph 2:20; 3:5; 2 Pet 3:2), and absolutely through Jesus Christ, his Son (John 1:1, 14, 18; Heb 1:1-3; cf. Acts 10:9-16; 27:21-26). And finally, God has revealed himself through holy Scripture, which is both authoritative and inspirational, referring to the written word, “Inspired” (γραφὴ *graphe*) that is (θεόπνευστος *theopneustos*) “God-breathed.” “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Throughout the Old Testament, God has spoken primarily at four significant times. He has spoken to Abraham, Moses, and David. However, God will do a new thing in speaking through Isaiah to Malachi, the prophets, and proclaimers of the new covenant. “Old Testament intertextuality demonstrates the prophets were exegetes and theologians”<sup>163</sup> is the beginning of a dialog solidified in the dimensional rationale of directionality—an idea observed in the New Testament’s use of the Old, where chains move between biblical texts. The prophets were knowledgeable of the theological associations of prior revelation and knew their predecessors’

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<sup>163</sup> Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids, IL: Kregel Academic, 2018), 93.

development of those results. They intentionally set a trajectory toward the apostles by using this logic in their writing and advanced a theological framework for them to expound.

A more cultural consciousness idea set forth by certain scholars asserts that the prophets opposed the big picture blueprint of God. Therefore, they were not sensitive to the future. However, the prophetic hermeneutic suggests the opposite— that the prophets knew how to fit the theological complexity of past revelation into God’s plan, composing to their generations and that superior agenda. In these reflections, the prophets did not “write better than they knew.” This position fits with the concept of dual authorship, given that the human author and the Spirit were of “one mind” —the basis of the doctrine of inspiration. This does not downplay human action in Scripture’s authorship but affirms Scripture’s ultimate origin in God, who gave it, making it “useful for teaching” (1 Timothy 3:16) and related pastoral purposes because it provides coherent, consistent, and reliable testimony to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39-40; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This idea shows that inspiration impacts hermeneutics in some ways, a concept illumined by Abner Chou. A point is to be made here concerning BLT’s view of inspiration. “Cone explains the movement, which has roots in 1960s civil-rights activism and draws inspiration from both the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, as ‘mainly a theology that sees God as concerned with the poor and the weak.’”<sup>164</sup> Thus, Cone’s “inspiration” is another hermeneutic opposing God as Authority. The authority acknowledged by followers of BLT is the black experience of oppression. This concept is an anthropocentric base rather than Christ and Scripture’s authority.

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<sup>164</sup> “Black Liberation Theology in its Founder’s Words”, *NPR VPM*, March 31, 2008, Live radio interview with James Cone.

God's word is presented in the context of redemptive history. Accordingly, apostolic writing was based on prophetic expectations that the fulfillment of Scripture, Jesus Christ, the Messianic King, was among them. "Inspiration and speculation cannot long abide in peace. Compromise there can be none. We cannot hold the inspiration of the Word, and yet reject it; we cannot believe in the atonement and deny it..."<sup>165</sup> At this juncture, Charles Spurgeon's point aligns with Chou's that "the prophets had a redemptive historical logic that establishes their texts in a trajectory which prepares well for the New Testament,"<sup>166</sup> that of Scripture being "God-breathed" (inspired by God, (θεόπνευστος), theopneustos) as 1 Timothy 3:16 suggests.

Moreover, man needs a moral standard outside of himself. The same God who ordained the elect ordained the means. One finds transformation in the gospel's proclamation, where the imputation of Christ's righteousness in exchange for man's sin is apparent. The antithesis is danger, deceit, and depravity—all falseness seen from the human condition—a view of today's society where cultural awakening now takes precedence over spiritual "awakeness." When a man takes upon himself the authority to interpret Scripture by himself, the rendering becomes about himself rather than God. This idea suggests a cultural hermeneutic common today where Scripture's interpretation is through a social lens. "There is an authority gap the further we remove ourselves from the intended meaning of the Word."<sup>167</sup> Scripture is sufficient and above all else and does not need a reference.

If then, Jesus was mistaken in regarding the Old Testament as completely trustworthy, reliable, and inerrant in matters of doctrine, history, and science, it must follow that God himself was mistaken about the inerrancy of the Hebrew Scriptures. And the proposition that God was mistaken is surely a theological issue if there ever was one! It turns out,

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<sup>165</sup> R. B. Cook, *The Wit and Wisdom of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon: Containing Selections from His Writings and A Sketch of His Life and Work* (Baltimore, MD: R. H. Woodard, 1892), 272.

<sup>166</sup> Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 95.

<sup>167</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 25.

then, that errancy in matters of history and science leads inevitably to errancy in matters (and very important matters!) of theology as well. Once the dike has been breached, it is eventually washed away.<sup>168</sup>

### Progressive Revelation

God's progressive revelation over the biblical timeline considers the unfolding of his plan centered around God's Messianic arrival and kingdom. Prophetic texts often seem to deliver the wisdom of why God acts and explains his responses. The Old Testament does not hold God's complete unfolding plan for humanity. Though its revelation is accurate, it is incomplete without fulfilling specific predictions. Progressive revelation does not imply that what the OT says is less accurate than the NT but that the advancement of God's plan in what the OT claims is complete in the NT. "I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which has once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Jude delivers that progressive revelation somewhat discloses earlier revelations but does not counter them. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, not its contradiction. "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:18). That which the prophets spoke was limited knowledge before Messiah came.

God made himself known to the prophets by *visions* - emblematic appearances, and by *dreams*, in which the future was announced by *dark speeches*, *בהידה* *bechidoth*, by enigmas or figurative representations, but God spoke to Moses *face to face* (Num. 12:6-8). The result for those following this direction for prophecy's future fulfillment presumed an exact match of the predictions made. However, there are numerous examples in opposition to this idea in later prophecy fulfillment. For instance, Amos, a pre-exilic prophet, reported to Israel that God would defeat them and send the nation "beyond Damascus" (Amos 5:27). Amos's utterance occurrence

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<sup>168</sup> Boice, *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, 92.

was during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II and perhaps rejected as a literal occurrence by Israel's audience because of the strength of their military at the time and their enemy, Assyria, was feeble. Though no date for this prophecy's fulfillment was provided, neither was the identification of any country beyond Damascus, Israel's literal acceptance of the prophecy was rejected, yet its fulfillment did occur, though after Amos' lifetime. The evidence of a clear and somewhat specific prophecy results in a historical fulfillment that Israel's audience should have regarded as a literal message. Shalmaneser, the Assyrian king, and his army surrounded Samaria for three years. In the literal fulfillment of Amos' prophecy, many Israelites were sent into exile beyond Damascus into the Assyrian territory (2 Kings 17:3-6).

How should one consider the language of future prophecy or its poetic descriptions? Should these descriptions be literal or metaphorical? The possibility of multiplying the examples of OT literal prophetic fulfillments is unpretentious, but as for future prophecies, not all are specific, and their fulfillments are not easily identifiable. Many future prophetic predictions were much more general or vague and were not closely tied to people, places, objects, and events that were identifiable. For example, God made a prophetic statement in Isaiah 42:14-16 that was less explicit:

<sup>14</sup>“For a long time I have kept silent,  
 I have been quiet and held myself back.  
 But now, like a woman in childbirth,  
 I cry out, I gasp and pant.  
<sup>15</sup> I will lay waste the mountains and hills  
 and dry up all their vegetation;  
 I will turn rivers into islands  
 and dry up the pools.  
<sup>16</sup> I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,  
 along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;  
 I will turn the darkness into light before them  
 and make the rough places smooth.  
 These are the things I will do;  
 I will not forsake them.”

It is noteworthy that God's silence in 42:14a does not mean it was literal and absolute. Indeed, God's direction continues in heaven's business and that of the world while communicating with the angelic host or even a prophet under his sovereign auspices. Thus, his silence means that God's message was an alternative to the prophet's audience's prayers being answered with pleasing messages of deliverance. One might ask, who is this audience? Perhaps the "blind" specific to verse 16 is not the audience's identity in verse 14, whose history was not recorded. However, by verse 15, what is known is that the audience's suffering is the result of the land's curse, which gives the prophecy's listener the possibility to now interpret Isaiah's prophecy as God's judgment on Israel's enemies using the metaphor, "a great drought," as the decimation of mountains, hills, vegetation, pools, and rivers— the result of God's judgment. Could this metaphor have multiple meanings one might ask? One may associate it with military destruction rather than a literal drought. What about "gasping and panting" in verse 14? Is God literally doing this, or is this a metaphor for the agony of things to come for the people of Israel?

Isaiah's use of an unusual metaphor ("gasping and panting") is usually associated with a woman's birthing pains. However, there are numerous suggestions for its use. Perhaps Isaiah created some confusion through his contrasting images between the negative images of verse 14 and the hopeful message given to the blind who did not understand God's ways spiritually. God treats both groups of people differently (42:15-16). This idea may even indicate that God will deal with the wicked and the righteous differently. When will God give them light, given the metaphorical dark side of life? The use of metaphoric language in Isaiah's prophecy uplifts and gives hope to people who feel abandoned emotionally. The intentional design of prophetic proclamations concerning a nation's coming destruction is designed to push the violator into



doing something— be it to continue in their present state, worsen the calamity or turn from evil and repent, thereby avoiding God’s judgment, as evident in Jonah 3.

Recognizing the hermeneutical difficulties in determining how to interpret imagery-laden passages provides that there are commentators who struggle and, in many cases, disagree on the best ways to handle these instances. For example, using Isaiah 31:8-9 as a backdrop, it is not too difficult to distinguish the differences between clear historical prophecies concerning Assyria’s defeat, where one will interpret the passage literally, whereas on the other hand, the highly imagery poetic passage of Isaiah 55:12 where hills are depicted as singing and trees clapping their hands, it is vague if one should analyze the verse literally or figuratively. Certainly, the use of metaphorical language adds difficulty that is problematic without proper hermeneutic consideration. D. Brent Sandy concluded that “by its very nature poetry is a performance rather than a series of propositions.... the ambiguity of poetry limits our ability to interpret it with scientific precision.”<sup>169</sup> In this frame, one must consider figures of speech common to Hebrew culture and used by the prophets in their writings. Here, one notes that Isaiah 65:5 employs “people are smoke in my nostrils,” while Jeremiah 31:9 uses “I will lead you by the streams of water” as examples that are not to be literally interpreted. However, there are instances where prophetic propositions are not just used figuratively. Isaiah employs metaphorical roles connected to literal truth, such as his references to Yahweh as God, Creator, Redeemer, Holy One of Israel, and King (41:14, 20-21; 43:3, 14-15; 44:6, 24).<sup>170</sup>

The Old Testament provides a Messianic vision through prophetic conveyance. The OT prophets furnish insight into Israel’s history but do not advance the storyline of the Old

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<sup>169</sup> Gary Smith, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook*, ed. David M. Howard (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2014), 118.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

Testament. Instead, the OT's audience is given help in understanding Israel's history on a deeper level. The more significant number of the prophets are preexilic and deliver forewarnings to both Israel and Judah regarding the dangers of rejecting God. The smaller number of prophets, exilic and postexilic, echo Israel's returning to the land. Summarizing the prophets emphasizes God's judgment, salvation, and reign over his people.

This idea leads to another feature of the prophets. There will be a new ruler over all creation. Though both Israel and Judah suffered exile, this condition was not permanent. God had not abandoned them and promised that Israel would return to their land. His promise of the woman's seed to bruise the head of the serpent was not withdrawn. The consummation of God's promise to Abraham of heirs, land, and blessings would be fulfilled, as would the promise of a reigning Davidic king where a new creation and new exodus are a reality, resulting in God making a new covenant with his people.

At this point, a critical question sets Jews and Christians at odds— is Jesus the Messiah? The OT motif of the Davidic dynasty evolved into the New Testament's grounds of eschatological hope and proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah. This hope strengthened behind most of the OT's writing, with the NT building further on developing this eschatological nature of hope. Liberating the national promise of a new king from a larger hope is not easy, given OT texts. However, the greater anticipation added up to gathered individual promises, specifically the linking of a future monarchy inviting an eschatological meaning in Isaiah 11:1-9. In addition, the rearrangement of the royal psalms that referred to individual Davidic kings has been collected and reinterpreted for forthcoming royal hope in Psalms.

What was the ancient's familiarity when they heard the word Messiah? For Christians, the word is traditionally identified with Jesus but has proven to be more complex than this simple

equation. In the ongoing dispute of messianism in the OT, two questions arise. Is there an expectation, and what kind? Mowinckel's minimization of messianic expectation in the OT viewed God's anointed primarily as the king, a political figure.<sup>171</sup> Contrasting this idea is H. Ringgren's view of a figure beyond the people of Israel linked with the royal psalms and OT servant passages.<sup>172</sup> Further discussions suggest not over-reading these related texts but with the understanding that there is more than simply a fulfillment by a figure of the time or Israel's people. There is a variety of possible people who are designated or thought about in some way to be God's anointed. Is. 45:1, for example, mentions Cyrus the Persian. King David is specially mentioned, and various prophets and others are also mentioned. However, in the OT, is there a kind of messianic expectation as portrayed in the NT, delivering a unique and specific person as God's only Messiah? Given this point, there is significant variation in scholarly thought.

The debate remains between the nature and significance of messianism for early Judaism and Christianity. One of the most disputed points is its meaning and origin. Two questions are fundamental to this continuing dialogue. What is the extent of messianism's role in shaping the theologies of various expressions of Judaism and Christianity? Was messianism a fundamental principle in ancient Judaism, as it symbolized Christianity? Given the framework of Christianity and its Messianic fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the analysis of first-century Jewish Messianic expectations is significantly considered. The ennoblement of a Davidic dynasty is ancient, with the messianic trajectory originating with the emergence of royal ideology in the expression of Israelite kingship. "Not all Jews had an expectation for such a figure, and for those who did the figure's mission or task varied. Also, the term "messiah" was not always used to

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<sup>171</sup> S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (New York, NY: Abingdon, 1954).

<sup>172</sup> H. Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (SBT 18; London: SCM Press, 1956).

denote this expected figure.”<sup>173</sup> These principles are rooted fundamentally in the ancient Near East in general as they are in Israel’s activities and religious beliefs. “The Jewish national hope anticipated a glorious destiny for Israel, the ‘good times coming’ when God’s blessings would reveal to all his favor toward his people.”<sup>174</sup>

Though several possible conceptions exist in messianism, Christian scholars imposed the idea of “*the Messianic hope*” of the Jews as the specific expression appropriated from Judaism to interpret the person of Jesus to their contemporaries. This idea, though an early Christian interpretation of Jesus, is not the general consensus of messianism. *Messiah*, or *anointed*, is an Old Testament expression used for kings, priests, and, as a metaphor, for prophets. “The Old Testament itself does not link the word with its expectations of future deliverance, and *Messiah* is not a particularly prominent concept in the intertestamental literature.”<sup>175</sup> Often God’s actions are direct and without reference to a human mediator. The Samaritan’s *ta’eb* speaks of a prophet like Moses, expressed also as reformer and restorer (John 4:25). Here, Beale and Carson make an interesting point, “The woman’s affirmation, ‘He will explain everything to us,’ is consistent with the fact that the Samaritans, rather than looking for the royal Messiah from the house of David (as did the Jews), apparently expected a “teaching” Messiah.”<sup>176</sup> The Psalms of Solomon 17-18, suggest the son of David as the coming king and “the anointed of the Lord.” The book “originated from a group of Jews who criticized the (Jewish) leadership of the Hasmoneans and

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<sup>173</sup> Derek Dodson and Katherine Smith, *Exploring Biblical Backgrounds: A Reader in Historical & Literary Contexts* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 189.

<sup>174</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 551.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 552.

<sup>176</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 440.

loathed the newly Roman rule.”<sup>177</sup> The Qumran *Rule of the Community* 9.11 anticipates the arrival of an eschatological “prophet and the messiahs of Aaron and Israel.” “The second excerpt (mid-first century BCE) describes how the priest, and the messiah will preside over the community’s sacred meal ‘in the final days,’”<sup>178</sup> while the *Rule of the Congregation* speaks of the “messiah of Israel” and “priest” who has precedence reflecting the post-exilic community of the priests of Levi (through Aaron), and the governor (and hoped for king) from the tribe of Judah (through David).<sup>179</sup>

Longman’s view of messianism in the OT proposes that a specific messianic expectation rises only in the late post-OT times. However, the roots are seen much earlier and associated with texts looking forward to a future anointed king or priest figure bringing salvation to God’s people. Both OT and NT authors believed that many texts had messianic significance. These passages include Gen. 3:15; 14:17-20; 49:8-12; Num. 24:17-19; Deut. 18:18-19; Psalms 2 and 110; and Dan. 9:24-26, where *mašīaḥ* is actual.<sup>180</sup> The result is a question raised by Longman and others: Did the original authors understand these passages as messianic? If not, then what is the significance of this material’s use in the NT?

Boda notes that in the Prophets, *mašīaḥ* is rarely associated with an anticipated future leader within the OT, except Daniel 9:24-26 and Isaiah. 61:1. He further proposes that most Hebrew passages describe past and present leaders. However, by examining the Prophets, the employment of the words “Messiah” and “messianic” is the proper way to refer to an assortment

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<sup>177</sup> Dodson and Smith, *Exploring Biblical Backgrounds*, 189.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 552.

<sup>180</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, IL: Eerdmans, 2007), 4-5.

of future leaders or the functions of a single leader.<sup>181</sup> There is tension in the last passages of the Prophets concerning the character and role of future leaders delivering the implication of the prophetic voice transitioning to a more emphatic eschatological priority. Where first-century Judaism's presentation about a coming age figured in a particular agent, a clearly defined view of the *Messiah* was not especially a conventional description. The "days of Messiah" was the expression of where he appeared as opposed to the significance of his purpose as a person. "He was part of the 'furniture' rather than a decisive factor."<sup>182</sup> In this framing, "messianic" in the Jewish expectation of Messiah was not the key classification it was for Christians. Thus, it is evident in the Prophets that the new David will shepherd Israel with love and care, unlike those who preceded him. In Daniel, the connection provides that the son of man will shatter worldly kingdoms. It is also evident in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah that the new David will shepherd and rule God's flock, a function of the stone in Daniel and the son of man. For this reason, one may think of the new David and the son of man as one and the same. However, Isaiah clarifies that the son of man will be given the kingdom, that the new David will rule, and that he is the Spirit-anointed ruler of God's people (Is. 9:2-7; 11:1-9).

Isaiah plainly notes that the new exodus and new creation will only come through the Lord's servant. The sins of Israel forgiven resulted in their return from exile, and the one who bore their sins is God's suffering servant, the shepherd who was struck for the people's sake, according to Zechariah. This new exodus and new creation become a reality through the new David, the son of man and the Lord's servant. All have the same meaning. This reality is God's promise to Abraham realized through the new David, the servant of the Lord and the son of man

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<sup>181</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 552.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 553.

as the NT refers to Jesus as the Son of David, the messianic king, the servant of the Lord, and Son of man.

BLT's hermeneutic of the new exodus theme is communicated as the "dominant perspective on God is God in action, delivering the oppressed because of His righteousness. He is to be seen, as immanent, among His people. He is doing something,<sup>183</sup> as illustrated in the Old Testament when He delivered His people Israel from Egypt's bondage.<sup>184</sup><sup>185</sup> However, Scripture presents that God delivers His people, bringing them to freedom in Christ. Nevertheless, this biblical perspective should be considered a part of the whole picture. For his name's sake and his glory, God chooses to deliver them because of His love and sense of justice. The Christian will either be a slave to Christ or himself— there is no middle ground.

Jeremiah's prophecy concerning messianic expectations provides a major theme for a new covenant in chapters 30-33. These combined passages explain God's provision for the future restoration of his people. While Judah suffered great terror under the attack of the Babylonians (30:4-7, 12-15), Jeremiah offered the people new hope for a planned restoration by God. He reminds them of God's covenantal past with them and encourages them that if they repented of their sins, God would build them up and plant them (31:1-14). A new covenant is offered by God that would be written on their hearts and never broken (31:31-40). Jeremiah reminded the people that God's promise to heal, transform, and fill the land with joy is because of David's righteous *Branch* (23:3-6) to rule and restore worship through the Levites (33:1-26).

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<sup>183</sup> Cone, "Black Theology and Black Liberation," 52-53.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>185</sup> H. Wayne House, "An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology," *Monergism*, <https://www.monergism.com>.

Zechariah's prophetic utterances occur in eight visions concerning God's people during the Persian period. These visions are framed within the first theme of Zechariah encouraging the people of Jerusalem that the sovereign God was in control of their future. Though Judah was symbolized as having patrolling horse riders, God knew what was happening within the land (1:7-11) and was zealous for their future but angry with the surrounding nations' ease (1:12-17). The second vision pronounces destruction to four horns by four craftsmen (1:18-21). The third involved a man measuring for the building of Jerusalem's walls with the intervention of an angel telling him that the people of God were too numerous for walls but, instead, that the fire of God's presence would protect the city (2:6-13). The high priest Joshua is on trial in Zechariah's fourth vision. God forgave his sins and gave him new clothing to fulfill his priestly roles (3:3-8). Two olive trees stand between a lampstand, one representing Zerubbabel encouraged by God's Spirit to build the temple (4:6). This fifth vision also exhorts Zerubbabel not to despise a diminutive temple building (4:1-14). The sixth vision symbolizes God's curses against sinful activity by representing a flying scroll. Babylon would, in turn, receive the wickedness of the land (5:5-11). God's sovereign control of the world's four corners is Zechariah's seventh vision of chariots (6:1-8). Still finally, the future hope of the *Branch*, the coming Davidic Messiah, who has a priestly function (6:9-14), is symbolic of the high priest Joshua's gold crown placed upon his head by the people.

Zechariah's prophecy of a king riding on a donkey into Jerusalem whose purpose is to bring salvation and righteousness to God's people (9:9) is related to the rejected good Shepherd (11:4-13) and the pierced Man (12:10-12). These prophecies are universal in dimension and not restricted to Israel only. However, the resulting salvation brought about by the new David extends beyond Israel and includes the Gentiles whose hope is in the servant of the Lord and the



Davidic king— the NT fulfillment of the OT’s progressive revelation regarding the Messianic King. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17).

The theme of the Bible is the Lord Jesus Christ. The fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and new David. The contrast of progressive revelation for BLT is its view of Christ and the Bible. Jesus Christ is the one who stands on the side of blacks and is one with them as a “revolutionary black leader,” and member of the Zealots. His death was for the rebirth of a lost black nation.<sup>186</sup> Thus, Christianity is viewed as black power because the message of Jesus Christ represents the essence of Christianity, and according to BLT, it is regarded as black power. Given, that Jesus became black, his disciples’ proclamation of its gospel must also be black. Clarence Hilliard stated, “Jesus stood with and for the poor and oppressed and disinherited. He came for the sick and needy.... He came into the world as the ultimate ‘nigger’ of the universe.”<sup>187</sup> Though Hilliard’s blasphemous words appear offensive, they are a statement composed to evangelical leaders.

Cone’s hermeneutical exploits of both the OT and NT Scriptures concerning God’s progressive revelation provides that Israel is Scripture’s historical depiction of Black Americans in the United States. The OT is merely a “historical book.”

Unlike the God of Greek philosophy, who is removed from history, the God of the Bible is involved in history. His revelation is inseparable from the social and political affairs of Israel...To know him is to experience his acts in the concrete affairs and relationships of people, liberating the weak and helpless from pain and humiliation. The Old Testament is a history book. To understand it and the divine revelation to which it testifies, we must think of the Old Testament as the drama of God’s mighty acts in history. It tells the story

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<sup>186</sup> Charles P. Henry, “Toward a Religion of Revolution,” 30. See also, Samuel George Frederick Brandon, *Jesus, and the Zealots* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967).

<sup>187</sup> Clarence Hilliard, “Down with the Honky Christ—Up with the Funky Jesus,” *Christianity Today*, January 30, 1976: 6.

of God's act of grace and of judgement as he calls the people of Israel into a free, liberated existence.<sup>188</sup>

### The Chicago Statement

Articles 3, 4, and 5 incorporate the CSBI's reliance on Scripture's interpretive criterion of God's word and revelation. As such, Article 3 affirms the neo-theologian's definition of what the Bible's revelation means—that it is not simply an observer of revelation, but that human language is its conveyance, which is the focus of Article 4. Article 5 explains that the unfolding of revelation, or progressive revelation, is the expounding of earlier Scripture in its fullness. The CSBI framers guard against any view that precludes any concept that the Bible is less than God's divinely inspired and written revelation. It is unique and does not negate the teaching of any part because it is of lesser appeal culturally or for any other reason. Here, D. A. Carson's view of imperious ignorance is best served as an example: "This is the stance that insists that all the relevant biblical passages on a stated subject are exegetically confusing and unclear, and therefore we cannot know (hence "imperious") the mind of God on that subject. This art of imperious ignorance is not unknown or unpracticed today."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> James H. Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, "Biblical Revelation and Social Existence" in *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), 160. See also "Black Theology and Black Liberation," where Cone states, "According to the Bible, the God of Israel is known by what he is *doing* in history for the salvation of man. It is this critical dimension of divine activity that makes history and revelation inseparable in biblical religion. To see the revelation of God is to see the *action* of God in the historical affairs of men. God is not uninvolved in human history, as in the Greek philosophical tradition; the opposite is the case. He is participating in human history, *moving* in the direction of man's salvation which is the goal of divine activity" (p. 110). The idea of prophecy is related to liberation where certain OT passages are used to drive this hermeneutic coupled with black prophetic Christian traditions where faith determines the outcome for future changes for overcoming oppression and racism. See Russell Shorto, *Gospel Truth: The New Image of Jesus Emerging from Science and History, and Why it Matters* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997) and Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) for Cone's methodological process.

<sup>189</sup> D. A. Carson, "The Art of Imperious Ignorance", *Themelios*, April 2017.

Article 3 states: “We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is revelation given by God. We deny that the Bible is merely a witness to revelation, or only becomes revelation in encounter, or depends on the responses of men for its validity.”<sup>190</sup>

The question of Scripture’s fundamental nature of divine revelation is focused upon in both the affirmation and denial of this commentary. The twentieth century has seen numerous debates concerning this issue, especially from scholars such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, James Cone, and others. They subscribe to “Neo-Orthodox,” or dialectical theology promoting a “dynamic” Scriptural view where its authority functions in a dynamic relationship of “Word and hearing of the Word,”<sup>191</sup> resulting in a denial of the Bible as revelation, in and of itself. Brunner, for example, insists that Scripture is merely a witness to the revelation found in Christ, not revelation. On the other hand, he considers special revelation is the embodiment of Christ alone. To regard the Bible as objective revelation would minimize the essence of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

These articles’ purpose is to show that objectively, the revelation given in the person of Jesus Christ and Scripture is on equal terms, and one should oppose a disconnection bounded by them. Scripture is revelation itself and not a mere catalyst of revelation. Scripture is propositional in content and understood as communicating propositions. The significance of “in its entirety” means that the whole of Scripture is God’s revelation. The interpreter’s task, whether the individual or corporate church, is to receive it as such, barring anyone separating any parts of Scripture seeming revelatory from those which seem not.

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<sup>190</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 29.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. One notes that this expression of Neo-Orthodoxy” is essentially the Barthian basis of James Cone’s interpretive process of Scripture as referenced in “Black Liberation Theology in its Founder’s Words,” *NPR VPM*, March 31, 2008, Live radio interview with James Cone, <https://www.npr.org/2008/03/31/89236116/black-liberation-theology-in-its-founders-words> [accessed Sep. 21, 2022].

Article 3 repudiates the practice of any approach to Scripture that does not view its entire contents as divine revelation, and God's inspired words. It also reinforces that Scripture's objectivity of revelation is not dependent upon human responses, nor does its truth depend upon believers or unbelievers. Central to Article 3 is the declaration and confidence relating to Scripture—that it is not the result of human wisdom, imagination, or philosophy, but is the reflection of the sovereign God's disclosure in Scripture concerning himself, which is the embodiment of truth in the Bible that is beyond the capabilities of man. God's word is himself.

A segue into Article 4 provides the means of communicating God's revelation in its declaration: "We affirm that God who made mankind in his image has used language as a means of revelation. We deny that human language is so limited by our creatureliness that it is rendered inadequate as a vehicle for divine revelation. We further deny that the corruption of human culture and language through sin has thwarted God's work of inspiration."<sup>192</sup>

Biblical inerrancy has been attacked significantly for its claims. Perhaps the most controversial debate in the twentieth century was against the limitations of the human language view, alluding to the biblical authors being inspired by the Holy Spirit. Since God did not write the Bible, the question has continually occurred whether such human involvement renders the Bible less than infallible under human limitations of necessity. And, since men are prone to error in everything and not infallible themselves, would it not seem logical that this human flaw would also affect the pen, making anything written errant? The correct response would consider Adam, perhaps free from error before the fall, and Jesus Christ, who was both fully human and divine, yet he did not err. Error in this argument is not an unavoidable accompaniment of human nature.

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<sup>192</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 30.

Thus, denial of the necessity of error always and everywhere, even apart from inspiration, is the outcome.

Sacred Scripture has been given by the Holy Spirit's guardianship and keeping, and its authors, though mortal men have also been aided by divine inspiration. Therefore, Scripture is void of the directions and proclivities of human depravity to falsify or misapprehend truth. Though expressed in human language, God's eternal truth is never exhaustive and can deliver truth without fallacy. For illustration, Chicago is a city located in Illinois. If one communicated this fact, the information would not be exhaustive. Therefore, the possibility of any human being knowing the city's measure and complexities is null. Neither would they be known fully by the speaker. Thus, if God communicated the same fact about Chicago, the information would not be more or less true than a human's same message. The creature's nature limits human language, but the premise does not alter the truth. Without the use of human language, God would not be able to reveal anything about himself verbally to human beings.

Nonetheless, Genesis 1:26 states that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," which allows communication between God and man, built into creation by the Creator. Though "all men are liars" (Ps. 116:11), this does not mean that "all men lie all the time." The psalmist refers to people whom he had trusted devoid of loyalty. To him, no one was dependable, so, in his "alarm," he embellished the truth. Though guilty before God because of man's fallenness, divine inspiration and the involvement and preparation of the Holy Spirit concerning Scripture helps one to overcome the tendency toward immorality, misshaping, and error. Thus, the inferences of biblical integrity affected by human speech's adequacy or inadequacy and the skepticism made thereof are nonessential.

Article 5 recognizes the Bible's progressive revelation: "We affirm that God's revelation in the Holy Scriptures was progressive. We deny that later revelation, which may fulfill earlier revelation, ever corrects, or contradicts it. We further deny that any normative revelation has been given since the completion of the New Testament writings."<sup>193</sup>

God's revelation concerning himself gradually unfolds in the totality of Scripture, as sometimes hinted, and shadowy as in the case of the OT's earlier portions. However, the fullness of the NT is expanded throughout Scripture ultimately. These ideas are the essential meaning of progressive revelation being revealed broadly and deeply. The denial article clearly states that the progressiveness and expansion of God's word in no way contradicts the earlier giving of Scripture. Though earlier precepts relating to OT people, given at a particular period, are no longer so in the NT, it does not mean they were broken because of past evil or because God restored what he formally advocated. Instead, particular traditions have been replaced by newer ones consistent with the OT's fulfillment actions. In this way, the OT is relevant to the NT believer because it helps one understand NT revelation in light of the OT. Recognizing progressive revelation does not mean one can loosely interpret Scripture by setting one revelatory dimension against another. Progressive revelation does not pervert the Bible's consistency and uniformity.

Since the NT canon's close, the church has not been given any normative revelation. This statement is understood as part of the denial of Article 4. This assertion does not mean that God has stopped working through the Holy Spirit or that he does not lead the believer today, but "normative" must be understood in this article's denial. Using certain words theologically is understood differently within diverse Christian communities. One group may use the word

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<sup>193</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 32.

“revelation” or another “illumination.” So, meaning is critical here. The denial concerning the canon’s closure is that since the first century, no revelation has been given that “merits or warrants inclusion”<sup>194</sup> in the Holy Scripture’s canon. “Private leadings or guidance or “revelations,” as some may term them, may not be seen as having the force or authority of the Holy Scripture.”<sup>195</sup>

### **Criticism of Black Liberation Theology’s Doctrine of Revelation**

God’s divine revelation is Scripture. One reiterates Warfield’s statement as a viable starting point to examine BLT’s doctrine of revelation. “The trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine and is therefore fundamental to the Christian hope and life.”<sup>196</sup> Warfield’s words are foundational to interpreting 2 Timothy 3:16-17 as the basis of biblical authority and inspiration. Formally, one has examined Articles 3, 4, and 5 of the CSBI to support Holy Scripture. Now, the objective is to undercut Cone’s interpretation of biblical revelation.

Though answering unique contexts, Barth and then Cone are both prompted to write their distinct sociological and theological imperatives. Because he objects to the world war that is visible to him, Barth replies to liberal theology and dystopian opportunities by presenting God’s relationship to humanity which does not appear to know him. On the other hand, Cone is passionate about writing about God’s relationship with African American humanity because of

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<sup>194</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 33.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Warfield, “The Inspiration of the Bible,” 614-640.

racist Christianity's theology that supports racism and struggle. Both men challenge the Antichrist by creating their theologies. Perhaps this is Barth's influence on Cone.

Barth did not believe in general revelation or natural theology, the terminology, that he often used. Barth answered, "'Nein'; natural theology 'can only be becoming to the theology and church of Antichrist. Except in His Word, God is never for us in the world, that is to say in our space and time.' There is no road from science to faith."<sup>197</sup> Cone concluded that the White Church is the "antichrist" — "an enemy of Christ," that is equated loosely with biblical terminology, "the principalities and powers."<sup>198</sup> His use of the term is not too distinct from the Reformers, Calvin and Luther, and the Anabaptists,<sup>199</sup> though Cone's use is distinctly non-eschatological.

God's revelation is addressed by Cone in "Black Theology and Black Power." In his analysis, Cone describes Barth's doctrinal standpoint based upon Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard's infinite distinctive description of the differences between God and humanity.<sup>200</sup> Barth and Kierkegaard's doctrines are defined in Cone's dissertation "The Doctrine of Man in the Anthropology of Karl Barth." At this point, Cone's consideration of Black theological

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<sup>197</sup> Karl Barth, *Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner* (München, Kaiser, 1934), 63.

<sup>198</sup> J. W. Caldwell, "A starting Point for Understanding James Cone: A Primer for White Readers," *Review & Expositor*, 117(1) (2020): 25–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637320903046>.

<sup>199</sup> Luther directly equated the Pope with the antichrist; Anabaptists tended to equate human powers as guilty by association with Satan, who was the antichrist. In both cases they understood the antichrist to be the powers of evil that worked against Christ in this world, and their use, like Cone's, lacked the type of eschatological attempts to identify dates for the end times that are prevalent in popular contemporary identifications of the antichrist. Cf. Martin Luther, "Eighth Sermon at Wittenberg, 1522," in *Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 80, and George Blaurock, "An Excerpt from the Hutterite Chronicle, 1525," in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George Williams (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 42.

<sup>200</sup> "Kierkegaard does not use "revelation" in this way, but also refers to the rise of faith in an individual. There are such experiences as "religious awakening" (pp. 163 ff.), but these are not strictly revelations of God." See Joe R. Jones, "Some Remarks on Authority and Revelation in Kierkegaard", *The Journal of Religion* 57, no. 3 (1977): 232–51. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1201641>.



anthropology does not question Barth's doctrinal position. Both agree upon the emergence of Christ among sinners. However, Cone was determined to uniquely define his position by reshaping the meaning of man's sinful nature, considering God's revelation. Nevertheless, like Barth, he decides that without Jesus Christ at the center of humanity's theology, one cannot know God without God revealing *itself*<sup>201</sup> in Christ, "the Revelation, the special disclosure of God to man, revealing who God is and what his purpose for man is."<sup>202</sup>

God's revelation is radically distinct in Cone's Northwestern University dissertation. Neither does he support that human sin is absolute. As a result, God reveals himself in Christ, allowing humanity to partake in God's grace in preparation for His kingdom. "The man-man relationship is fulfilled and actual because of his God-man relationship. 'Real man' is primarily Jesus Christ and secondarily other men in their redeemed state. Second, "humanity" refers to the *form* and content of man, which is man-man or I-Thou in structure."<sup>203</sup> However, Cone emphasizes the purpose of God's revelation for humanity by allegorizing the NT in view of Jesus Christ and the oppressed:

According to the New Testament, Jesus is the man for others who views his existence as inextricably tied to other men to the degree that his own Person is inexplicable apart from others. The others, of course, refer to all men, especially the oppressed, the unwanted of society, the "sinners." He is God Himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing man from the ungodly principalities and powers that hinder his relationship from God.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Sekhmet Ra Em Kht Maat, "Looking Back at the Evolution of James Cone's Theological Anthropology," 5. Maat, a contemporary of Cone, refers to God as "itself," conceivably describing Williams R. Jones' human-centric theism, a theological position with philosophical biases. Cone's BLT focuses on the Bible as its basis for Christian theology. See John H. McClendon III, *Philosophy of Religion, and the African American Experience* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2017), especially Chapter 7 "William R. Jones and Philosophical Theology: Transgressing and Transforming Conventional Boundaries of Black Liberation Theology."

<sup>202</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 166.

<sup>203</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1*, 127.

<sup>204</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 35.

Cone's use of the NT to formulate a theology that overlooks the depravity of man stands at the pinnacle of undermining the gospel message. For Cone, BLT is the gospel of Jesus Christ, where the oppressed *black* man of America, its object, is the nation of Israel. The idea of universal sin is to be identified *only* with the white oppressors of blacks, the poor, and the captives (those without liberty or enslaved people). This idea is communicated with Cone's use of Luke 4:18-19 to support his black theology: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." This idea is only one example of where Israel (again, in this case, blacks), being delivered from slavery, is the mission of Jesus Christ, which, for Cone, is a reoccurring theme throughout the Bible.

According to Scripture, the gospel is given to a world under God's judgment. The wicked are not that because of the rejection of Jesus, but the sin of the fallen world. God cannot be pleased with evil— black, white, or otherwise. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18). God will not place his benediction upon injustice or unrighteousness of any sort. Both hiding and distorting the truth of God is a crime against him.

Though God is invisible, he makes himself known by the things he has made— even his eternal power and Godhead so that all are without excuse. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and

their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools...” (Rom. 1:19-22). Many of the world are banking on the excuse of ignorance to escape judgment (“I did not know!”). The judgment against man is that he does not honor God and denies the presence of indwelling sin. Can racism be viewed as sin? Certainly. Can an oppressor be viewed as a sinner, or the oppressed for that matter? Certainly. One’s condemnation is that one loves darkness instead of light because one’s deeds are evil. “And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (Jn. 3:19).

The reliance of Cone’s ideology of a sinless, or in the case of BLT, a liberated black man, is the priestly expectation of making one right before God based on color, social, economic, or political status instead of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Cone further defines what justifies one as an “enemy of Christ.” He works to equate Christ’s position as a suffering Jew as hermeneutically equivalent to the oppression of Black people. By way of this distinction, Cone is then able to identify Christ, and by extension Christ’s Church, as ontologically Black. If Christ is Black and His Church is Black, then the White Church’s racism identifies it as an “enemy of Christ.”<sup>205</sup>

The law reveals the righteous character of God. It is the standard by which God measures a man. “There is none good but God” (Matt. 19:17). “The law is holy, just, and good” (Rom. 7:12).

The two things, therefore, are to be distinctly observed--viz. that being thus perverted and corrupted in all the parts of our nature, we are, merely on account of such corruption, deservedly condemned by God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence, and purity. This is not liability for another’s fault. For when it is said that the sin of Adam has made us obnoxious to the justice of God, the meaning is not, that we, who are in ourselves innocent and blameless, are bearing his guilt, but that since by his transgression we are all placed under the curse, he is said to have brought us under obligation. Through him, however, not only has punishment been derived, but pollution instilled, for which punishment is justly due.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Caldwell, “A starting point for understanding James Cone: A primer for White readers,” 25-43.

<sup>206</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume II, I, VII, 96.

The scales of divine justice are not balanced upon good and evil in oneself, but only in the righteousness of God's Christ.

### **Black Liberation Theology's Reply**

In its formidable emphasis on the black man, Black theology has solid humanistic and pragmatic markers. It is barren of the proper biblical perspective of God and Christ. Scripture is not held as authoritative or inspirational except by its readers. Salvation emphasizes blackness with a worldly focus on social equality and justice. BLT's gospel claims are made up of ideological manipulation of Scripture to fit its narrative.

Most importantly, Jesus is misidentified. Therefore, Black Liberation theologians must ask themselves, who is Jesus? Their answer will determine if BLT is genuinely Christian in its claims. Basil Moore says, "It begins with people—specific people, in a specific situation, and with specific problems to face,"<sup>207</sup> resulting in the black experience as the basis of authority for its existence. "Blackness gives a point of reference, an identity, and a consciousness."<sup>208</sup> For Cone, if one is to be God's righteous, then one must be black.

While the gospel itself does not change, every generation is confronted with new problems, and the gospel must be brought to bear on them. Thus, the task of theology is to show what the changeless gospel means in each new situation. . . . The task of Black Theology, then, *is to analyze the black man's condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.*<sup>209</sup>

G. Clarke Chapman expresses Cone's belief that all theology is bipolar and that his position should be widely discussed. Accordingly, theology is an ongoing dynamic exchange between the

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<sup>207</sup> Moore, "What is Black Theology," 6.

<sup>208</sup> Barney Pityana, "What is Black Consciousness?" in M. Motlhabi, ed., *Essays on Black Theology*, (Johannesburg: University Christian Movement, 2017), 37-43.

<sup>209</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 3

message of God's self-revelation and the applicability of each current message. For American blacks, Christian faith must arise from and speak to their distinctive collective experience of oppression, both brutal and subtle.<sup>210</sup> "Black Theology is a theology of the black community and is thus opposed to any idea which alienates it from that community."<sup>211</sup>

Some scholars have misinterpreted Cone's agenda for communicating a black liberation theology, believing it to be ideological, not theological. From BLT's commencement, Cone's reasoning was straightforward and plain.<sup>212</sup> Though his theological presentation is ideological, he believed that the theologian's worldly experience governs the theological perspective implicitly and explicitly. Thus, for Cone, intellectual integrity identifies these effects unquestionably from the theological discourse's beginning.<sup>213</sup> All of Cone's theological writing has an informed and directed agenda. He stayed devoted to two parallel obligations throughout his theological corpus, though certain aspects may be restated, reengaged, or re-envisioned. First, Cone's fight to end white supremacy contained its manifestations in white society, the white church, and white theology. His second effort, uniquely for a black theology, was to create an apologetic defense of it. The latter obligation was an answer to "black nationalism, historians of black religion, the prevailing myth of a universal theology"<sup>214</sup>, and the development of an outline for a uniquely

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<sup>210</sup> G. Clark Chapman Jr., "American Theology in Black: James Cone," *Cross Currents* (Spring 1972): 141-157. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24457694>.

<sup>211</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 3.

<sup>212</sup> James Cone, "Black Theology and Ideology: A Response to my Respondents," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 31.1 (Fall 1975): 71-86.

<sup>213</sup> James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), xix.

<sup>214</sup> Universal theology is a theological perspective of religion based on relativism, but without holding religious absolutes. The focus is religious reconciliation where liberalism, freedom of individual interpretation, tolerance of diversity, and agreement on methods of approaching theological and church issues. see W. M. Pickard, "A Universal Theology of Religion?" *Missiology*, 19(2): 1991, 143-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969101900202>. See also, John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

“black” theology.”<sup>215</sup> White supremacy and the apologetic for BLT were addressed in “Black Theology and Black Power,” Cone’s 1969 publication, and in the posthumous “*Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian* in 2018. However, both of Cone’s agendas and assertions require further consideration.<sup>216</sup>

### **Revelation of God in the World: The Blackness of God**

The former premise that God is black has been articulated throughout one’s examination of BLT and its founder’s ideologies. Cone expressed, “a colorless Christianity is a joke—only found in the imaginary world of white theologians.”<sup>217</sup> At this stage, one’s examination explores what drives Cone’s premise of a black God opposite the biblical understanding. One has provided evidence that Cone wanted to communicate a Christian message whose origin was Scripture, but what is the support of Cone’s hermeneutic of God? One considers the following quotes by Cone. “There is no place in black theology for a colorless God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of their color.”<sup>218</sup> “Blackness whetted my appetite for learning how to do theology with a black signature on it and thereby make it accountable to poor black people.”<sup>219</sup> When confronted with such words, there is a root cause that may or may not be so obviously spoken.

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<sup>215</sup> Caldwell, “A starting Point for Understanding James Cone,” 25–43.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> James Cone, *Risks of faith: The Emergence of Black Theology of Liberation, 1968–1998* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999), xx.

<sup>218</sup> James Cone, “Black theology from a historical perspective,” *Bangalore Theological Forum*, 22 (1990): 1–25.

<sup>219</sup> Cone, *Risks of faith*, xxii.

The Black Nationalism of Malcolm X, which gave rise to the Black Power movement, contributed significantly to Cone's theology. Cone explains: "to understand white racism and black rage in America, I turned to Malcolm X and Black Power. Malcolm X did not enter my theological consciousness until I left seminary and was challenged by the rise of the black consciousness movement in the mid-1960s. Black Power, a child of Malcolm, forced me to take a critical look at Martin King and to discover his limits."<sup>220</sup> The significance of Black Consciousness gave Cone the weight to define the "hermeneutic of blackness" in BLT. Cone argues that blackness is "an ontological symbol for all people who participate in the liberation of [humanity] from oppression."<sup>221</sup> In "Black Liberation and Theology," Cone presents the concepts of "ontological and physiological blackness by attaching "blackness" to those who do not have black skin, but work for liberation."<sup>222</sup> His "physiological" characteristic of blackness is a physiological trait, indicating "a particular black-skinned people in America."<sup>223</sup> Malcolm X said, "Where the really sincere white people have got to do their 'proving' of themselves is not among the black victims, but out on the battle lines of where America's racism really is—and that's in their own home communities."<sup>224</sup>

The central power of the Black Consciousness Movement enabled Cone not only to consider the words of Malcolm X, but the realization of communicating his ideas, along with those of Martin Luther King, Jr., and others within the Civil Rights Movement. The result is

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<sup>220</sup> James Cone, "Martin, Malcolm, and Black Theology" in *Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*, eds. M. Volf, C. Krieg, and T. Kucharz (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 185-95.

<sup>221</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 32.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>224</sup> Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2015), 383.

frame bridging both men's ideas to form BLT's doctrinal stance of revelation. Thus, black consciousness' role impacted Cone's "blackness" theology. "Under Malcolm X, theology cannot achieve its Christian identity apart from a systematic and critical reflection upon the history and culture of the victims of oppression."<sup>225</sup> The rhetoric of Malcolm X is the indelible fingerprint of which to communicate BLT through the lens of black suffering and making it "able to speak relevantly to the black condition."<sup>226</sup>

Black Consciousness' influence on BLT initiated deeper conversations beyond black America's Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. For example, in 1984, BLT's impacts could be heard throughout South African Apartheid. Simon Maimela, a Black theologian, indicated that Black theology's ontological discussion is necessary and cannot be denied, given the symbolism of BLT.<sup>227</sup> He said:

When used ontologically, black refers literally to certain people and is specific and therefore particular. As such it is confined to black people and their concerns. When used symbolically the word refers to every human situation of enslavement, domination, and oppression and therefore to the situation of deprivation, powerlessness and of being the underdog who suffer injustice at the hands of the powerful and the ruling elite.<sup>228</sup>

The earliest significant representation of South African Black Consciousness was the 1968 founding of the South African Students Organization or SASO, one of many organizations

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<sup>225</sup> James Cone, "Black Theology From a Historical Perspective," *Bangalore Theological Forum*, 22 (1990): 1–25.

<sup>226</sup> James Cone, *The spiritual and The Blues* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 3.

<sup>227</sup> M. A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel, "Blackness as An Ontological Symbol: The Way Forward," *Review & Expositor*, 117(1) (2020): 101–113. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637320904718>

<sup>228</sup> Simon Maimela, "Black Power and Black Theology in Southern Africa," *Scriptura* 12 (1984): 49–50; Maimela, "Current Themes and Emphases in the Black Theology of Liberation, in *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology from South Africa*," ed. Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986), 101–12; Maimela, "An Anthropological Heresy: A Critique of White Theology," in *Apartheid is a Heresy*, ed. John W. De Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1983), 48–58.



forming the Black Conscious Movement.<sup>229</sup> In the August 1976 edition of “Black Sash Magazine,” Black Consciousness was defined by SASO:

- Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind, a way of life.
- The basic tenet of Black Consciousness is that the black man must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity. The black man must build up his own value systems and see himself as self-defined and not defined by others.
- The concept of Black Consciousness implies awareness by black people of the power they wield as a group, both economically and politically and hence group cohesion and solidarity are important facets of Black Consciousness.
- Black Consciousness will always be enhanced by the totality of involvement of the oppressed people; hence, the message of Black Consciousness has to be spread to reach all sections of the black community.<sup>230</sup>

### **Revelation of God in Christ: Earthly Liberation of the Oppressed**

Rather than a race category, the nature of blackness became a political concern misconceived by its status-based detractors. Cone writes, “For me, the burning theological question was, how can I reconcile Christianity and Black Power, Martin Luther King Jr.’s idea of nonviolence, and Malcolm X’s “by any means necessary” philosophy? The writing of *Black Theology and Black Power* was the beginning of my search for a resolution of that dilemma.”<sup>231</sup> “The liberation theme relates black power to the Christian gospel and renders as untruth the un verbalized white assumptions that Christ is white, or that being Christian means that black people ought to turn

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<sup>229</sup> P. C. Kenworthy, “Bikoism or Mbekism: The Role of Black Consciousness in Mbeki’s South Africa” (Master’s thesis, International Development Studies and Kirsten Holst Petersen, English Roskilde University, Trekroner, 2007).

<sup>230</sup> Kelebogile T. Resane, “Black Consciousness, Black Nationalism and Black Theology: Is There a Possibility for Theology of Dialogue?”, *HTS Theological Studies*, 77(3) (2021): 1- 9. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i3.6418>

<sup>231</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, viii.

the other cheek—as if we blacks have no moral right to defend ourselves from the encroachments of white people.”<sup>232</sup>

God’s self-disclosure, according to BLT, is centered on one’s understanding involving blackness, which is inherently dangerous, and formed socially. For illustration, Jesus, a black man, is the emancipator of the oppressed. The White church, then, must embody the liberating message of the biblical prophets and Jesus Christ and God’s categorical demands for Christians to practice justice, do what is right, and hate oppression. Thus, the community is black, and the American conscience must be wakened to the powers and systems that oppress and dehumanize Black people and alienate other marginalized groups.<sup>233</sup> According to J. Deotis Roberts, Black is “a symbol of self-affirmation.”<sup>234</sup>

For American blacks, Christian faith must arise from and speak to their distinctive collective experience of oppression, both brutal and subtle. Black Theology is a theology of the black community and is thus opposed to any idea which alienates it from that community.<sup>235</sup>

The traditional meaning or notion of “black” implicated by both Roberts and Cone must be refused. Martin Luther King, Jr. emphatically rejected this idea in the 1960s when he said that one should “not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character”<sup>236</sup> — words that should be considered in the debate undercutting the hermeneutic of BLT.

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<sup>232</sup> James Cone, “Black theology on Revolution, Violence, and Reconciliation,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 31 (1975): 8.

<sup>233</sup> M. Pugh, “Malcolm X and the Philosophical Theology of James H. Cone,” *J Afr Am St* 24 (2020): 434–455. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-020-09485-4> Pugh, M. Malcolm X and the Philosophical Theology of James H. Cone. *J Afr Am St* 24, 434–455 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-020-09485-40-09485-4>

<sup>234</sup> J. Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1974), 21.

<sup>235</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 130.

<sup>236</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” speech by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at the march on Washington, 1963, <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>.

Cone's theology of the community, let alone the oppressed, is against the biblical definition, which contains "all" who are part of the church, Christ's body. "So, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28). "The unfortunate errors of nascent black theology were rooted in the assumption that experiences should be the primary source of truth."<sup>237</sup> Cones doctrinal stance of blackness is the antithesis of integrity "pivotal and indispensable to the historic Christian faith."<sup>238</sup> He argues:

Firstly, in a revolutionary situation there can never be nonpartisan theology. Theology is always identified with a particular community. It is either identified with those who inflict oppression or with those who are its victims. A theology of the latter is authentic Christian theology, and atheology of the former is a theology of the Antichrist. Insofar as black theology is a theology arising from an identification with the oppressed black community and seeks to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of the liberation of that community, it is Christian theology. American white theology is a theology of the Antichrist insofar as it arises from an identification with the white community, thereby placing God's approval on white oppression of black existence.<sup>239</sup>

Though Paul communicates a church undivided because Christ is its Head, BLT, through Cone's use of Galatians 3 to articulate a radical divide seen through the lens of race and experience, is antithetical and undermines the central role Scripture should play in the lives of Christians. The idea that Christianity is presently not authentic for blacks or that Christianity needs to be altered

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<sup>237</sup>Anthony J. Carter, *On Being Black and Reformed: A New Perspective on the African American Experience* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P and R Publishing, 2003), 14.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>239</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 6.

to fit the black community is founded on the erroneous belief that Christianity is fundamentally an issue of human institutions, politics, race, and social causes.<sup>240</sup>

The underlying problem of Cone's theology of blackness is sin. Until one rids oneself of one's depravity, differences, whether black or white, for that matter, will undermine God's authority. The truth remains— only Jesus Christ alone can change a sinful heart. "Proverbs 18:1 describes the person who disconnects himself from the community to live in a self-contained universe. Community involves being interested in others, but the self-centered person sees no utilitarian need for such involvement."<sup>241</sup> BLT's doctrinal position sees the community as one that is black and separated from what it calls "whiteness."

### **Epistemology: Theology Conditioned by Social Position**

In God's economy, justice has nothing to do with outcome. Equality seeks truth, regardless of outcome. On the other hand, equity emphasizes outcome without regard for the truth. In the postmodern church, these two ideas are conflated. Biblically, they are different— equity in application versus equal outcomes. These terms are transposed in today's culture and seek equal outcome for everyone regardless of their qualifications. BLT's idea of Christianity seeks to get rid of the traditional pessimistic view of man's nature in pursuit of a perfect man. The church "can build a new society to create a new man freed from greed, competitive hatred, and ready to realize his full potential in humble cooperation with other men in a just socialist society."<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> La Shawn Barber, "What's Wrong with Black Theology?", *Christian Research Institute*, Article ID: JAV332, November (2013): <https://www.equip.org/articles/whats-wrong-with-black-theology/>.

<sup>241</sup> Paul Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic), 82.

<sup>242</sup> Lori Latrice Martin, ed., *Introduction to African Demography: Lessons from Founders E. Franklin Frazier, W. E. B. Du Bois, and the Atlanta School of Sociology* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2021), 187-88.

Weldon McWilliams supposes “three evils” identified by Martin Luther King, Jr. that are still prevalent in American society: racism, militarism, and poverty. Williams provided statistics of a poverty rate reported in 2017 as 12.3%, with no change from the previous year. Accordingly, about 39.7 million people were affected. Based on these statistics, Williams suggested the need for new methods and strategies to address the social issues of black folk. He emphasized that most research today does not seek out a Black epistemology and does not consider the stark contrast between the American black and white experience, suggesting social and economic inequality. In other words, black people need to be heard and the primary sources to solve problems that impact black people differently and disproportionately are black folk and black institutions.<sup>243</sup>

Realizing that white racism is an insanity comparable to Nazism, black theology seeks to articulate a theological ethos consistent with the black revolutionary struggle. Blacks know that there is only one possible authentic existence in this society, and that is to force a radical revolutionary confrontation with the structures of white power saying yes to the essence of their blackness. The role of black theology is to tell blacks to focus on their own self-determination as a community by preparing to do anything the community believes necessary for its existence.<sup>244</sup>

By arguing in the spirit of Malcolm X, Cone declared that American society could no longer restrict, limit, or hinder social progress for blacks. Black theology demands that blacks pursue a vision and methods for socio-political advancement. Black theologian William R. Jones, who relates his earlier preaching experiences as “‘Whiteanity,’ preached, ‘the harder the cross, the brighter the crown.’”<sup>245</sup> Jones, however, retracted his traditional view of God’s benevolence and

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<sup>243</sup> James Ngugi, cited in Pityana, “What Is Black Consciousness?”, 63.

<sup>244</sup> Cone, “Black Theology from a Historical Perspective,” 15.

<sup>245</sup> William R. Jones, *Is God A White Racist?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), 7.

now advocates humanocentric theism and “secular” humanism instead. “The essential feature of both is the advocacy of the functional ultimacy of man. Man must act as if he were the ultimate valuator, agent in human history, or both. Thus, God’s responsibility for the crimes and errors of human history is reduced if not effectively eliminated.”<sup>246</sup>

Any belief that God should bear the responsibility for the crimes and errors of humans is an insult to his *aseity*. Believing that man can solve the world’s problems, whether racist, economic, political, or otherwise, suppose that God shares his independence with man. “Man is not the measure of all things, the crucified and risen Lord is.”<sup>247</sup> When it comes to truth and salvation, the priority of orthopraxis over orthodoxy is realized in “doers of the truth,” and not by the means of “blackness.”

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<sup>246</sup> Jones, *Is God A White Racist?*, 28.

<sup>247</sup> Martin H. Scharlemann, *The Ethics of Revolution* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 41.

## CHAPTER FIVE—The Word of God and Inspiration

### 2 Peter 1:20-21

The nature of Scripture’s inspiration is the Pauline proclamation of “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16), therefore, God is the Author. “It is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” Peter’s exposition (1:19-21), on the other hand, is the method of God’s “prophetic word made surer”— that being the prophets, “men moved by the Holy Spirit” (1:20). Therefore, “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation.”

The “word of the prophets made surer” refers to the OT Scriptures as a whole. Perhaps this reference considers the canonical awareness of Peter. One should pay attention to the reference of the word of God “as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,” indicated in Psalm 119:105 and other Jewish literature (e.g., Wis. 18:4). Certainly, as Jesus is referred to “the bright and morning star” in Revelation 22:16, Peter’s consideration is likely not the signaling of the eschatological age, but at the “dawn,” referring to the Parousia, where one will no longer need the mediating revelation of the Scriptures, for Christ has risen in one’s heart.<sup>248</sup> Pointedly, Jesus Christ was referred to as “the Word of God” before the canonization of Scripture (Jn. 1:1-3, 14; 14:10; 17:8; 1 Cor. 8:6; Phil. 2:9-11).

Peter’s overall message is for believers “to know” Christ better because of the threat of false teaching that may cut off their growth (2 Pet. 3:18). Without hesitation, one also references the call for the reader’s attention to an integrating and practical theological point permeating Peter’s First Epistle— that of divine providence working as a “theology of history,” testifying

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<sup>248</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1048.

the truth of the divine initiative and guarantying the evidence of the believer's hope. At this juncture, one examines this significant theological point in detail.

In theology's history, providence is a far-reaching theme of the doctrine of God. In 1 Peter, providence constitutes God's redemptive acts and purposes while serving as an extension of the epistle's eschatological emphasis. "This two-fold emphasis of providence and eschatology allows the writer to move back and forth from theology (election-redemption) to praxis (good works), to hope and expectation."<sup>249</sup> When combined with eschatology, providence in 1 Peter is not a philosophical worldview but rather the believer's understanding and experience of faith. God's sustaining initiative raises 1 Peter's theological and moral declarations by serving to describe God's nature in Jesus Christ as the One who elects, and the One who sustains the elected. God's motives are his divine will. For the elect, life is made possible under the most trying conditions because its potentiality is the exhibition of hope in God's divine initiative. His elective purposes set up the eschatological hope, which is human destiny's end. "Thus, also Peter, in saying that the believers to whom he writes are elect "according to the foreknowledge of God," (1 Peter 1:2), properly expresses that secret predestination by which God has sealed those whom he has been pleased to adopt as sons."<sup>250</sup>

From its Hebraic position, 1 Peter is cautious about certifying the most historical character of the divine revelation. While its theocentricity reveals God's supremacy, his relationship with man reveals his fullness. People need salvation and hope. This need is visible to those who suffer in faith while finding comfort and support in the merciful Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Though sovereign, the Creator-Redeemer is closely associated with his people while

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<sup>249</sup> William David Kirkpatrick. "The Theology of First Peter," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* Vol. 25, (Fall 1982).

<sup>250</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume III, Ch. XXII, 332.



grounding them in faith as an acknowledgment of God’s historical revelation. As the Spirit of God is “the generating power of biological life, so is he the source and generating power of the spiritual life. His work in redemption mirrors his work in creation.”<sup>251</sup> The apostle’s theology has determined his theological formulation from living in the world oppressed by sin.

1 Peter 1:18 reveals the type of redemption that the readers of his epistle have experienced in the gospel: “For you know that it was not with imperishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers”— an OT reference now develops: “but with the precious blood of the Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” The redemptive language referenced here is rooted in Greco-Roman culture for the freedom of slaves.<sup>252</sup> The price of a slave could be deposited in a temple of a local god or goddess, with money, minus commission, paid out of the temple’s treasury to the owner of the slave. The result of the ownership being now dissolved by the god of the temple, the former slave is now free from his master’s obligation and ownership, but now belonging to the god or goddess instead— meaning that the slave is now free. The purchase price was referred to as *timi* (“price”). This could also take place in Jewish culture as well (Ps.43:22; 33:23 LXX). 1 Peter 2:3 quotes this idea alluding to the redemption of slaves at great length: “The Lord will redeem the lives of his slaves; none who hope in him will go astray” (LXX). Redemption also alludes to God delivering his people from the plight of their enemies or foreign domination— whether from exile or enslavement from Egypt (Deut. 7:8; Isa. 52:3). The language that Peter

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<sup>251</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier, 2018), 75.

<sup>252</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1018-19.

applies in reference to Christians is how God redeems them from their own captivity— free, but now slaves to God (*doulos*).<sup>253</sup>

The second observance of redemption is the rescue of God’s people from captivity or their former way of living. Peter gathers this same idea and applies the language to Christian converts to whom he is addressing: “You have been redeemed out of the useless (*mataios*) way of life (*patroparadotos*) you inherited from your ancestors” (1:18). Peter’s negative reference employed in this verse is a reference to the pre-Christian life existence. Perhaps, Peter’s negative reference is used only by him in comparison to others who would propose that the ancestral way of life usually has positive associations. A more profound suggestion would be that Peter may be referring to Gentiles since the adjective *mataios* is often used in the LXX to describe pagan idols (1 Kings:2; Jon. 2:9; Isa. 44:9). Its use appears in Ecclesiastes (nearly 40 times), as well as in Romans 8:20. In addition, some scholars suggest that Peter would not have applied such language to describe the Jewish life before one’s conversion to Christianity. In observation, it would be ill-advised to conclude too much about Peter’s readers.

So how are Christians redeemed? Certainly, not with *timi* (“price”) such as silver and gold, but instead with the *timios* (“precious”) blood of Jesus Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. A myriad of OT texts can be referenced in this juncture, but redemption by the blood of a lamb is rooted in the Torah’s books of Exodus and Leviticus, the New Testament’s book of Isaiah, and the Kethuvim’s book of Psalms— all books quoted by Peter. Speaking of Jewish ancestry and their old way of life or even the Gentiles’ doomed location would suggest, based on Peter’s theology, nothing from their past can redeem them. Not the sacrificial killing of animals—

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<sup>253</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1018-19.

neither the purchase with silver or gold— but only God’s powerful act in redemptive history— the precious blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ (1:20-21; 1 Cor. 7:23; Heb. 9:12).<sup>254</sup>

The language of 1 Peter is theological. It is both practical and relational. However, it is liturgical in some moments, but not abstract. The epistle is grounded historically with the understanding of God's revelation. It does not appeal to any system of abstract ideas.

Theologically, the language is practical in its concern for Christian living. Relationally, it reveals the redemptive intentions of God’s plan for man. The eschatological-redemptive language describes God’s nature. Although possessing the supreme sovereignty, he participated in creation compassionately by providing salvation to those who believed. 1 Peter 1:18-20 is the Old Testament’s fulfillment of the God who is sovereign and holy, but also the God who rescues and redeems his people. In view of his redemptive work, the clarion of the writer’s theology is God’s business in the redemption of those whom he has called in faith (1:20). This “faith and hope” is that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead (1:20-21). “I will raise up a faithful priest, and he shall walk before mine anointed forever.” (1 Sam. 2:10, 35). Kingship in this context is a future expectation (Deut.17:14-20).<sup>255</sup> “And there can be no doubt that our heavenly Father intended that a living image of Christ should be seen in David and his posterity.”<sup>256</sup>

One’s analysis of both of Peter’s epistles’ use of OT and NT illustrations to encourage Christians under the threat of violent persecution and the warning of the danger of false teachers provide the Christian’s fortitude to hold fast to their trust that Christ will return to judge the

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<sup>254</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1018-19.

<sup>255</sup> John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 284.

<sup>256</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume II, VI, 127.

world. They must remain faithful though persecution is evident. Its effect, however, does not diminish God’s requirement of perseverance. Refuting this idea are unbelievers mocking this message, many of whom have been hoodwinked by their appetite for the pleasures of the present world and those false teachers whose message is full of duplicity. Thus, to counteract these false teachers, the theological ground to rest upon for expository preaching is the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture— “Preach the word” (κήρυξον τὸν λόγον), 2 Timothy 4:2. “The context makes it clear that ‘the word’ here is Scripture— and particularly its message of ‘salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ (3:15).”<sup>257</sup> So, Timothy, like his predecessors, is to make an authoritative proclamation of God’s word.

At the conclusion of 2 Timothy 3, Paul emphasized to Timothy the Scripture’s sufficiency (3:16-17), so that unlike the false teachers of his day, Timothy will remain loyal to Scripture’s all-sufficient foundation for his ministry’s longevity, as well as the charge (4:1-2) in how to use this sufficient Scripture. “If apostles were viewed as the mouthpiece of Christ, and it was believed that they wrote down the apostolic message in books, then those books would be received as the word of Christ himself.”<sup>258</sup> David Allen notes that the New Testament authors quoting the Old Testament use “God” and “Scripture” as interchangeable subjects via metonymy.<sup>259</sup>

The delivery of Scripture during church history was expository, beginning before the advent with Jewish preaching, continued by the apostles, and the church fathers of the patristic

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<sup>257</sup> Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblical-Theological Study*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 55.

<sup>258</sup> Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict: Life-Changing Truth for a Skeptical World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 27.

<sup>259</sup> Daniel Akin, David Allen, and Ned Matthews, *Text-Driven Preaching* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 4.

era (Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, others). Though the Middle Ages saw a reduction in the practice, with the exception of Clairvaux, a recovery of expository preaching began with Erasmus' New Testament, and the Bible-centered preaching of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli.<sup>260</sup>

“The biblical and theological foundation for all preaching is the fact that God has revealed Himself,”<sup>261</sup> as revealed in Hebrews 1:1: “God, having spoken in times past to the fathers by prophets in many portions and in many ways, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son.”

“Text-driven preaching that is faithful to Scripture not only will expound the text but also will, of biblical and theological necessity, apply the text.”<sup>262</sup>

### **Scripture as Literature: The Gospels**

God's Word is altogether distinct from any other literary composition in its divine authorship, inerrancy, and its ability to change our hearts. It is significant that God has decided to speak with His people through the written word, a means of literature. As literature, the Gospels represent a mixture of different genres. On the one hand, they purport to present the circumstances of Jesus' birth, ministry, and death. On the other hand, they express the conviction that Jesus from Nazareth is the divine Savior.<sup>263</sup> Reading mandates a baseline familiarity of what writings are and why they were composed. However, when one speaks regarding acknowledging the Bible as literature, that may raise questions for some. Is not the Bible adequate and unambiguous? Is not God's Word authoritative? Does not the Holy Spirit aid one in

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<sup>260</sup> Akin, Allen, and Matthews, *Text-Driven Preaching*, 4.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>263</sup> M. Hietanen, “The Gospel of Matthew as a Literary Argument.” *Argumentation* 25, 63–86 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-010-9198-z>

understanding what one reads? The answer is an absolute yes! These questions are a few that one may ask in the light of considering the Bible being literature.

Considering the Gospels in light of literature requires an understanding of what distinguishes them from the whole of Scripture. In distinction, “the Gospels are theological, historical, and aretological biographical narratives that retell the story and proclaim the significance of Jesus Christ, who through the power of the Spirit is the Restorer of God’s reign, [whereas] one is called to believe, trust and follow Christ.”<sup>264</sup> God’s Word is literature, but it is also alive and active, revealing our hearts and directing how one lives. “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God’s word is read through the lens of genre, context, and intent and its interpretation should bring honor to him alone. The Gospels are not just information but transformational when communicated as the Spirit dictates.

While reading the Gospels in light of different vantage points from a historical theme or various critical theories is most helpful but receiving them as stories and theologically rich application narratives is ideal and provides a rather easy way to articulate each writer’s perspective. An example is Luke 7:1-10 where applying a narrative-analysis tool reveals Jesus’ compassion and power in regard to the centurion bold faith and believe in him as able to heal his servant. Having the right framework can be helpful when one contemplates how to read, interpret, and apply difficult passages in Scripture. Approaching the Bible as a book—albeit a holy book and a book breathed out by the God we follow—written by the hands of faithful men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will result in him being glorified by the humility of the

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<sup>264</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 213.

reader. Again, one reiterates that “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation” (2 Pet. 1:20). Thus, those who read Scripture must trust the text— the Author of it, and its mediator Jesus Christ.

Christological heresies are not new to the church. The sects of the Gnostics and Marcionites were a product of the early church. For centuries, men have proposed different views on the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To support this fact, 1 John 2:18 warns against denying the Son. One must remain faithful to the message heard because many antichrists seek to deceive them. In 2:19, “they went out from us, but they did not really belong to us” is the actuality of secession resulting from heresy, and that “they” had never really been true members of the Christian church. “The context shows that John is trying to repel the influence of the false teachers who, John avers, are trying to lead you astray” (2:26). The assumption seems to be that these teachers claim a certain inside knowledge (*gnosis*?) that they wish to impress on the believers.”<sup>265</sup>

Nevertheless, upon evaluating the texts in First John by historical analysis and theological distinctions of each heretical group, one of the two emerges as the likely group described in the apostle’s epistle. Based on the evidence, the hermeneutics of Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others provide the council needed to support the inerrancy of the holy Scriptures. Did these teachings originate in or outside of the church? F. L. Cross and Elizabeth Livingstone indicate, “Some think it originated within the church, as an erratic expansion of Christian teaching (as the Fathers thought). Others claim that the movement had already begun before the

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<sup>265</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on The New Testament*, 1065.

Christian period, but there is no Gnostic document which in its present form pre-dates the New Testament.”<sup>266</sup>

### **Inspiration**

More so than at any time in its history, the church is at its most critical regarding the Scripture’s inspiration, particularly where the social movements’ use of it becomes the lens of interpretation. This action was not done in a corner because the warning signs were posted along the corridors of church history. Expounding from this idea, one would begin by examining the practice of the exclusion of faith and how it affects Scriptural interpretation.

Devoid of any emotion, the interpretation exercise seems futile at best. The point is not just to have knowledge but to put that knowledge to good use. Thus, it seems what has occurred over time in attempting to get at the text’s true meaning is “the exclusion of faith from biblical interpretation,” where the divine Author’s marginalization and the Christian faith’s deadening result.<sup>267</sup> Understated is the attempt of preaching without a “license” and the “power” that makes Scripture solely belonging to God—that being Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17, and is given by the inspiration of God, θεόπνευστος).

The theology of the church needs recovery in the modern era. Much of its basic tenets have been lost— one of these being the sufficiency of Scripture. The world views the Bible from the implications of a prohibition against one’s will. This original idea resulted in the fall of man and continues today based on the premise that truth is socially constructed. Any other suggestion

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<sup>266</sup> F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 687.

<sup>267</sup>Keith Stanglin. *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From Early Church to Modern Practice*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 202.



is an infringement upon one's will. Similarly, Scripture is deemed unfair, prejudicial, misogynistic, and homophobic, and invades the right of one to choose the way one desires to live freely.

Before one contemplates preaching God's word, one must learn God's word in a reverential respect. This task begins in one's direction to reading and apprehending the Bible independently. One must understand where significance is encountered in Scripture and diligently comprehend the author's intent. Once one grasps the significance, one must surrender himself entirely. This lesson becomes the rhythm of one's life—seeking with all his mind to understand Scripture and then placing himself under the full weight of its authority and bending his life into surrender to Christ. In this frame, D. A. Carson's words add weight to this perception. "Words are powerful things. It is easy to imagine that words are empty, and action is all that counts. But the reality is that in speaking we are acting. God not only created the good world by his word; he also brings healing to a broken world through his word."<sup>268</sup> Gospel preaching should be Christ-centered as its focus to bring Jesus as the solution in every way to man's brokenness.<sup>269</sup>

One who forges these habits in one's time alone with the Lord may be invited to shepherd others. And then one's knowledge of Scripture evolves all the more important, as one's careful handling of the Scriptures will be the only criterion of hermeneutics or rules of interpretation one's audience may ever obtain. One must learn to convey the intent of the Gospel authors in such a way that one brings it to bear upon the lives of one's listeners, applying it to them personally, in such a way that not only do their hearts long for Christ but one's as well. And most

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<sup>268</sup> Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament*, 10-11.

<sup>269</sup> Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 221.

significantly, one must present the Word of God in such a way that one need not be ashamed.

This is a complicated and lengthy journey in submission to God's will and requires humbleness in all cases. With this challenge, a critical point is to be made concerning preaching the Gospels effectively in this hour.

The commitment to *Sola Scriptura* leads to a commitment to hermeneutics—to how one studies the Gospels and the totality of Scripture for that matter. Hermeneutics matters because it determines whether one, in practice, holds to *Sola Scriptura*. Each approach to an open Bible should be one's commitment to say only what Scripture says, to work hard to know all it says, and not to have excuses that would undermine any of its implications. *Sola Scriptura* leads to a hermeneutic of absolute surrender so that what one has in the end is the Scripture, and nothing but the Scripture. People will not only hear one declare *Sola Scriptura*, but they will see it etched into one's life.

### **Verbal Plenary Inspiration**

The apostle Paul's premise that "all Scripture" is inspirational means that God's word is entirely trustworthy and is God's divinely chosen words. The implication is referred to as "plenary" inspiration, meaning that holy Scripture is "full" or "complete." Significantly, every word of Scripture is vital without emphasis on particular bits that may seem more important than others. The words of Jesus highlighted in red-letter Bibles may seem more authoritative than other words surrounding them, but all the words of Scripture are God-breathed. Thus, all Scripture has the authority of God and his Christ.

One need not believe that God hijacked the minds of the inspired biblical writers. Neither should it be implied that God gave general concepts or guidelines to these men, but instead, God's inspiration extends to the words they distinctively selected. The biblical authors'

varying personalities and writing styles are evident in Scripture, and the idea of mechanical dictation of any sort is rejected.

The importance of God's words provides man with the essence and will of the Creator. When one reads Scripture, one can be sure that what one is reading was breathed out by God. Not just in general but right down to the specifics. The principle of verbal inspiration is evident in Paul's Galatian's argument: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed, meaning one person, who is Christ" (3:16). "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him" (1 Jn. 5:1). Therefore, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jn. 5:20).

### **The Inspiration of Man and Idolatry**

Antithetically, Cone does not hold to the authority, nor the inspiration of Scripture. The Gospel is not an abstract idea or spiritual truth that applies to all people indiscriminately. As such, BLT's retooling of the gospel purports an idolatrous perversion of Scripture. Man becomes what he worships. Because Israel, defined as black and American, is Cone's deduction and interpretation of the OT and NT, the God of the Bible, or in this case BLT's god, is reduced to an individual of color that caters to people or groups who are black and oppressed. Cone's idea is that God is never color-blind:

[Secondly], in a racist society, God is never color-blind. To say God is color-blind is analogous to saying that God is blind to justice and injustice, to right and wrong, to good and evil. Certainly, this is not the picture of God revealed in the Old and New Testaments. Yahweh takes sides. On the one hand, Yahweh sides with Israel against the Canaanites in the occupancy of Palestine. On the other hand, Yahweh sides with the poor within the community of Israel against the rich and other political oppressors. The God of the biblical tradition is not uninvolved or neutral regarding human affairs; God is decidedly involved. God is active in human history, taking sides with the oppressed of the land.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 6.

Understanding the nature of idolatry is critical to grasp what happens to those who make, then commit themselves to love and worship their idols. Today, it is acceptable to handle idolatry as a relic from the ancient past, as many modern evangelicals do. Who today worships golden calves or Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue? Perhaps no one but idolatry is alive and well. As the psalmist so eloquently stated, "Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them" (Ps. 115:8).

Cone's attempt at making God's Word to be something that is humanly defined creates a false Christ at the expense of black liberation. Man, not God, determines his destiny. By conquering his liberty throughout his existence and history, man is transformed. Rather than the authority and inspiration of Scripture as God's setting the standards for men to live by, the authority of black theology is its anthropocentric base—the black experience of oppression. Thus, the black man becomes an idol of himself as the "ultimate reality," and the higher "Ultimate Reality" (God) must relate to the "very essence of blackness."<sup>271</sup> Therefore, BLT's adversative hermeneutic has created another god.

Christian concepts of God taught to the black man are to be discarded or at least ignored. The arguments about the person of God, the Trinity, His supreme power and authority, as well as subtle indications of God's white maleness, do not relate to (and in some cases are antagonistic to) the black experience. For example, the image of God as all-knowing and all-powerful is too familiar for comfort from a background of slavery. This kind of God is too similar to the white oppressor. Concepts such as "God is love" or "God is freedom" have more meaning for and are more acceptable to the oppressed.<sup>272</sup>

Pagan gods and idols, according to the authors of Scripture, are, in fact, "not-gods" compared with the only true and living God, Yahweh (Isa. 40–55). Idols exist only as human constructs

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<sup>271</sup> Cone, *Theology and Black Power*, 33.

<sup>272</sup> Sabelo Ntwasa and Basil Moore, "The Concept of God in Black Theology," *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, 18–28.

that individuals impute power and authority. However, these other “gods” unquestionably impact the personal, social, economic, and political aspects of the whole world, and sadly, the church. Ralph Venning makes an interesting point in his reference to idolatry as “man’s folly” in a panorama of Isaiah 44:14-16. “To worship no God, or that which is not a God— but an idol, is folly. Man is such a fool that he neglects to serve the God who made him and serves gods of his own making— they are not as their name is— but merely man-made gods.”<sup>273</sup>

Given Psalm 115:5-7, Jewish writers were familiar with its implications. However, in Philo’s suggestion, there is a blatant abuse of its words by humanity, and the Jewish philosopher urged that idolaters metamorphose into images as those they worship, though he believed they should despise such thoughts of self-exhortation and abhor the notion of taking after them. Philo’s belief indicates the profound impious breadth of depraved worship, but at the same time, he may demonstrate psychologically the truth that knowingly idolaters do not desire to mirror what they adore but consequently evolve in punishment for their blatant refusal to stop idol worship.<sup>274</sup>

Philo further discloses that idol makers produce idols that seize their prey by seductive and delusional means by unsettling the soul and making it their prey.<sup>275</sup> By worshipping inanimate images, one will become inanimate as well. The ensuing punishment is resultant for those worshipping lifeless images, but also holds captive those who idolize gold, silver— money lovers who treasure their hoard like a divine image believing it to be a source of blessings and happiness. Paul’s similar view in Ephesians 5:5, “For you may be sure of this, that everyone who

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<sup>273</sup> Venning, *The Plague of Plagues*, 38.

<sup>274</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 142.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. See also, David Lincicum, “Philo on Phinehas and the Levites: Observing an Exegetical Connection.” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21, no. 1 (2011): 43–49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26424413>.

is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God,” echoes this idea as well as a similar reference to the Minor Tractates of the Talmud, *Derek 'Erez Rabbah* 57: “Every man in whom there is haughtiness of Spirit is as though he worships idols.”<sup>276</sup>

Idolatry’s relationship with the church should be no surprise considering the Old Testament’s many warnings against its participants. Even the New Testament church had its problems to “hear what the Spirit says.” This reference to the hearing formula’s function in urging Christians not to compromise receiving their salvific reward is key to understanding the theme of the entire book of Revelation, whose biblical-theological background of its hearing formula is framed in the Synoptics and Old Testament having symbolic and parabolic revelation connections.<sup>277</sup> For the Old Testament, the prophets’ effect on the Israelites, the primary function was to warn them of imminent destruction and divine judgment for their idolatry. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel provoked their audiences concerning their sins, reminding them of God's judgment upon their fathers for selfish disobedience. However, these prophetic messages proved little success for Israel’s idolatrous allegiances and consequent spiritual lethargy. This observation is synonymous with Isaiah 6:9-10 and 42:20.

The hearing formula in Jesus’ hands is in line with the Old Testament. His use of the phrase “the one having ears, let him hear” and other variations referenced in Matthew 13:9-13, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8, are all directly related to Isaiah. 6:9-10, where they function to “enlighten the genuine remnant, but blind those who, they confess outwardly to be part of the

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<sup>276</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, 143.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

covenant community, are really unbelievers and idolatrous” (Mt. 7:15-23, 11:15; Lk. 14:35).<sup>278</sup>

This formula addresses the church, a continuation of the true covenant community from the Old Testament. In their compromise, spiritual lethargy, the church has become like Israel and contemplated allegiances. Now, in the book of Revelation, the institution of the parabolic method is in play. The book’s parables are the means of warning the idolatrous suspects of God’s impending wrath for their crimes. Most of whom John address are unbelievers, a majority of the unfaithful and conceding in the covenant community.

John’s case against the Christians of Thyatira is their blindness to the harlot, Jezebel. The church elder’s obvious attraction with the woman made allowance for her teaching in the church. Though the weight of her actions is not realized, neither rebuked, John’s goal is to shock them into understanding the dire consequences awaiting them for their indiscretions— “they will eat her flesh” (Rev.17:16). The outtake of John’s message is “you will be destroyed.” John’s *Jezebel* illustrations hold true in the post-modern church of today. The pictures are numerous, to say the least, especially in Western culture where the church has become synonymous with entertainment, prosperity, and the place of self-aggrandizement.

At a 2009 Ligonier conference theologian Derek Thomas said, “the church is a poor cousin of Hollywood.”<sup>279</sup> These words resonate with ideas of the church’s idolatry taking flight with more than selfish ambition, but now the concept of entertaining the masses without addressing sin. All too often, the guilty are those Christians whose mirrored image stares back at them each morning. The nature of man is egocentric, selfish, and proud, offering no concession for these means of self-worship enabled by an obsession with oneself and others who promote

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<sup>278</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, 246.

<sup>279</sup> Citation is from 2009 Ligonier National Conference video entitled Anyabwile, Carson, Godfrey, and Thomas: Questions and Answers #3, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar0ujkWH2kA>

their fetishes. Like in the Old Testament narratives, numerous life pleasures and materialism restrict one from serving God. One will fail at one's efforts to counterbalance serving both God and earthly idols. Jesus clearly outlines the implications of this futile effort in Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Thus, one can see that covetousness is behind idolatry and shifts one's heart and mind from the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Augustine proposed that "the task before us is a matter of supreme importance: to establish that the true and truly holy Divinity is to be sought and worshipped not with a view to this mortal life, which passes away like smoke..."<sup>280</sup> Calvin assembles a similar paradigm against humanity's obsession with idol worship by making the case for God's exclusivity as the object of worship—that he is distinguished from idols. "But God, in vindicating his own right, first proclaims that he is a jealous God, and will be a stern avenger if he is confounded with any false god; and thereafter defines what due worship is, in order that the human race may be kept in obedience."<sup>281</sup>

The founders of America invented a Christian morality culture that helped guide the nation. However, the idea was not based on the true God of the Bible, though traces of his existence are evident in the culture. The founders created a god of their imagination to hold over the heads of its citizens. People would not be kept as moral if there was no divine threat. So, there was a belief in God defined primarily by the Bible—a cultural morality that survived for decades in America. In the last 30 years, this morality has shown up in politics. Eventually, it

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<sup>280</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God, Book VII, Chapter 1*, 254.

<sup>281</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume I, XII, 48.



influenced elections under a skewed redefinition of evangelicalism, the “moral majority,” and the “religious right,” but slowly tapered off in the last 15-20 years. What is seen today is the decline of cultural Christianity and a collective Christian consensus that is powerless to impact any significant cultural changes. The more distinctly Christian one is, one will be labeled as extremist, alien, bizarre, homophobic, and guilty of hate crimes.

Cultural Christianity, once known in America, is gone. Those voting and seeking political office now evade the extremism of cultural Christianity. Through cultural Christianity, one wanted to promote the biblical principles of marriage and family, morality, kindness, and justice. One wanted people to know that these were things everyone wanted— even as common grace. Nevertheless, today, one has no influence to make these ideas seem natural in this culture. Many believed that their actions were Christian witnesses, but they were not. The mission field has now become the political enemy. However, the gospel still advances one soul at a time.

Similarly, BLT reacted and created its gospel and culture, believing that the black church had the answer to America’s problem. David Walker, a predecessor of James Cone, wrote an appeal from the African Methodist Episcopal Church: “Have not the Americans the Bible in their hands? Do they believe it? Surely, they do not. See how they treat us in open violation of the Bible!” The statement was an answer to white theologians and the white church’s hypocrisy.<sup>282</sup>

This same emotion continues today employing black theology that rethinks biblical Christianity.

Yet, while white Christianity is unraveling by its ecclesiological strings, Black Christians are still creating spaces that exist outside of America’s theo-patriotic hypocrisy. Even as the Black Church currently faces its own reckoning with its legacies of misogynoir and queerphobia, the “invisible institutions” created within the “invisible institution” direct the whole of this country toward the society America must become in order to survive. Mutual aid organizations founded by Black queer and transgender Christians like There’s Still Hope in Charlotte, North Carolina and The Lighthouse Foundation in Chicago,

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<sup>282</sup> David Walker, *David Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter Hinks (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 40.

Illinois represent how the Black Church has always been what America claimed to be, but never was.<sup>283</sup>

The antithesis of true worship is that which shifts the focus from God’s revealing truth of himself— an unquestionable sign of the church’s idolatry today. Christ must guide any discussion of the truth. Truth must be defended— the Gospel must be defended with the authority of God’s word. The carnal gratification of “seeker sensitive” churches linger in the Evangelical camp without question. Now, division in the Reformed churches over controversial doctrinal proposals such as the “New Perspective on Justification,” denying the traditional-Protestant understanding of justification provides that New Testament markers are wrong.

Such opposition and re-tooling of the Gospel message dethrone God causing the unsuspecting Christian to bow to entities and asserting one’s own moral autonomy. Many leading the charge are pastors who have compromised God’s morality to become popular rather than principled. God created man as an image bearer to reflect the image of God, but when man turns his worship of God in another direction, he perverts the reflection.<sup>284</sup> In this frame, man becomes what he worships. Instead of worshipping God, man worships and idolizes himself. “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (Rom. 1:28).

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<sup>283</sup> Melech E. M. Thomas, “American Idolatry and the Theopolitical Imaginations of the Black Church,” *Berkley Forum*, April 2021, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/american-idolatry-and-the-theopolitical-imaginations-of-the-black-church>.

<sup>284</sup> Baucham, *Expository Apologetics*, 54.

### The Chicago Statement

God gave man his word through inspiration. The means of his doing so has yet to be fully understood. The Articles of Affirmation and Denial referenced in this discussion provide that the CSBI framers explicitly deny understanding the method of inspiration but affirm, as Scripture does in 2 Timothy 3:16, that the Bible is the yield of humanly inspired authors moved by the Holy Spirit. Each word of each area of the original documents is the outgrowth of divine inspiration. God's inspiration method did not make the human authors of Scripture automatons but revealed their unique literary styles, vocabulary, and interpretations. Inspiration secured the tendency for human error to be overpowered, resulting in the written words being exactly the divine Author's words of Scripture.

The discussion of verbal plenary inspiration begins with Article 6 of the CSBI based on 2 Timothy 3:16. "We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole."<sup>285</sup> The doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration indicates that "all" Scripture is divinely inspired. The implicit "all" indicates that Scripture as a whole is inspired. Some have asserted that the whole is delivered by inspiration, though not all parts of Scripture are inspired. However, the presumption is the origin of Scripture which began with God and not man's wisdom.

The affirmation of Article 6 delivers the clause "down to the very words of the original," referring to the extent of divine inspiration, with the "original" words indicating the inspiration of the autographs, a reference to CSBI's Article X (to be discussed later), or the Bible's original manuscripts. This idea may suggest the notion of the dictation of divine words by God, which

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<sup>285</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 34.

has often been a charge against verbal plenary inspiration. However, such is rejected by Scripture and Article 6, where no such theory is spelled out or implied. It is noted, as well, that CSBI's Article 7 rejects and denies the dictation theory, a problem in church history.

The Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth-century Council of Trent did use the word *dicante*, implying "dictating" concerning the Holy Spirit's providing Scripture. Answering from the protestant camp, John Calvin described the biblical authors as amanuenses or secretaries. In addition, complexities exist that provide that portions of Scripture seem to be some form of dictation, such as the Decalogue given by God to Moses. However, this view indicates the canceling of human literary styles, vocabulary choices, and other distinct autographs, opposite the modern era's understanding of dictation. Article 6 does not suggest that inspiration vitiates the literary styles of the original biblical authors. For example, Calvin's view of amanuenses and Trent's views of dictation cannot be interpreted with modern methods. The historical context of these words references some analogy explicitly to one issuing a message to a secretary who assembles it. The message's origin is at stake in the doctrine of inspiration, where God is the Author, rather than human initiation.

These articles left the mode of inspiration as a mystery (Cf. Article 7). Divine superintendence understood in this article is preserving each author's words and choices by the Holy Spirit, not to falsify or distort the Scripture's message. Thus, the statement affirms God's superintendence on the one hand, and the hand denies that God cancels each author's personality and word choices expressing his revealed truth.

Evangelical Christians affirm the process of inspiration. Nevertheless, they avoid the idea that the biblical writers were passive instruments like pens in the hands of God. Calvin illustrates that one should treat Scripture as though God is speaking audibly:

But since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognized, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them.<sup>286</sup>

Calvin's statement does not imply hearing God speak audibly, but what is indicated is that God-inspired Scripture results in the outcome that every word carries the weight of God's authority.

Article 7 provides the explanation and implications of CSBI's Article 6. "We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us. We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind."<sup>287</sup> Human writers are the apparent reference of the text. These human authors became God's instruments to communicate his word, known as *Verbum Dei*, the Word of God, or in some regards as the *Vox Dei*, the voice of God. At the same time, Scripture is delivered as the words of men, relating it to the human agency by which God's Word is communicated, though Scripture's origin is divine.

In view is the CSBI framers' primary meaning of *theopneustos*, or "inspired by God," the words translated in 2 Timothy 3:16. This primary reference, *theopneustos*, literally "God-breathed," is God breathing out his word rather than holding some mark upon the human writers themselves. So, concerning the origin of Scripture, a more accurate term would be expiration rather than inspiration, which is the term used for covering the entire process of how the word is given to man, originating from the mouth of God (metaphorically speaking). The word is

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<sup>286</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume 1, VII, 1, 32.

<sup>287</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 36.

transmitted through the agency of human writers under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, then to human beings apprehending its divine message. The explicit statement in this article is that the precise mode of inspiration remains a mystery, with no attempt to define or suggest “how” man understands this process.

In human language, inspiration often refers to achievement in genius-level insight, intensified consciousness, or a significant accomplishment. For example, inspired poetry can refer to the author’s extraordinary brilliance and wisdom. However, inspiration’s dimension does not suggest divine power as its source when referring to holy Scripture. Nevertheless, there are reflections of heroic acts, intensified consciousness, and significant accomplishment from human levels of inspiration. The distinction here is that divine inspiration’s transcendence considers the view of all human states under God’s supervision and working power. Thus, the articles declare that the Bible, though it is a human book insofar as human authors write it, holds its humanity exceeded by its divine origin and inspiration.

God’s work of inspiration and the use of human writers does not cancel their humanity. This view is restated in Article 8: “We affirm that God in His work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.”<sup>288</sup> Advocates for biblical inerrancy teach that God used the “distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers”<sup>289</sup> of Scripture and that God’s inspiration guided them to project his message through their language and personality flawlessly, not that the Bible was dictated directly by God. The view is a denial of any kind of mechanistic or mechanical

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<sup>288</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 38.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

inspiration. Infallibility and inerrancy indicate that the original texts of the Bible are “God-breathed.” Scholars who are advocates of biblical inerrancy concede that there is a possibility for human error in exposition and translation, and consequently only uphold as the Word of God when those interpretations “faithfully represent the original.”<sup>290</sup> The signatories declare that faith in biblical inerrancy is not required for salvation but advises that there are severe consequences to denying the trustworthiness of the Bible, both for the individual and the church at large. The human writers were not machines which made it possible for God to use their personalities, backgrounds, and writing styles to fulfill his divine purposes. “The Canon of Scripture, then, is the list of writings delivered to us as the divinely inspired record of God’s self-revelation to men—that self-revelation of which Jesus Christ our Lord is the center. The writings are not authoritative because they are included in the list; they are in the list because their authority has been recognized.”<sup>291</sup>

### **Criticism of Black Liberation Theology’s Doctrine of Inspiration**

Examining CSBI’s Articles 6, 7, and 8 sustains the biblical doctrine of inspiration’s critical importance for the church. “The trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine and is therefore fundamental to the Christian hope and life.”<sup>292</sup> The abandonment of Scripture will jeopardize the entire Christian doctrinal system’s foundation by placing it upon the sand. Without the assurance of inerrancy, Scripture’s

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<sup>290</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 39.

<sup>291</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1954), 19-22.

<sup>292</sup> Warfield, “The Inspiration of the Bible,” A lecture. From *Bibliotheca Sacra*, v. 51, 1894, pp. 614-640. Pub. also in “King’s Own,” v. 6, London. 1895, pp. 791-794, 833-840, 926-933.

trustworthiness is doubtful, and the gospel's "good news" of a resurrected Savior is worthless. Faith and application readily hang on the reliability of all of God's word.

After having given a requisite of the believer's expected behavior in 1 Peter 2:11-3:12, Peter discourses that an affirmation of the believer's good behavior will eliminate deserved suffering, leading those who suffer for righteousness' sake with an exhortation on sustaining their salvation and sanctification while amid the incurring action. In this framework, Peter gives them something to remember (their blessedness), something to avoid (fear and troubled hearts), something to do (sanctify Christ as Lord), something to prepare (a defense of their hope), and something to maintain (a clean conscience) (3:13-16). "For it is better if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong" (3:17).<sup>293</sup>

Having examined Cone's view of inspiration, BLT's idea of Christianity is anti-biblical and the abandonment of Scripture, though the consideration of the oppressed and the poor are its focus. Peter's initial address to his readers ("the chosen ones"), sets the tone for their elevated status. These chosen ones have received a future salvation that is sure as Christ's resurrection, which is an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance unto which God's hand of protection shall bring them in keeping with their faith (1:3-5).<sup>294</sup> But what is Cone's view of "the chosen ones" or perhaps more critical to this examination of inspiration, what does *black Christianity* look like?

Cone's theology of black liberation has a false view of Christ. The traditional theological discussions about God, Christ, and salvation are basically irrelevant. Instead, the attributes of BLT are significant for blacks only inasmuch as they bond to the question of freedom from the

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<sup>293</sup> Brandon D. Crowe, *The Message of the General Epistles in the History of Redemption: Wisdom from James, Peter, John, and Jude* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing), 24-25.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.



oppression of blacks in this world. Cone declares that Jesus did not resort to violence, nor did he support overthrowing social order. However, Cone discards Jesus as a model for contemporary argument. Since man's choices today are different from Jesus' choices in his day, blacks must not be restrained by biblical literalism. Their question is not, what did Jesus do? but, what is He doing and where is He at work?<sup>295</sup> Here, the significance of Cone's statement provides the basis for BLT's antithetical view of God as noted in the rhetoric of Emmanuel McCall, who, like Cone, and others, believes that traditional theology presents a false gospel and of the world of men:

Liberation theology wishes to cause a theological reformation of "Civil Religionists" who fail to see the inconsistency of proclaiming a God who created all men equal, a Christ who died to set all men free, but is unconcerned about their earthly existence; who pharisaically interpret ill-gotten gain as divine favor; who seek God's favor as they continue their acts of violence against the family of men; who proclaim "pie in the sky" to the "have-nots" and proclaim heaven as an extension of the good life for the "haves"; and who emphasize evangelism for "souls" as though those souls were devoid of bodies and human personality.<sup>296</sup>

Thus, liberation theology's presentation of salvation is foundationally earthly and seeks equality and justice for all in this present life. Salvation's aspects are political and economic, rather than spiritual. For BLT, this paradigm is Christianity's meaning and the church's mission.

By comparison, the significance of Peter's address suggests suffering in a pagan society but maintaining faith in the resurrected Savior. Unlike BLT's black, oppressed, and poor peoples or groups, the "chosen ones" Peter refers to are not victims of race, social inequality, or economic or political injustice. However, they are the children of God who are suffering from

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<sup>295</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 139-40.

<sup>296</sup> Emmanuel McCall, "Black Liberation Theology: A Politics of Freedom," *Review and Expositor* 73 (1976): 323-33.

being a Christian. Their suffering is not associated with the usual human preoccupation, such as chronic ailment, bereavement, social issues, or other day-to-day matters. Instead, the focus is on opposition, persecution, and abuse for being followers of Christ. Believers are urged to press on in obedience and conformity (gospel maturity) to Christ. “Milk” (1 Pet. 2:3) is their experience in the Lord himself which they have tasted. Their resilience leans somewhat on the things they choose to fear. “Do not fear their threats: do not be frightened” (3:14). Peter’s theological exercise of moving from the metaphor of “milk” to “stone” suggests a theme of Ps. 34 (33 LXX), and the NT context of *Jesus the Precious Cornerstone* (2:3-6):

I *sought* the Lord, and he hearkened to me,  
and delivered me from all my  
sojournings.  
*Come to him*, and be enlightened;  
and your faces shall never be put to shame.  
(Ps. 33:5-6 LXX NETS)<sup>297</sup>

One is reminded of David’s deliverance by the Lord himself in his escape from Abimelech: “Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed are those who take refuge in him” (Ps. 34:8).

### **Liberation versus Inspiration**

When compared to the biblical doctrine of inspiration, a critical examination of Cone’s concept of liberation is necessary. First, the question of what liberation means in black theology must be re-examined. One may ask why since Cone has answered emphatically up to this point. However, one believes that some unanswered questions or concepts are somewhat hidden from the reader of Cone’s works. According to Cone, Scripture is not inspired, but its reader and interpreter are. Consequently, white Christians “are in no position whatever to question the

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<sup>297</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1023.

legitimacy of Black theology” as their minds are “incapable of Black thinking.”<sup>298</sup> Lastly, what are the implications of his statement upon the biblical text itself, and what problems, if any, can one expect when considering Cone’s view of Christianity and the gospel it claims?

Cone’s BLT is an interrogation of faith pioneers in the history of American theology that are considered New World Afro-Christian. Given what Cone and others define as the racist traditions and practices of America and modernity, BLT endeavors to disclose the theological importance and political assurance of black faith and existence. Cone describes the traditions and practices of “whiteness” as theological and considered white theology. In contrast, the task of “black liberation theology” is unmasking whiteness’s ideological superstructure. “We will not accept a God who is on everybody’s side, which means that God loves everybody in spite of who they are and is working (through the acceptable channels of society, of course) to reconcile all persons to the Godhead.”<sup>299</sup>

Why is white theology *white*, asks Cone? The answer is his formulation of BLT and its core ideologies. As a mode of theological reflection, BLT sufficiently specifies what is theologically atypical about the Euro-American address of modern race and racial character. Additionally, BLT manages the problem of white theology by providing philosophical and theological corrective action and reveals to what extent it removes the *white* in white theology. Cone then evaluates the degree to which BLT remains obligated to modern racial logic. By doing so, his analysis renders explicit Christological themes that break in from uncovering the heterodox theological structure of modern racial reason.

Central to Cone’s analysis is the place he accords, especially in his early thought, to Jesus’ Jewishness. Hence, the breakthrough in his thought: the humanity that the God of Israel assumes in Jesus of Nazareth is the location from which God secures and affirms

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<sup>298</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 23.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

all of creation in its historical unfolding. Thus, black theology, understood from this vantage, gestures toward a theology of the nations, one that emanates from and is consonant with a Christian theology of Israel. Indeed, it is a theology of “a nation within a nation,” a theology, that is, of black existence in its diasporic wanderings through the strange land of late modernity.<sup>300</sup>

Though Cone theologizes in “black,” identity is not static but rather a dynamic, racialized, and historical construct. BLT’s institution of Israel as black America is its biblical connection. This idea within itself poses several problems that seem “think nothing of it” for Cone, though his concepts have profound, unorthodox implications against biblical inspiration when considered.

Cone’s “nation within a nation” means much more than its words suggest. It is a theology of black existence in its diasporic quest through the unfamiliar ground of late modernity. From this vantage, black theology moves toward a theology of the nations that stems from and is compatible with a Christian theology of Israel. Israel’s land of modernity, black America, provides the basis for identity politics, a hidden gem in BLT that is not readily identifiable by the casual reader of Cone. Case in point, Tracy Robinson points out that “race . . . alone does not constitute all of one’s attitudes, experiences, and cognitions related to the self.”<sup>301</sup> Identity is “both visible and invisible domains of the self that influence self-construction. They include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical and intellectual ability.”<sup>302</sup> Edward Taylor explains identity as “one’s understanding of the multilayered, interdependent, and nonsynchronous interaction of social status, language, race,

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<sup>300</sup> J. Kameron Carter, “Theologizing Race: James H. Cone, Liberation, and the Theological Meaning of Blackness”, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York, 2008; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Sept. 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195152791.003.0008>.

<sup>301</sup> Tracy Robinson, “The Intersection of Identity,” in *Souls Looking Back: Life Stories of Growing Up Black*, ed. Andrew Garrod, Janie Victoria Ward, Tracy L. Robinson, and Robert Kilkeny (New York: Routledge, 1999), 85.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

ethnicity, values, and behaviors that permeate and influence nearly all aspects of our lives.”<sup>303</sup> So, what does black mean according to Cone? According to J. Deotis Roberts, black is “a symbol of self-affirmation.”<sup>304</sup> Thus, for Cone blackness is “an ontological symbol for all people who participate in the liberation of [humanity] from oppression.”<sup>305</sup>

The variability of liberation’s meaning in Cone’s BLT suggests that his ontological symbology is the primary reason why God’s word as inspirational does not exist in his theological perspective. Man, a created being, is in many ways made equal to his Creator in that ontologically, he can define or even redefine himself. Even more disturbing is that man can define God as well. God is also seen to be in flux, or always changing. He continually shows up in a different light when his people are found in distinct historical situations. Thus, the truth about him must be diverse correspondingly.<sup>306</sup> Cone’s argumentation for these ideas is problematic, especially for his defense that BLT is equated with the Christian gospel.

For example, one’s destiny is determined by oneself, not God, through one’s efforts to establish a just world where all people have dignity. Cone categorizes, “Black Theology puts black identity in a theological context,”<sup>307</sup> where one’s identity is multiple, textured, and

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<sup>303</sup> Edward Taylor, “Lessons for Leaders: Using Critical Inquiry to Promote Identity Development,” in *Racial and Ethnic Identity in School Practices: Aspects of Human Development*, ed. Rosa Hernández Sheets and Etta R. Hollins (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1999), 232.

<sup>304</sup> J. Deotis Roberts, *A Black Political Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1974), 21.

<sup>305</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 32.

<sup>306</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 31. Segundo, like Cone, argues that God is not ruler over the order of things, but the emphasis of God amongst his people is similar to the idea of immanence presented in process theology. For example, God is not omnipotent because he interacts with the changing universe. God is changeable (that is to say, God is affected by the actions that take place in the universe) over the course of time. However, the abstract elements of God (goodness, wisdom, etc.) remain eternally solid. See, Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), 20—26.

<sup>307</sup> Kwame Bediako, “Black Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 103.

converging. Again, this awareness in BLT indicates that culture drives Scriptural interpretation, which, again, empowers the interpreter to determine the text's meaning. Case in point—Cone's inclusion of gender fluidity and the redefinition of marriage within BLT rise up due to a growing cultural mandate for their acceptance. These insertions are emphasized in his later work.

Before his death, Cone preached for the “Love Your Neighbor” coalition at the United Methodist General Conference, where the group lobbied for homosexual practice and acceptance. In support of the “queer people of this world,” Cone urged the UMC's acceptance of the coalition's injunction in sync with his black liberation theology to overturn its traditional stance on marriage and sex. Cone told his pro-LGBT audience:

You may be down, but you are not out... We must remember that the cross comes before the resurrection, and today may be your cross. This is our hope: that we may heal the wounds of racial violence that continue to divide our churches and societies. God must be with us because we are on the cross too. The cross is God's condemnation of power, with powerless love snatching victory when in the hands of defeat. White churches with a white Jesus oppressed blacks and marginalized them. Today, white churches and black churches are doing the same thing excluding gay people from their communities saying, ‘I love the sinner hate the sin.’ Now I never heard Jesus say that!<sup>308</sup>

Rather than the freedom from the sinful nature of the individual's sin, BLT's salvific belief is physical liberation from white oppression, unlike in evangelical theology. Because of this stance, the need for personal introspection and the spiritual aspects associated with biblical Christianity is not stressed. Sin's presence in BLT is only associated with “whiteness,” and its reference to liberation from the unwarranted power of oppressors over blacks in society believed collective

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<sup>308</sup> Bart Gingerich, “Radical James Cone Touts “Queer People” to UMs at General Conference”, *Juicy Ecumenism*, May 1, 2012, <https://juicyecumenism.com/2012/05/01/radical-james-cone-touts-queer-people-to-ums-at-general-conference>.

sin. Any appeal to heaven is considered an endeavor to prevent blacks from total liberation of themselves.<sup>309</sup>

Today, a renewal of BLT has taken upon new methodologies to reach a younger generation of activists. “Unlike their predecessors in the ‘60s and ‘70s, who included black liberation theologians such as James Cone, the current generation of young black activists is calling for a network of black institutions built outside the context of the strongest black institution there is: the church.”<sup>310</sup>

Anthony Pinn, a black humanist theologian presents an entirely different view of Cone, but in the context of black theology in what he refers to as the “black body.” He challenges traditional black theology for its Christian-centered focus. Rather than placing God or Christ at the center, Pinn crafts his theology using the body as the center of an examination on how the effects of racism and white supremacy are experienced physically by the material body. He writes: “Black theological thought related to issues of liberation and life meaning, when framed in terms of the body, tend toward the body only as abstraction, as symbolic with little attention to the lived body.”<sup>311</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, an avowed atheist, parrots this idea: “In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body— it is heritage.”<sup>312</sup> Using Pinn’s embodiment framework, Marquis Bey suggested a black atheistic radical feminism centering on the body and its lived experience, significantly in the recent Black Lives Matter Movement. He writes, “Black lives can

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<sup>309</sup> Pierre Bigo, *The Church and Third World Revolution*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 131.

<sup>310</sup> Emma Green, “Black Activism, Unchurched”, *The Atlantic*, March 22, 2016: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/black-activism-baltimore-black-church/474822/>.

<sup>311</sup> Anthony Pinn, *Embodiment and the New Shape of Black Theological Thought* (New York, NY: University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>312</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 103.

only matter if black bodies matter first.”<sup>313</sup> These examples are only a few of today’s reshaping of BLT.

### **Liberation of the Oppressed versus “God Emphasis”**

BLT’s quest to liberate the oppressed is its view of God. The oppressed are not only blacks in America but marginalized groups affected by “whiteness.” The black theologian is intentionally oblivious to a comprehensive theology proper that views God as authoritative and his word as inspirational. “Black theology says that as Creator, God identified with oppressed Israel, participating in the bringing into being of this people; as Redeemer, God became the Oppressed One in order that all may be free from oppression; as Holy Spirit, God continues the work of liberation.”<sup>314</sup> Though Cone’s viewpoint of the Godhead seems comparable to the heresy of modalism, he denied this affirmation.

For Christians who parrot Cone’s gospel, Jesus is evident in their beliefs. He delivers enslaved people and punishes their masters. He is the elder brother of enslaved people, their Savior, and a fellow sufferer who is still alive to render help to the oppressed.<sup>315</sup> However, BLT’s Jesus is not Scripture’s historical view. According to Cone, the message of Christ is black power. “It is my thesis...that Black Power, even in its most radical expression, is not the antithesis of Christianity, nor is it a heretical idea to be tolerated with painful forbearance. It is, rather,

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<sup>313</sup> Marquis Bey, “She Had a Name That God Didn’t Give Her: Thinking the Body through Atheistic Black Radical Feminism”, *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, 9, 2015: 1-17.

<sup>314</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 72.

<sup>315</sup> McCall, “Black Liberation Theology,” 329.



Christ's central message to twentieth-century America."<sup>316</sup> Similarly, but in a more radical way, Henry expresses, "Black Power is not the antithesis of Christianity. It IS Christianity."<sup>317</sup>

Ignoring the real cause of oppression is inherent in the rejection or denigration of the spiritual dimensions of salvation. Thus, there is no true cure for oppression when the rejection of the biblical view of sin is ignored. Though BLT imagines a world where one works for liberation apart from a regenerated heart through being born again, its claims for a utopian society in this life is futile and impossible without the help of the Savior. Moreover, in BLT, God is viewed as being primarily for the poor over against the rich in society.

Disobedience is man's normal response to God. In this reality, man cannot be expected to produce anything radically good. He cannot in his own hope move society toward perfection. Scripture that is authoritative and inspirational contends that only God can create what is new. He does this through men, but by changing them first. Only then will Christ become the object of their faith.

The world overrates Christian living because it lacks "on the spot results" to solve immediate problems. One may desire to be a Christian because of its ethics, but another may prefer "now" answers rather than ethics. The world's view is survival rather than sacrifice (8:5) given φρονου̅σιν where one thinks of oneself. "For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" Gal. 6:8. The antithesis is the Spiritual mind, with one knowing that one has an internal problem one can never solve, though one is born into a world full of excellent promises and opportunities.

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<sup>316</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1.

<sup>317</sup> Henry, "Toward a Religion of Revolution," 30.

Thus, the degree of victory is not dollars and cents, possessions, neither accolade for accomplishments, but rather faith in the “good news.” “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous (δικαιος) shall live by faith’” (1:16-17).

Christians today should live faithfully in view of biblical social, ethical, and emotional behavior. One believes that the church has abandoned the theological implications of the text in view of a deceptive social gospel where the focus is race— racial justice, liberation theology, critical theory, queer theory, abortion rights, social justice, and the list grows. The issue of the sinner is addressed by Jesus as one the matter of a sinful heart. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it” (Jer. 17:9)? “A man is said to be justified in the sight of God when in the judgment of God, he is deemed righteous, and is accepted on account of his righteousness; for as iniquity is abominable to God, so neither can the sinner find grace in his sight, so far as he is and so long as he is regarded as a sinner. Hence, wherever sin is, there also are the wrath and vengeance of God.”<sup>318</sup>

Paul’s recognition of man’s depravity is his expression “sold under sin” (πεπραμένος) or the expression of his behavior and bodily existence from the viewpoint of God’s holy law. “Who will deliver me?” Though seemingly a cry of despair, Paul answers the question himself— “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (7:24-25)! In this frame, “There is therefore now no condemnation” (8:1).

Given Paul’s narrative, one has hope in the redemption of one’s soul from the depravity of sin. Deliverance of the believer from the law of sin and death is one’s deliverance from sin’s operative power where the association of one’s worship is futile (8:2). “For God has done what

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<sup>318</sup> Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume III, XI, 258.

the law could not do” in that human sinfulness could not bring salvation. Here, the doctrine of God affects one’s theology and controls all doctrines of Christianity. For the one who now walks in the Spirit, worship now takes on a different dynamic of holiness, reverence, adoration, and gravitas. The believer’s relationship with God, communicated prominently through 8:1-10, “for those who are in Christ Jesus,” is the culmination of one’s possession of both Christ and the Holy Spirit— the direct relation to God’s character and purposes.

To neglect salvation would be surrendering one’s relationship mediated by Christ to more or less subtle pressures, becoming liable to these pressures, renouncing the gospel altogether, and disengaging oneself from its public profession until it ceases to impact one’s life. A way to encourage one who is afraid of “neglecting” his salvation: One of the unmistakable marks of a real child of God, born again and justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ, is that if one neglects God’s salvation, one will not continue to do so for long. The child of God will hear the gospel and feel conviction by the Holy Spirit and desire to return one’s eyes, ears, and heart to Jesus; one will be attentive and faithful to the message of the cross. One that is born again and justified by faith in Christ alone will heed the warning of Hebrews 2:3. To help avoid this situation, consider the following questions: The distinction of the Christian character is one’s response to the gospel. As one progresses from its understanding to respond to the message, one must ask, “Am I neglecting salvation?” Have I neglected to consider the teachings of Jesus, the gospel, and its meanings? These investigations are critical for those who consider BLT the source of authority in today’s world, where one may only discuss God so long as He is concerned with the “revolution.” God, then, is a manipulated being in this theological crisis. Cone contends that to be oppressed and poor is to be a child of God. A fallacy of black theology is that rich and poor are believed to be opposites, as if every person in the world is one or the other. However, even if

everyone had a degree of wealth, there would be degrees of richness and poorness. So, where would the demarcation line be drawn?

According to the New Testament, it is not the possession of wealth that condemns one but the wrong attitude toward it. Scripture argues that the poor and the rich can both be guilty of greed. In this view, God does not desire the salvation of the poor more than the salvation of the rich. “Certainly, the Bible presents, and experience corroborates, that God delivers His people, bringing them to freedom in Christ. But this must be seen as a part of the whole picture He desires to deliver them because of His love and sense of justice— for His name’s sake and His glory. But the Christian will be either a slave of himself or Christ, there is no middle ground.”<sup>319</sup>

### **Human Authors**

The Bible is unique and diverse in its authorship and its production. It is authored by approximately 40 people who write in different periods and geographical regions. The authors were human storytellers who understood men and women from diverse backgrounds— the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, and the faithful and treacherous. They all can be found in Scripture. If apostles were beheld as God’s mouthpiece, and it is believed that they wrote according to the Spirit’s leading, their writings would be received as God’s authoritative word. Thus, Scripture is inspired from the very start. For this reason, the written word was not a formal decision of the church but was instead its natural outworking and view of the function of the apostles.

One of the greatest problems facing Christianity today is interpreting Scripture to suit modern proclivities. What if this unrestrained practice motivated the human authors of Scripture? The short answer is that Scripture would cease to be authoritative and inspirational. The

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<sup>319</sup> H. Wayne House, “An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology.”

historicity of biblical Christianity concludes that Scripture is not only world literature but is a definitive essay of the evolution of Western civilization. As well, “it is divine revelation that confronts readers with their sin and need for salvation and forgiveness, calling upon them to make a choice that has eternal ramifications: to receive Christ’s free gift of salvation or to reject it.”<sup>320</sup> One who reads Scripture is confronted by it and “must act in response to it rather than merely revel in interesting plotlines, masterful characterization, or various other instances of skillful literary techniques employed by the biblical authors”<sup>321</sup> or those who are purely dispassionate literary detractors.

In one’s previous discussion of God’s use of human authors, one provided acumen for the divine means by which Scripture is inspired. Indeed, it was not the man that was inspired, but God’s word itself. This idea is the anthesis of BLT, which stipulates that the reader and interpreter of Scripture are inspired, disturbing God’s sacred word by the lens used to interpret it. This awareness is limited to modern proclivities and other beliefs, concepts, and philosophies. D. A. Carson said, “Careful handling of the Bible will enable us ‘to hear’ it a little better. It is all too easy to read the traditional interpretations we have received from others into the text of Scripture. Then we may unwittingly transfer the authority of Scripture to our traditional interpretations and invest them with a false, even an idolatrous, degree of uncertainty.”<sup>322</sup>

Peter’s proclamation, “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation,” argues that the prophetic testimony of Scripture comes from God (2 Pet. 1:20). Thus, both Scripture and its meaning originate with God and not with the human

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<sup>320</sup> Andreas Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, 2nd Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Publishing, 2013), 14.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 17.

authors. God's word is not the private, fallible, or religious opinions of mortal men, but rather, the revelation and truth of its divine Author. "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (1:21). For this obvious reason (and others), any basis for interpretation of Scripture must begin and end with God.

For BLT, on the other hand, "[A word of God] if quested at all, is sought not in scripture, but in the self in dialogue with itself, or in a reading of societal structures and movements.... The Bible is basically the document of the Christian's self-identity: within our identity crisis, it points to the source and origin of Christian self-identity."<sup>323</sup> So, the human effort becomes the quest for man to find himself in opposition to Scripture as one's guide and revelation of the Creator. The reader, though human, becomes one's authority. Thus, to believe that man is able to solve his problems makes one wonder if anything really would be lacking in black theology if there were no God or Christ.

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<sup>323</sup> H. Wayne House, "An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology." See also, J. Christiaan Beker, "Biblical Theology Today," *New Theology* No. 6, 32.

## CHAPTER SIX—The Word of God and Inerrancy

### 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 John 1:3

With the rise of biblical illiteracy, error, and hostile teaching from within and without America's churches, most Christians today cannot answer three basic questions: What is the gospel? What is the church? What is a Christian? One's critical examination of Scripture's authority and inspiration has determined that without proper biblical hermeneutical exercise and the fortitude to defend Scripture, one will fail at trusting the text— that each word is God's.

Scripture's inerrancy is centered on the idea that there are no errors because the Bible is authoritative and inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16). Centering inerrancy on the person and work of Jesus is an alternative way of thinking about this doctrine. For the Christian, one's faith in Jesus Christ is based on the validities of God's inerrant word revealing his character, plan, and truths rooted and grounded in historical events. Though the existence of Jesus Christ remains a controversial topic in this culture, one must "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). In this generation, the defense of the gospel has fallen on hard times. The practice is a critical application of the biblical doctrine that is exegetical and theological rather than a philosophical exercise. For Paul, the proper defense of the Christian faith is not to be done with persuasive words of human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:4) but by proclaiming the truth of the Word of God itself.

The Pauline proclamation of the gospel rests in the believer's "receiving" and "standing" by which one is being saved (1 Cor. 15:1-2). Christians believe that Christ died and rose again and that his death was substitutionary. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (15:3). Paul asserts that the gospel is not the cross but the sign of an "empty" tomb where death and resurrection are the

central events *kata tas graphas* (“in accordance with the Scriptures”). Paul’s use of “Scriptures” in the plural refers to its general references (Rom. 1:2; 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; cf. Gal. 3:10), as opposed to its single use, “Scripture,” citing a specific text.<sup>324</sup> The cross is salvation history’s climax of events revealed in the OT categories of atonement, suffering, vindication, and so forth, expounded by Paul as a “superstructure” of NT theology observing OT texts commonly used by NT writers. Especially cited are those OT texts by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Psalms.<sup>325</sup>

Scripture’s assurance is that Christ was buried and appeared to hundreds of witnesses after his resurrection. Thus, Christianity’s truth stands or collapses on the Messiah’s physical resurrection. These words resonate with: “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith” (15:14). Paul delivers an unbiased standard by which to judge the legality of the Christian perspective. The negative would suggest that if Christ is not raised from the dead, then Christianity will be positively verified false. However, if Jesus is resurrected from the dead, then his existence, living, and teachings are justified. Christianity, as it turns out, is confirmable and grounded on an empirically verifiable event. This one statement provides evidence that a miracle has occurred though rejected by human wisdom. Christ’s resurrection, though not an isolated event, guarantees something more. This occurrence, communicated in the gospel, is “not in persuasive words of [human] wisdom,” but in the powerful demonstration of the Spirit, “that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

The reliability of the Scriptures is its best witness. John strengthens his readers by reminding them of what they have witnessed— an event constituting the basis for their fellowship. The resurrection’s eyewitnesses are identified as “us” rather than the secessionists

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<sup>324</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 744.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*



who rejected the true message of the Word of life. “That which we have seen and heard we also proclaim to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Further investigation concludes that rising disputes with emerging Gnosticism spawned disputes over John’s Gospel and subsequently the Johannine Epistles. Noted is John’s shared theme of “darkness” and “light.” “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1:5). Light is love for God and fellow believers, and darkness symbolizes the blind who hate fellow believers— “But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (2:11).

Inerrancy manages one’s confidence in Scripture, which is authentically God’s truth. Without Scripture’s reliability, could one offer a verifiable and true gospel? Paul’s central work in ministry was preaching God’s priority message to the public— “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1:18). However, for the Greek philosopher; the “wise,” the Jewish scholar; the “scribe,” and the Greek orator; the “disputer,” “God made foolish the wisdom of the world” for the Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a *stumbling block* to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1:19-24).

Though there is no more supreme truth than the message of the cross, an absolute misunderstanding of Jesus’ message throughout his earthly ministry and throughout the apostolic epistles provides that the message of the cross was both a stumbling block to Israel and the unbelieving Gentile then, as it is now today. The Corinthians were so impressed by contemporary orators and the secular wisdom they taught that they questioned the validity of

Paul's preaching. Did it offer a true expression of rhetorical, intellectual, or spiritual power? However, Paul's comparison is implicit in the contrast between "the wisdom of the world" and his message that is "Christ crucified" — a "stumbling block."

Paul's use of the phrase stumbling block (σκάνδαλον *skándalon*) refers to the Jew's rejection of the Messiah, whose person and career were contrary to Israel's anticipations causing the shipwreck of their salvation. They believed "Christ crucified" (*skándalon*) and a "rock of offense" (*petra skándalon*), a term derived from 1 Peter 2:7–8, a stumbling block to their faith. Here one references Peter's words: "So, the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone' and 'a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." Peter's words are drawn from Isaiah 8:14 and are used by Paul (Rom. 9:32-33) as well to illustrate Israel's rejection of God in the past and their continuation into the present. This same idea of Israel's rejection of God in the days of Isaiah parallels their rejection of Jesus Christ in the first century. At this juncture, one must revisit the Jewish philosophy that rejected any messianic contemplation of Jesus Christ as its fulfillment— "the message of the cross is foolishness." This idea provides that God's sentence of judgment on human wisdom is Paul's point in 1:19, recalling Isaiah 29:14: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Paul's use of both of this Isaiahic indication informs the overall interpretation of 1 Corinthians.

Both the Sadducees and the Pharisees were opponents of Jesus and united in their opposition against him. However, the true identity of the Pharisees results in a mixed bag once one gets past the Jewish polemic, the anti-Pharisee polemic of the gospels. The Pharisee's emphasis was a devotion to the study of the law and obedience to its commandments. Their

origin may be Hasidean, however their roots may be postexilic related where a Deuteronomic mindset focused on following the law. “Josephus records that Pharisees were known for their ‘virtuous conduct’ and that the people perform ‘worship, prayers, and sacrifices’ according to their direction (Ant. 18:15 LCL).”<sup>326</sup> In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus presents the Pharisee and a tax collector praying in a temple that demonstrates the faults of self-righteous and legalist, and the faithful displaying a right attitude before God. The Pharisee boldly thanks God that he is “not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers— or even like this tax collector.” He also boasts of his fasting and tithing. In contrast, a tax collector stands at a distance, not able to lift his head to heaven, beating his chest, and praying, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Jesus tells the crowd that the tax collector— who pleaded for mercy for his sins “went home justified before God”, rather than the Pharisee who was proud of his spiritual accomplishments, and who “were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else.” “The Pharisee uses the pronoun “I” five times in two verses. His attitude seems to be that God should be grateful to him for his commitment.”<sup>327</sup> Though he is law-abiding, he is absent of wisdom. Thus, proclaiming a crucified savior is nonsense and void for any like him who denies the possibility of their sinfulness.

Devotion to the law is at the heart of the case against the Jews’ requirement of a sign. Paul reminds them that human effort to find God’s favor will fall short (Rom. 3:9-28). “Legalism exists when people attempt to secure righteousness in God’s sight by good works. Legalists

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<sup>326</sup>Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald, *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 218.

<sup>327</sup> Earl Radmacher, Roy Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Compact Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 727.

believe that they can earn or merit God's approval by performing the requirements of the law."<sup>328</sup> Schreiner's statement is both the consensus of Reformists Calvin and Luther. However, "In the early part of the twentieth century a few dissenting voices were raised which called into question the consensus which had emerged since the Reformation. Both George Foote Moore and Claude Montefiore protested that Judaism was not legalistic, and that such a view of Judaism was a distortion of Jewish documentary sources."<sup>329</sup> Despite the erudition of these scholars, no significant changes were made until the shattering of the majority consensus by E. P. Saunders whose controversial stance impacted the view of Jewish legalism in Paul's writings suggesting that the term "covenantal nomism" be used instead of "legalistic" to describe Judaism. Saunders "concluded that the notion that the Jews in Paul's day were legalists was a myth imposed on the evidence by Christian scholars who read the disagreement between Paul and certain Jews through the lenses of the struggle between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism."<sup>330</sup> D. A. Carson said, "But even if this is the case, it doesn't prove that Paul must be read as advocating covenantal nomism; in fact, there is just as strong a possibility that he would be speaking out against it! The matter of sin makes this especially clear. Second-temple Judaism took sin much less seriously than Paul did; his writings argue that sin must be taken more seriously."<sup>331</sup> Reading the Pauline epistles does not argue for the reader to adopt the perspective on sin that is evident in second-temple Judaism. Carson argues that the controversy that Paul mentions in Galatians

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<sup>328</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Was Luther Right?", *Ligonier*, Jan 27, 2010, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/was-luther-right>

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> D. A. Carson, "D. A. Carson on the New Perspective," *China Institute*, July 4, 2005 <https://www.reachingchineseworldwide.org/wright-doyle/articles/articles/d-a-carson-on-the-new-perspective>

seems to imply that the Jews thought (and communicated to the Gentiles) that they had some sort of “inside track with God” based on keeping the law.

There is uncompromising antagonism between human wisdom and “the message of the cross.” This main idea makes the gospel unattractive. One does not possess autonomy neither the power to overcome the plague of plagues. “God has executed judgment on sinners.”<sup>332</sup> Paul’s emphasis links this idea to the Old Testament narrative of judgment and grace. The contradiction of the cross is foolishness to some, but in reality, the power for salvation per Scripture. Paul’s argument aligns with several verses with Isaiah. 29:14, as mentioned earlier. Relating to this argument is part of a woe oracle rebuking miscellaneous human practices (29:1, 3), preceding with the verse linking wisdom with “lip service” to God: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” (29:13). Like the Pharisees’ fixation on the law, the Corinthian’s preoccupation was rhetorical brilliance in its superficial package— their diseases indicated their lacking reconciliation with God. Both these aspects indicate the offensiveness of the Christian Gospel as foolishness.

The judgment of the “wisdom of the wise” is indicated in 29:14. It ensues when “I [God] will again do wonderful things,” where the Hebrew word for “wonder” (פֶּלְאָה *pālā’*) may suggest a messianic connection with Isa. 9:6, where the figure is called “Wonderful Counselor,” and in 28:29, the Lord of salvation is referred to as “wonderful in counsel.” In these inferences, God’s people are urged to respect his divine intervention in the future to help them evaluate their difficulties. The absence of wisdom is seen as a sign pointing to the final, universal judgment associated with the coming Messiah’s work. The proof in history of God’s saving grace is through the preaching of the crucified Messiah: “it pleased God through the folly of what we

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<sup>332</sup> Venning, *The Plague of Plagues*, 80.

preach to save those who believe” (1:21). Here, yet another Isaiahic text is considered in Paul’s message— “a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation” (28:16). His use of this dualistic theme in Romans 9:33-10:14 (c.f. 1 Pet. 2:6), indicates the consequence of one’s response to the stone of either hell or salvation (1:23-24). The idea of skándalon (“stumbling block”) reappears, and later emerges in broader context again in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

By citing Jeremiah 9:23, “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,” Paul argues that the Corinthians should not consider themselves by human standards before God, meaning that God called them by different means. They should, instead, regard their lives in the salvation plan of God in Christ (1:26-31). The majority of Corinthians were uneducated, unintellectual, and deemed as foolish by the educated elite. These were also considered despised, weak, and treated as persons without worth, thus, insignificant. However, Paul’s gospel is the antithesis of these ideas, though the reality in the world spoke otherwise. Noting these actualities, the unsaved Gentiles had an incorrect view of the cross. The cross idea to the unregenerate Gentile mind with its accompanying humiliation, disadvantage, and the appearance of failure, conveyed weakness instead of victory. Adding the resurrection of Christ to this argument did nothing to provide human wisdom’s view, and intellectual reasoning neither provoked philosophical thinking.

The gospel of Christ was a stumbling block to Israel, whose expectation of a reigning Messiah over a restored nation never materialized. A man whose exclusive message provided that he was the Son of God was foolishness to them and also to the arrogant, intellectual Gentiles whose human wisdom disclosed their gross misunderstanding. The Corinthian Christians, similarly, misunderstood this message when Paul preached to them in their time. Even today, myriads of believers are misinformed and misguided concerning their salvation by ignoring the

means that makes one acceptable to God—the transforming work of Jesus Christ. “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards” provides that God’s power does not consider human wisdom, but rather “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” Though wisdom was a term misunderstood by most Christians, Paul defines it in terms of “Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” To both the sign-seeking Jew and the wisdom-seeking Greek, God’s Gospel is both “Christ crucified” (*skándalon*) and a “rock of offense” (*petra skándalon*), a stumbling block to their faith. “The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

### **Inerrancy**

The trustworthiness of the Scriptures lies at the foundation of trust in the Christian system of doctrine and is therefore fundamental to the Christian hope and life.

— B. B. Warfield<sup>333</sup>

During the U. S. presidency of Donald Trump, an expression from a bygone era was used to interrogate the trustworthiness of the press—*fake news*! The revival of this phrase was controversial not only for a generation of older Americans familiar with its incendiary drifts but also for a younger generation unfamiliar with its innuendoes. Using the phrase aggravated American citizens and the international community that relied upon and never questioned the integrity of the American press. Fake news’ association with the World War II propaganda machines of the United States, Nazi Germany, Japan, and others influenced their soldiers,

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<sup>333</sup> B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 120-125.

citizens, and enemies. The press deliberately embellished news to hide or even evade the truth. Inerrancy was the antithesis of this rule, disclosed by one's free will to misleadingly interpret any position to accomplish one's objective. Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary, "The essence of propaganda consists in winning people over to an idea so sincerely, so vitally, that in the end they succumb to it utterly and can never again escape from it."<sup>334</sup> Adolph Hitler agreed.

Like the past, the world is witnessing a resurgence in interrogating the integrity and validity of the Bible. — "is it genuine or fake news?" If Scripture cannot be trusted, let alone the gospel, then both are literally and figuratively, for that matter, fake *news*! The doctrine of inerrancy is critical for the church. If discarded, tampered with, or ignored, the substratum of the Christian doctrinal system rests on shaky ground, though futile efforts by some to maintain certain of its truths may be attempted. Thus, proving inerrancy can be tricky in this hour.

For example, some affirm Scripture's inspiration but reject its inerrancy. This assertion seems evangelical when one says, "I believe the Bible is true in its message of faith." However, upon further investigation, this stance rejects Scripture's truth in all it affirms. Its gospel message may be true but may err in its specifics. This supposition cannot argue that Scripture is its absolute inerrant rule, which the church consistently affirms as *sola scriptura*. There is a critical difference between total inerrancy and limited inerrancy. Full inerrancy declares, "All Scripture is our inerrant authority." However, limited inerrancy claims, "Only when Scripture addresses matters of faith is it our inerrant authority." According to limited inerrancy, *sola scriptura* can only be declared when Scripture puts forward its central message. Periodically, Scripture is not inerrant and cannot be the final authority. Of course, this is not Luther's, neither the Reformers'

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<sup>334</sup> Speech on the Tasks of the German Theatre', 8 May 1993. Quoted in J. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich* (London, UK: 1972), 151.



view of *sola scriptura*. At the Diet at Worms, Luther protested Rome and stood on the authority of Scripture with inerrancy (among others) distinguishing his cause. He boldly claimed that Scripture does not err, even though popes and councils do. God inspires Scripture alone. For this reason, it is inerrant, sufficient, and the Christian's final authority.

On another front, the battle between religion and science renews because of Scripture's inerrancy. With the outgrowth of Scholasticism and medieval universities in the sixteen century, Christianity's unique theological assumptions explained why science was born only in Christian Europe, delivering that religion and science were inseparable. For many in the church and academy, this wisdom was contrary. The battle between religion and science waged on for over three centuries, using this as the primary polemical device to attack faith by atheists. The writings of Thomas Hobbs, Carl Sagan, and Richard Dawkins, to name a few, have used false claims about religion and science as weapons to wage a battle to "free" the human mind from the "fetters of faith."<sup>335</sup> Rodney Stark understood, there is no inherent conflict between religion and science, but Christian Theology was essential for the rise of science.<sup>336</sup> "One of the biggest myths that Stark exposes is the inflated, if not totally fabricated, idea that religion (particularly Christianity) was somehow an obstacle to, rather than a catalyst for, the advent of science and the rise of higher education."<sup>337</sup>

According to Stark, the universe is the personal creation of a rational, responsive, dependable, and omnipotent God. This idea is depicted in Christianity, where science is the natural outgrowth of its doctrine rather than an extension of classical learning. Nature only exists

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<sup>335</sup> McDowell and McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 17.

<sup>336</sup> Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformation, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 3, 123.

<sup>337</sup> McDowell and McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 17.

because God created it. Thus, to love, appreciate, and honor God is to embrace his handiwork that functions according to immutable principles. One can discover these principles using one's God-given powers of reason and observation. Scripture's declaration is established in the doctrine of God. Thus, the divine authorship of Scripture cannot be divorced from God's character and words expressed in his communicable attributes— one being truth. God is both truth and the God of truth. Human authors wrote the Bible, but its ultimate originator is God, the divine author,<sup>338</sup> who is reflected in the truth of the text. God is “perfect” and the word that he speaks “proves true” (Psa. 119:96; cf. 119:160).

Carl Hatch stated that three complex factors forever changed the course of American theology in the 19th century: biological evolution, higher criticism, and the study of comparative religion. Charles A. Briggs, a promoter of higher criticism, believed that “the great fault with American theology is that it is too little critical.”<sup>339</sup> Impressed by the German higher critics of the day, he pressed that Scripture, on matters of history and science, was not free from error but only from error in faith and practice teachings. Taking on the Edward Robinson Chair of Biblical Theology at Union Theological Seminary in 1890, Briggs delivered his inaugural address in January 1891, titled “The Authority of Scripture.”<sup>340</sup> He outlined his views on biblical inspiration and authority, attacking the doctrine of inerrancy expressed in the 1881 *Presbyterian Review*

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<sup>338</sup> McDowell and McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, 17-18.

<sup>339</sup> Carl Hatch, *The Charles A. Briggs Heresy Trial* (New York: Exposition Press INC, 1969), 23.

<sup>340</sup> Barry Waugh, “Warfield and the Briggs Trial: A Bibliography,” In *B.B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought*, ed. Gary Johnson, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2007), 243.

essay “Inspiration” written by Warfield, and co-editors, Briggs, and A. A. Hodge.<sup>341</sup> It was here that Warfield argued that Scripture was fully inspired and error-free.<sup>342</sup>

Finally, in 1891, Briggs’ views on inerrancy, inspiration, the authority of Scripture, and other teachings led to charges of heresy being brought against him by the New York Presbytery, charging him on two accounts. One of the charges accused him of teaching doctrine contradicting the Westminster Standards and Scripture. In 1893, Briggs was “convicted of heresy, and then suspended from the ministry in a later General Assembly action.”<sup>343</sup>

E. Y. Mullins, on the other hand, takes a moderate conservative approach on the issue of inerrancy. Though he was critical of specific scientific theories in his day, Mullins did not feel they threatened the Christian faith. However, he felt that science and philosophy had their respective fields and purposes and should be allowed the freedom to investigate within their realms. Nevertheless, Christianity’s purpose is different and should provide for humanity’s moral and spiritual needs. Mullins also felt that scientists and theologians should recognize this division of labor.<sup>344</sup>

Given the argument of biblical criticism, Mullins believed that its responsible use was essential in studying God’s word. He acknowledged, as well, that higher criticism in reverent scholarship’s hands could be helpful, citing the authority of Scripture was not threatened by open investigation of authorship, date, or text. Some passages must be interpreted literally and figuratively depending on the literary genre. He strongly repudiated creedalism, saying, “No

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<sup>341</sup> Gary Noll, “Introduction” In B.B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought, 5-6.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>343</sup> Waugh, “Warfield and the Briggs Trial: A Bibliography,” In *B.B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought*, 244.

<sup>344</sup> Robson James, *The Unfettered Word*, 116-18.

creed can be set up as final and authoritative apart from the Scriptures.”<sup>345</sup> In this periphery, he identified what he believed were certain truths that all teachers must employ in the schools of his denomination:

The Bible is God’s revelation of himself through men moved by the Holy Spirit, and is our sufficient, certain, and authoritative guide in religion. Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was the divine and eternal Son of God. He wrought miracles, healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead. He died as the vicarious atoning Savior of the world and was buried. He ascended to the right hand of the Father. He will come again in person, the same Jesus who ascended from the Mount of Olives.<sup>346</sup>

Mullins viewed fundamentalism as rigid and mechanical. A better view of Scripture is inductive regarding the Bible as “living,” and speaking for itself. He criticized traditional fundamentalism as being scholastic, citing that any single mistake in matters of science would invalidate the authority of Scripture. Obviously, Mullins could not be categorized with the acceptance of the Hodge-Warfield-Lindsell doctrine of biblical inerrancy, believing that the inductive view “refuses to adopt any abstract or *a priori* starting pointing, but goes directly to the Bible itself for the evidence of its own interpretation.”<sup>347</sup> He clarified that the Bible’s authority derives from its leading people to God through Jesus Christ and relates them to redemptive forces.

The Scriptures do not and cannot take the place of Jesus Christ. We are not saved by belief in the Scriptures, but by a living faith in Christ. To understand what is meant by the phrase the “authority of the Bible” we need only to remember that in so expressing ourselves we are not speaking in vacuo [in a vacuum], and apart from that of a personal object in religion. The authority of Scripture is that simply of an inspired literature which interprets life.<sup>348</sup> In short, Christ as the Revealer of God and Redeemer of men is the seat

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<sup>345</sup> E. Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1912), 7.

<sup>346</sup> An address published in the Annual of the SBC, 1923, as quoted in L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists, and the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 289-90.

<sup>347</sup> E. Y. Mullins, *Freedom, and Authority in Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Griffith and Rowland Press, 1913), 280.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

of authority in religion and above and underneath and before the Bible. But the Bible is the authoritative literature which leads us to Christ.<sup>349</sup>

Though his statements against inerrancy are controversial among those supporting the Hodge-Warfield-Lindsell doctrine, Mullins' view on inerrancy was considered both mainstream and conservative. However, like many others in his camp agreeing with him, he believed that the debate on Scriptural inerrancy divided Christian theologians. The terms "infallibility" and "inerrancy" could be argued for the Bible when rightly understood. Nevertheless, if misunderstood, the mentions can bring discord and confusion. In this defense, Mullins also stated that Ultra inerrantists periodically support a rationally assured perfection that makes human reason, not divine revelation, the final standard.

The conclusion of the 19th century saw the persistence of the inerrancy debate within the academy and church, where biblical scholars were granted the benefit of the doubt to support the doctrine of Scripture's inspiration. However, the last two centuries have seen more evangelical and Reformed scholars retreat from this belief. Modern scholarship's erroneous opinion of inerrancy surfaced to acclimate modern scholars' presumed findings regarding biblical origins, broadly as the concept of theistic evolution emerged to adapt the presumed findings of modern scientists. It is here where the seeds of Cone's tenets for BLT originate.

Cone's refutation of the doctrine of inerrancy in these interrogations was not created in a vacuum. His admiration for certain European theologians influenced not only his liberal but anthropocentric theological perspective. Though BLT claims to reject white theologians and their "whiteness" by loudly proclaiming its independence to speak to and for blacks without desiring white dialog, critical analysis suggests that Cone was influenced more by Euro-American

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<sup>349</sup> E. Y. Mullins, *Freedom, and Authority in Religion*, 394.

theological conceptions than the black religious experience. Thus, black theology should be questioned. Is there a fundamental “black” theology, and is it free from European influence? The answer to both questions is no. H. Wayne House presents the best explanation for these modern theological acrobatics:

The modern liberation movement often combines biblical liberation themes with Marxist ideology and methodology. Wolfhart Pannenberg (Lutheran), Jürgen Moltmann (Reformed), and Johannes Metz (Roman Catholic) represent the theology of hope movement from which more radical political theologians such as Ruben A. Alves, James Cone (black theologian), and Camilo Torres (Roman Catholic), and Gustavo Gutiérrez have developed a theology of violent revolution. Pulling from Marxism more than from Scripture, they pursue a forceful overthrow of oppression and see this as God’s method of working in the world today.<sup>350</sup>

Innately, BLT rejects the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Cone’s salvific standpoint furnishes a confusing interpretation of who must be saved. He wrote, “if the basic truth of the gospel is that the Bible is the infallible word of God, then it is inevitable that more emphasis will be placed upon ‘true’ propositions about God than upon God as active in the liberation of the oppressed of the land.”<sup>351</sup> Thus, the child of God is oppressed and poor, whereas the rich are automatically excluded from the kingdom, an argument that is scripturally and logically wrong.

BLT does not offer an exclusive savior for sin. It replaces the power of God for Black power and the supremacy of Christ for Black supremacy. Its gospel is liberal and social and designed to repay evil for evil. Here, Cone explains his theological argument:

As in 1969, I still regard Jesus Christ today as the chief focus of my perspective on God but not to the exclusion of other religious perspectives. God’s reality is not bound by one manifestation of the divine in Jesus but can be found wherever people are being empowered to fight for freedom. Life-giving power for the poor and the oppressed is the

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<sup>350</sup> House, “An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology.”

<sup>351</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 88.

primary criterion that we must use to judge the adequacy of our theology, not abstract concepts.<sup>352</sup>

BLT provokes its leaders to be primarily central in social issues but insignificant in sin. Its theological system promises to liberate those it commits, but its man-centered and black-centered thinking cannot deliver. BLT's unrealistic hypothesis is flawed and world-conforming.

Proponents of Cone's theology need to be transformed by renewing their minds on Scripture. If not, they cannot discern "God's good and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2). Thus, for BLT, Scripture cannot be inerrant in its theological framework. Rather it is Scripture's deconstruction to fit a "black" narrative that denies the aseity of the God of the Bible and his eternal sovereignty.<sup>353</sup>

The starting point for Christian theology's interrogation of black theology, or any other theology for that matter, is the question, who is Jesus? When one knows who he is, then and only then can one explore where Christ is in one's presence and difficulties and how Christ will provide the help one so desperately needs. The God of Scripture offers all people, in all conditions, a salvation that they absolutely cannot accomplish through their mechanisms. Jesus identified himself without the need of his created beings: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6). Jesus' declaration is the undergird of inerrant holy Scripture, the gospel, and Peter's answer, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). On the other hand, BLT's "eternal" is *now* in this world!

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<sup>352</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 12.

<sup>353</sup> Cone, *A Black Liberation of Theology*, 7. Cone denies the inerrancy of Scripture as distinguishing God's movement in the world. "But there is no perfect guide for discerning God's movement in the world, Contrary to what many conservatives say, the Bible is not a blueprint on this matter. It is a valuable symbol to point to God's revelation in Jesus, but it is not self-interpreting. We are thus placed in an existential situation of freedom in which the burden is on us to make decisions without a guaranteed ethical guide."

## The Autographs

The inerrant original autographs of the Bible are the cornerstone of biblical inerrancy. Many critics of the Bible have worked to understand what inerrancy does and does not mean in its fundamental definition. Therefore, in all cases, clarifying inerrancy must address whether Scripture is trustworthy. Though Jesus and the Jews strongly disagreed on the OT's interpretation and Jesus' identity, they never questioned the trustworthiness of Scripture. The debates between Jesus and the Jews would never have occurred aside from this presupposition.

As discussed previously, Jesus brings credibility to the debate of Scripture's trustworthiness, where one's view should be the Savior's. Beyond this assumption, inerrancy is most illuminated in Scripture. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises, where God's word has come to fruition in the Son, the Word of God. One can conclude that the gospel is proof of God's unfailing word, where Jesus Christ affirms its trustworthiness.

Since, the gospel is the proof that God's word has not failed, what qualifies it as inerrant? Why can one trust Scripture, let alone the gospel? Paul Feinberg delivers these answers in inerrancy's meaning: "When all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences."<sup>354</sup> Feinberg's definition provides two key components. First, inerrancy involves the original autographs. This essential capability of inerrancy is paramount in comprehending the original text of Scripture as "breathed out by God" through human authors (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Second, Scripture is

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<sup>354</sup> Paul Feinberg, *The Meaning of Inerrancy, in Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 294.



“wholly” true. Kevin Vanhoozer said, “To say that Scripture is inerrant is to confess faith that the authors speak the truth in all things they affirm (when they make affirmations).”<sup>355</sup> Regardless of what Scripture declares, it is trustworthy. “Wholly” does not limit inerrancy to the main doctrinal message, but includes those to whom God “breathed upon,” who affirm the message as well. Inerrancy applies to all areas including ethical instruction, and is both verbal and plenary, as inspiration is.

When critics of the Bible detect errors in copies of Scripture, they suppose that the Bible includes fallacies. Karl Barth, for example, did not believe in the inerrancy of the Bible or its infallibility— accordingly, the Bible is a human work, not the word of God. He regarded Scripture as having two natures— divine and human. Bernard Ramm believed that the advantage of confronting Barth was to reply first to his conception of the human nature of Scripture. “Any doctrine of Holy Scripture and its inspiration that does not come to the fullest, frankest, most honest confrontation with the full range of the humanity of Holy Scripture will certainly be written off as obscurantist.”<sup>356</sup> Ramm’s stated intent was an outcry to those pretending to deal with Scripture’s humanity while correspondingly minimizing the significance of anything visible, making this point accurate. The reality of Barth’s controversial theological position on inerrancy proved far more significant than what was comfortable for evangelical theology.

However, as remarked in his volume, *Church Dogmatics*, it did not appear to be an issue for him.

If God was not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words of the Bible, of their historical and scientific inaccuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition, and, above all, their Judaism, but adopted and made use of these

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<sup>355</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Augustinian Inerrancy: Literary Meaning, Literal Truth, and Literate Interpretation in the Economy of Biblical Discourse,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 207.

<sup>356</sup> Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1993), 101.

expressions in all their fallibility as witness, and it is mere self-will and disobedience to try to find some infallible elements in the Bible.<sup>357</sup>

Barth's assertion that "God is not embarrassed by the fallibility of his witness" is arrogant, to say the least, and should provoke serious inquiry. How does Barth know what bothers God? Is there Scripture to support his opinion? For Barth, this idea seems to be common knowledge for someone pushing an agenda of a perfect God's need for a perfect Bible dictated perfectly without needing a human element in writing his self-revelation. His statement appears to be a presupposition that humans do err, but is this really his point?

Ramm believes that Barth is not stating ontologically that to be human is to err but that the reality is both observable and empirical. Instead of a presupposition, Barth's observation is accurate regarding human behavior. For him, the biblical text is only true if man errs. If a man does not, theologians embrace the humanity of the Scriptures instead of its reality.<sup>358</sup>

In addition, Barth reflects that the Bible is normative<sup>359</sup> and infallible<sup>360</sup>, affirming that it is totally and completely divine. While accepting the Bible's humanity, Barth believes it is "becoming" because of its inspiration. Because of this encounter, the Bible is both true and authoritative for the church. "Becoming" reflects God's person. John Morrison explains:

...for Barth God's, 'being in becoming' reflects the fact that the living God can reveal himself, and that this is a capacity of pure grace and does not arise from necessity. God's revelation is his Self-interpretation; in God's revelation 'God's word is identical with God himself.' Revelation is that event in which the being of God comes to word, and

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<sup>357</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 531.

<sup>358</sup> Bernard Ramm, *After Fundamentalism*, 104.

<sup>359</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 7.

<sup>360</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 23.

Revelation is, too God's free decision in eternity to be our God, and so to bring himself to speech for us.<sup>361</sup>

By making the Scriptures an eyewitness to the revelation event, Barth states that Scripture is a recording of that revelation and becomes the Word of God as the Holy Spirit meets the reader at present, making God always active in bringing revelation to his people.

### **Autographs of Black Liberation?**

Barth's theological premises are the basis of Cone's deliberate hermeneutical exploits in BLT. For Cone, Barth is the epicenter of this theological perspective. His dependence on Barth offered the needed direction for creating BLT, though the numerous incompatibilities would cause some followers of Barth to reject Cone's later views.

The fourth and last weakness that I wish to comment on was my inordinate methodological dependence upon the neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth. Many of my critics (black and white) have emphasized this point. It is a legitimate criticism, and I can offer no explanation except that to say that neo-orthodoxy was to me what liberal theology was to Martin Luther King, Jr.--the only theological system with which I was intellectually comfortable, and which seemed compatible with the centrality of Jesus Christ in the black church community. I knew then as I know now that neo-orthodoxy was inadequate for my purposes, and that most American theologians who claimed that theological identity would vehemently reject my use of Karl Barth to interpret black theology. However, I did not have the time to develop a completely new perspective in doing theology. I had to use what I regarded as the best of my graduate education.<sup>362</sup>

Cone's former statement exposes BLT as an interpretation of neo-orthodox theology. However, some of its concepts are not emphasized or, in some cases, veiled in ways to conceal their similarities. This disclosure is evident in Cone's statement that he "did not have the time to

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<sup>361</sup> John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said?: Scripture, the Word of God, and the Cross of Theological Authority* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 156.

<sup>362</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xvii.

develop a completely new perspective in doing theology.”<sup>363</sup> A more unambiguous indication revealing that Cone’s version of theology borrows from Barth but adds the rudimentary elements of race, social, economic, and political dogmas to differentiate it from others is without question. Cone’s use of these elements to legitimize that BLT is Christian interprets them through the personal experiences of “black” folk, namely the oppressed.

This point is critical to understanding how Cone speaks to the subject of the original autographs. Since BLT is communicated through one’s experiences and can be understood to fit modern cultural ideas, the biblical authors are not God’s authoritative voices of Scripture but are merely writers in obscurity. Therefore, there is no consideration nor reference to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek manuscripts of Scripture. Neither Scripture’s infallibility or inerrancy exist according to Cone. BLT’s basis for authority is anthropocentric, rather than Christ and Scripture. The common experience among black people in America elevated by BLT is the supreme test of truth. The biblical gospel is not only deconstructed but repackaged as a social gospel that “knows no authority more binding than the experience of oppression itself. This alone must be the ultimate authority in religious matters.”<sup>364</sup>

The essence of black liberationist thought is slave theology, which eventually gave rise to black activism. Throughout black history, many figures contributed to the cause of black liberation, providing the fundamental starting point and basic framework for Cone’s formal introduction of Black Liberation Theology based on the “black experience.” The following list

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<sup>363</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xvii.

<sup>364</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 121.

provided by Ron Rhoades is only a sample of the authoritative voices which gave rise to black thought.<sup>365</sup>

- Nat Turner (1800-1831) was the most notorious slave preacher who ever lived on American soil. Turner's hatred of slavery propelled him to seek freedom by violence. Indeed, Turner killed nearly sixty white people before being captured and hanged in September 1831. This violent revolt marked the beginning of the black struggle for liberation.
- Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) is regarded by many as “the apostle of black theology in the United States of America.”<sup>366</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., said Garvey “was the first man on a mass scale and level to give millions of Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny, and make the Negro feel he is somebody.”<sup>367</sup> Garvey was one of the first to speak of seeing God through black “spectacles.”
- Howard Thurman, in his book *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949), saw black life paralleling Jesus' life because His poverty identified Him with the poor masses. Thurman also noted that Jesus was a member of a minority group (the Jews) in the midst of a larger and controlling dominant group (the Romans). Thurman thus drew many applications for the black experience from the life of Jesus.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) was America' most visible civil rights leader from 1955 until his assassination in April 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. Though he cannot be called a formal participant in the black theology movement, he nevertheless roused the conscience of black America to passionate commitment to liberation. King was an advocate of Ghanaian nonviolent social change. Through nonviolent suffering, King believed that “blacks would not only liberate themselves from the necessity of bitterness and the feeling of inferiority toward whites but would also prick the conscience of whites and liberate them from a feeling of superiority.”<sup>368</sup> To some, King's assassination indicated that nonviolence as a means of liberation had failed and that perhaps a more revolutionary theology was needed.

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<sup>365</sup>Ron Rhoades, “Black Theology, Black Power, and the Black Experience,” *CRI*, Statement DL-100-2. Rhoades short compilation of black historical figures represents the building blocks of black liberationist thought. One notes the distinction of these men and the period in which they communicated their ideas. It is also noted that Cone's communication, though a formal introduction of BLT in the 1960's, was the emergence of these expressions on a grander scale reflecting early slavery thought which gave rise to black power being expressed as a new starting point in theology. These early writings would reflect BLT's idea of the autographs sent out to others who would eventually communicate a theology from black experiences.

<sup>366</sup> Lindsay A. Arscott, “Black Theology,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 10 (April-June 1986): 137.

<sup>367</sup> Quoted by Clair Drake, Foreword to *Garveyism as a Religious Movement*, Randall Burkett (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 15.

<sup>368</sup> James Cone, “Black Theology in American Religion,” *Theology Today* 43 (April 1986): 13.

- Albert Cleage was one of the more militant black writers of the 1960s. His claim to fame was *The Black Messiah*, a 1968 collection of sermons in which he set forth his brand of black nationalism. Cleage rejected the Pauline books in the New Testament. He said that — in contrast to the black Messiah — there was a spiritualized Jesus constructed by the apostle Paul who “never knew Jesus and who modified his teaching to conform to the pagan philosophers of the white gentiles.... We, as black Christians suffering oppression in a white man’s land, do not need the individualistic and other-worldly doctrines of Paul and the white man.”<sup>369</sup>

The suspicion that Cone’s theological beliefs are antithetical to the doctrine of inerrancy is unmistakable in his deficient view of the authority of Scripture. Undoubtedly, Cone’s words challenge his lack of hermeneutical regard for sacred Scripture. “It is true that the Bible is not the revelation of God; only Christ is. But it is an indispensable witness to God’s revelation.”<sup>370</sup> Scripture’s meaning is not in its words but in its power further away than itself to the reality of God’s “revelation,” which, in the case of BLT, is unpacked as taking place in the experiences of God’s liberating work among blacks in America. Therefore, the reader, in one’s experience, not the original authors, is the interpreter of Scripture. “Inerrant Original Autographs are therefore a tautology of Biblical Inerrancy and tells us nothing about the nature of the first sources of the Bible and tell us everything about the flawed presuppositions of Biblical Inerrancy.”<sup>371</sup> Nevertheless, 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “God breathes out all Scripture.” Paul’s implication is the actual document, not simply the authors of Scripture. Not the copies of Scripture are inerrant, but the biblical author’s original manuscripts.<sup>372</sup> This understanding should not create suspicion or distrust but provides that God uses flawed individuals for his purposes.

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<sup>369</sup> Albert B. Cleage, *The Black Messiah* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 4.

<sup>370</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 66.

<sup>371</sup> “The Errors of Inerrancy: #2 Inerrant Original Autographs are a Tautology of Biblical Inerrancy”, *PostBarthian*, <https://postbarthian.com/2016/10/02/errors-inerrancy-2-inerrant-original-autographs-tautology-biblical-inerrancy/>.

<sup>372</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa,” in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 182 (ed. 173).

## Infallibility

Scripture renders that God’s word is incapable of error. This fundamental meaning of infallibility explains a perfect God whose revelation about himself is also perfect. Both of these truths are entwined and cannot be divided. “So, when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:17-18).

All that one knows about God comes from Scripture. So, if God cannot lie, then his word is also unable to lie. Harold Lindsell stated: “From the historical perspective it can be said that for two thousand years the Christian church has agreed that the Bible is completely trustworthy; it is infallible or inerrant.”<sup>373</sup> However, the postmodern church stands at the crossroads of renouncing the traditions of Scripture’s infallibility, responding to higher criticism and evolutionary science’s many false claims. Even more troubling are the compromises of evangelicals like their liberal counterparts who reject Scripture and its claims about itself.

Bart Ehrman, for example, once considered himself an evangelical Christian, but now identifies as a Christian, agnostic/atheist. He does not believe that Jesus was the son of God or that he was raised from the dead, or even that God exists. Nevertheless, Ehrman asks, “But can’t I be a Christian in a different sense, one who follows Jesus’ teachings?”<sup>374</sup> Sadly, today, in many liberal and conservative seminaries, this moving of the goalposts to accommodate these

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<sup>373</sup> Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible: The Book that Rocked the Evangelical World* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1976), 19.

<sup>374</sup> Barth Ehrman, “Why I Am Not A Christian: Is Bart Ehrman a Christian?”, The Bart Ehrman Blog (blog), April 2, 2022, <https://ehrmanblog.org/why-i-am-not-a-christian/>.

suggested philosophies increasingly challenges or denies the authority of Scripture entirely.

Ehrman stated:

I kept reverting to my basic question: how does it help us to say that the Bible is the inerrant word of God if in fact we don't have the words that God inerrantly inspired, but only the words copied by the scribes—sometimes correctly but sometimes (many times!) incorrectly? What good is it to say that the autographs (i.e., the originals) were inspired? We don't have the originals! We have only error-ridden copies...<sup>375</sup>

Defending the Bible's authority, reliability, and inerrancy will continue to be a constant battle for each new generation of conservative Christians. Harold Martin noted: "The inspiration and authority of the Bible is the foundation upon which the entire edifice of Christian truth is standing. If this foundation falters, the whole Christian faith goes with it. Thus, it is against this foundation, the reliability of Scripture, that Satan launches his most vicious attacks."<sup>376</sup>

Stated formerly, the marginalization of the divine author of Scripture is the antithetical backlash of the wholesale rejection of spiritual senses and the concept of fuller meaning. "Without any spiritual meaning, the Bible could be viewed merely as a historical document"<sup>377</sup> with churchmen applying biblical texts however they like. By focusing on the human author and rejecting the Spirit's inspiration of Scripture, the divine word of God ceases to be for the church. What many scholars believed a century ago as dichotomies in Scripture have been settled with time and study. Neglect of the Spirit's role will also determine that insurmountable hurdles cannot be overcome. Nevertheless, when God's Spirit illuminates these challenges in Scripture, they become small speedbumps when one can better understand its meaning. In this case,

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<sup>375</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 7.

<sup>376</sup> J. Otis Yoder & Harold S. Martin, *Biblical Inerrancy and Reliability* (Harrisonburg VA: Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites, 1985), 30.

<sup>377</sup> Stanglin, *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation*, 181.



Scripture, when correctly interpreted, is inerrant. The importance of hermeneutics provides discernment for affirming and asserting what Scripture is saying or what it is not. Considering biblical genres ensures that one does not force the text to say something it does not. One must also distinguish between Scripture's inerrant text and one's fallible interpretations. Should a contradiction occur between two texts of the Bible, the first presumption should be that one's understanding requires correction, not Scripture. Allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture provides a more accurate interpretation when the clear text is used to interpret the one appearing ambiguous.<sup>378</sup>

### **Fallibility of Scripture: Hermeneutics in Black Liberation Theology**

Reading and interpreting the Bible today is often done with modern views of truth and precision, providing a misunderstanding of the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility. Often critics of Scripture deny the Bible's inerrancy by imposing a modern standard, only to conclude that Scripture is fallible because it fails to match modern standards of precision. This concept allows extra-biblical phenomena to refine the biblical concept of truth and levies that Scripture can be interpreted to suit modern cultural views.

Cone's words are essentially Barthian in that "we should not conclude that the Bible is an infallible witness."<sup>379</sup> Black theology is pragmatic. The success of action determines truth. Orthodoxy retains no supreme criterion because being orthodox does not mean possessing the final truth. The truth, defined in theology and biblical interpretation, is valid only when it serves as the basis for human attitudes. "Doers of the truth" is the formula used by divine revelation to

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<sup>378</sup> On inerrancy and hermeneutics, see J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 325-58.

<sup>379</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 67.

stress the priority of orthopraxis over orthodoxy regarding truth and salvation.<sup>380</sup> Thus, BLT's perspective is "God in action, delivering the oppressed because of His righteousness. He is to be seen, not in the transcendent way of Greek philosophy, but immanent, among His people."<sup>381</sup>

House's examination of BLT's hermeneutical methods exposes a fusion of black thought, black power, and other idealistic views of Scripture that are communicated through the lens of the oppressed and their associated groups. Biblical interpretation results in variations of theological responses related to contemporary social, economic and political issues. These responses will change as the culture changes or if another theological response is needed. "God in action" is this requirement as he works through those who work for liberation.

A clear example of BLT's hermeneutics on display is from black author, Esau McCaulley's *Reading While Black*. McCaulley advocates for "Black ecclesial interpretation" of the Bible. McCaulley believes that a partial picture exists when one mentions black biblical interpretation. Accordingly, the usual response is Cone's BLT, but he indicates that conversion and holiness are included in black biblical interpretation and that black pulpits have brought all three concurrently:

[T]here is no one Black tradition, but at least three streams: revolutionary/nationalistic, reformist/transformist, and conformist. Much of the modern academic dialogue highlights the heirs to the revolutionary and conformist tradition.... I noticed that there were some common tendencies among the reformist/transformist stream. I named this the Black ecclesial tradition because I think it lives on in pulpits even if it is less often in print.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 32.

<sup>381</sup> H. Wayne House, "An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139 (April-June 1982): 163.

<sup>382</sup> Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 183.

Expressing concerns for African American experiences with police officers, McCaulley stated that there exists a “historic legal enforcement of racial discrimination and terror visited on Black bodies.”<sup>383</sup> To express this controversy, he uses Romans 13 and then identifies what he notices as a problem— wicked rulers. McCaulley’s question is not whether one should submit to wicked rulers, but why would they exist? Manipulating Romans 9:17, he notes that God removed Pharaoh, a wicked ruler. Though concluding that Romans 13:1-2 indicates God’s sovereignty, McCaulley develops a Christian theology of policing by demonstrating the Bible’s demands for the accountability of governing authorities of the state (13:3-4) and individual police officers (Lk. 3:14). Thus, his resolve concerning policing is interpreted in this approach: “If we undertake this task of calling on the officer and the state to be what God called them to be, then maybe the hopes of Black folks as they relate to the police in this country might be fulfilled.”<sup>384</sup>

McCaulley’s use of Scripture to construct a theological judgment on policing is a prime example of interpreting the Bible to fit a postmodern perspective. His foremost hermeneutical method of personal experience is typical of BLT, where, in this case, the oppressed are black people’s experiences in America with bad policing, and all aspects of theology are subjugated to this theme that infers a biblical answer to a social issue. But is McCaulley’s explanation of Romans 13:1-5; 9:17, and Luke 3:14 what holy Scripture pronounces? Does its meaning justify a defense for postmodernism’s social inclinations?

Paul’s principle in Romans 13:1-5 is the importance of the gospel’s eschatological essence (12:1-2; 13:11-14). One who has faith in the gospel will experience rejection and persecution from a fallen world in defiance of its Creator (12:14, 18-21; cf. 5:1-11; 8:17-39).

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<sup>383</sup> McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 28.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

Paul affirms that God has ordained all earthly government and that the gospel is to be understood in this context. Otherwise, believers might falsely apprehend the gospel to command the repudiation of all secular authority, potentially ushering one to defiance or rebellion. Within this narrow context, the teaching implied is clear. All are subject to governing authorities since no authority is given but from God. Opposing earthly authority is opposing God's authority (13:1-2). The directive is deeply rooted in early Judaism and biblical thought. It references the Jeremican injunction to Judean exiles to "seek the welfare of the city" where God had sent them (Jer. 29:1-23). Daniel's exilic narrative correspondingly echoes Nebuchadnezzar having to realize that God gives sovereignty over the "kingdom of human beings" to whom he wills, though Belshazzar, his son, suffered waste for failing to heed this instruction (Dan. 4:25, 32; 5:21, 22-28). These two examples communicate God's temporal limits on earthly governments and declare his sovereignty's confession. Early Judaism broadly understood that God appointed earthly rulers and that they were held accountable by him (Wis. 6:1-11; *b. Ber.* 58a).<sup>385</sup>

McCaulley's reference to Romans 9:17, describing Pharaoh as a wicked ruler, misconstrues Paul's interpretation. "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.'" The rule of Pharaoh was God's will at the time of the exodus for his sovereign purposes (Ex. 9:16). The performance of God's signs and wonders was provoked by Pharaoh's hardened heart, causing God's "name" to become universally known in all the earth. "So, then he [God] has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills." Perhaps, Craig

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<sup>385</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 681-82.

Blomberg's advice could help McCaulley here: "In some cases, historical information illuminates an often-misunderstood detail of a text."<sup>386</sup>

Lastly, in this examination of McCaulley's hermeneutics is Luke 3:14 for a biblical demand for individual police officers' social accountability. The context of Luke 3 occurs in God's action in redemptive history in the appearance of "the word of God" to John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. This text describes a new act of God and the arrival of his salvation, an echo of the language of Israel's prophets (cf. Jer. 1:1-3). The Lukan reference to Isaiah 40:3-5 calls for the wilderness transformation in anticipation of the Lord's return, the second exodus, and the "way" motif signifying the salvific act of God on behalf of his people. This "way" is for both God (Isa. 40:3) and his people (42:16; 43:16-19; 49:11-12).<sup>387</sup> The underlying message of Luke 3 is repentance, signifying a change of heart and the anticipation of the gospel spreading amongst the Gentiles. Those refusing God's salvific acts are described as "you brood of vipers" (3:7). The "ax" imagery of the OT (Isa. 10:33-34) describes the fate the enemies of God will suffer. Jews view Roman oppression in the persons of the tax collectors and their guards, soldiers, who were probably local police rather than members of the army. A repenting heart on behalf of these officials will ultimately have personal and social implications. Conceivably, this idea is McCaulley's use of Luke 3:14.

BLT's hermeneutical exercise is accomplished through a variety of methods. As previously examined, McCaulley promoted a "Black ecclesial interpretation" of the Bible. His belief, though seemingly suggesting a new and more critical method for biblical interpretation, is

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<sup>386</sup> Craig L. Blomberg and Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 83.

<sup>387</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 280.

not distinctive but employs Cone's basic theological assumption that Scripture is fallible and not God's authoritative word. Employing this specific standpoint for biblical interpretation, black liberation theologians, on the one hand, may use the proof-text method, but on the other hand, will use the reader-responsive method, a combination of these, or as Cone does, a method that interprets Scripture from personal experience. The proof-text method ignores context and relies on a naive reading of the biblical text, whereas the reader-responsive method allows the reader to be the sole interpreter to determine what the text now means. Any combination of these two methods, or a hermeneutic solely grounded by one's personal experience, is untrue in their ability to communicate the divine Author's meaning of holy Scripture. As for Cone and those who follow his black theology, without God's scepter to lead them, their thoughts and accompanying words are the maneuverings of men with their sinful hearts exposed. Such is the case with Raphael Warnock.

Warnock, a black author, pastor, politician, and former student of Cone, presents another example of postmodernism's biblical interpretation utilizing an inexplicable but familiar hermeneutic associated with BLT. He offers a theology that addresses religion and politics, noting that a theology that does not is considered privileged. This concept is not new but an embroidered version of Cone's theology. For example, Warnock, in his book, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness*, emphasized that any solely pietistic theology serves the interest of white and rich people and preserves the political *status quo*. The gospel, on the other hand, he claims, disrupts the privileged people's domination. This idea is not original to Warnock but echoes Clarence Hilliard's perspective of Jesus as a suffering, oppressed, poor Jew in a Roman-dominated world who came to the oppressed to promise them freedom and hope. The rejected of society can know God's concern through Christ, who is God's

expression in history. “Jesus stood with and for the poor and oppressed and disinherited. He came for the sick and needy.... He came into the world as the ultimate ‘nigger’ of the universe.”<sup>388</sup> Some blacks acknowledge that he was politically and violently battling the first century’s *status quo*.<sup>389</sup>

Warnock’s biblical interpretation of Luke 4:18 and statement that God became human in Jesus to bring “good news to the poor” and “woe to the rich,” utilizing Luke 6: 20, is almost verbatim of Cone<sup>390</sup> and Hilliard’s declaration of Jesus coming to and becoming one of the oppressed.<sup>391</sup> Warnock adds that this idea “is expressed in apocalyptic terms, by the church community in an extreme situation of oppression as they hold out for God’s judgment against systemic oppression and the coming of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’” (Rev. 21:1a).<sup>392</sup> Additionally, he believes that interpreting these biblical texts as oppositional is the basis on which the black church is called. Warnock explains,

I posit all of this as an oppositional hermeneutic and the biblical basis on which the black church is called on to resist the encroachment of an uncritical biblicism that ignores that which is central to the mission of the church, reentering the biblical matrix of its own liberationist heritage as carried out by black churches during the first through third moments of African American Christian resistance to racism. Moreover, if the mission of the true church cannot be understood apart from the mission of Christ, then a black faith that truly sees truncated notions of God’s salvation as a heresy against God and a sin against the poor must embrace a self-consciously oppositional thesis—a thesis signified by black theologians through the transvaluative meaning of the cross and “the Black Christ.”<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Clarence Hilliard, “Down with the Honky Christ—Up with the Funky Jesus,” *Christianity Today*, January 30, 1976: 6.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>390</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2-3.

<sup>391</sup> Hilliard, “Down with the Honky Christ”, 6.

<sup>392</sup> Raphael Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014), 181.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-60.

An additional investigation of Warnock's interpretive methods delivers miscellaneous social issues framed by manipulating Scripture. One such illustration is the Savior's sacrificial death on the cross, where Warnock proposes that black women's bodily service to the community aligns with Jesus, who is traditionally seen as a surrogate or servant used to offer bodily sacrifice on the cross. This comparison warrants black theology to reevaluate how Jesus' cross is analyzed and revised in postmodernism. These modern assertions opened the doors to intersectionality, prohibiting the church from solely focusing on racial injustice without considering gender injustice and all forms of oppression. Accordingly, one who works for racial justice must also work for women's liberation with the uplift of LBGTQ+ persons and the environment. Similarly, Warnock urged the environment be revealed clearly as an exploited entity.<sup>394</sup>

Warnock expressed in the *Jesuit Post* that the Christianity on display at the U. S. Capitol's invasion on January 6, 2021, was not "good for anything" and should be "thrown out," citing Matthew 5:13. Rather than displaying a liberation force for the oppressed as Jesus did, the riot was a tool of "white capitalistic forces."<sup>395</sup> In *The Divided Mind*, Warnock used this phrase to describe the false church, as did Cone in *Black Theology and Black Power*,<sup>396</sup> referring to white Christianity as "the anti-Christ" emerging from within and denying the embodiment of Christ (2 Jn. 1:7). If Warnock's hermeneutics are not questionable, then perhaps his statement concerning Easter is: "The meaning of Easter is more transcendent than the resurrection of Jesus

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<sup>394</sup> Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 153-60.

<sup>395</sup> David Incauskissj, "Raphael Warnock's Black Liberation Theology and the Faux Christianity of the Capitol Insurrection", *The Jesuit Post*, Jan. 11, 2021: <https://thejesuitpost.org/2021/01/raphael-warnocks-liberation-theology-represents-a-starkly-different-christianity-than-the-capitol-invaders/>.

<sup>396</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 73.



Christ. Whether you are Christian or not, through a commitment to helping others we are able to save ourselves.”<sup>397</sup>

The proof text for BLT is Luke 4:18-19, always identified as the call for Jesus to fight for the oppressed.<sup>398</sup> This hermeneutic, among others utilized, is the approach and rationale to weaponize Scripture as its just cause. However, a critical look at the biblical text explains something much more significant than what Cone and other black liberation theologians deny—Jesus as Lord, Savior, and the Son of God. This contradiction is evident in the narrative of BLT, which denies the need for Jesus as the Savior of redemption from sin. These mentions are evident in the Warnock review, embracing both Cone’s and Hilliard’s understanding where all deny the infallibility of Scripture.

Luke 3:4-6 defines Jesus’ ministry, where its significance is seated in the broader context of salvation history. The Nazareth sermon opens with the identity of Jesus being revealed by the Father’s heavenly voice in the baptismal setting where the Son is introduced, his genealogy revealed, and his temptation in the wilderness, additionally presenting his ministry. At the center

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<sup>397</sup> Michelle Boorstein, “Sen. Raphael Warnock’s Deleted Easter Tweet Reflects Religious and Political Chasms About Christianity”, *The Washington Post*, April 5, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2021/04/05/raphael-warnock-deletes-tweet-easter-resurrection-jeremiah-wright/>.

<sup>398</sup> A direct quote from Cone argues the gospel is liberation theology: “In the New Testament, the theme of liberation is reaffirmed by Jesus himself. The conflict with Satan and the powers of this world, the condemnation of the rich, the insistence that the kingdom of God is for the poor, and the locating of his ministry among the poor—these and other features of the career of Jesus show that his work was directed to the oppressed for the purpose of their liberation. To suggest that he was speaking of a “spiritual” liberation fails to take seriously Jesus’ thoroughly Hebrew view of human nature. Entering into the kingdom of God means that Jesus himself becomes the ultimate loyalty of humanity, for *he is the kingdom*. This view of existence in the world has far reaching implications for economic, political, and social institutions. They can no longer have ultimate claim on human life; human beings are liberated and thus free to rebel against all powers that threaten human life. That is what Jesus had in mind when he said: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19).” See James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Press, 2007), 2-3.

of these events is Jesus being given the scroll and reading from Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6, bringing a renewed focus on the prophet's message. The anticipation of "good news" is provided in Isaiah 58-60, where God's promise of salvation accompanies the call to repentance. The culmination, however, is the individual anointed by the Spirit of God to make this announcement— a parallel to the servant figure in Isaiah 40-55. Citing Isaiah 58:6-9, the broader context of "to set the oppressed free," an infinitive clause, contributes to the collection of metaphors defining the good news. God's people are called to act justly— the prophet, in turn, points to how the righteousness of God can be acted out.<sup>399</sup>

The critical importance of Luke 4 is understanding the person and work of Jesus in His earthly ministry. As indicated in Isaiah 53, the Servant of the Lord's mission is to bear people's sins as Savior. He is to be Lord and conqueror, the One who brings salvation and judgment, God's redemption, and wrath. The anointing of which the prophet speaks is the power of the sovereign God upon the Messiah who would come and minister in this power. This message indicates that Jesus was anointed by the Spirit to preach the gospel to the poor— not just to the physically poor, but to those described as the poor in spirit. Spiritual bankruptcy is this personal acknowledgment. It is not a surprise that Matthew 5:3 declares that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit. As one recalls the Sermon on the Mount, one does not possess the spiritual resources to practice its tenets. One cannot fulfill God's standards without the Savior's intervention. It is clear that this is not the view of Cone and BLT: "To suggest that he [Jesus] was speaking of a "spiritual" liberation fails to take seriously Jesus' thoroughly Hebrew view of human nature."<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Beale and Carson, *Commentary on The New Testament*, 286.

<sup>400</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2-3.

God's infallible word does not possess a "Black ecclesial" hermeneutic, as suggested by McCaulley. Neither does it suggest that Jesus is black, nor does it indicate "black power," as Cone and other black theologians contend. Similarly, as proposed by Warnock, Jesus is not a surrogate compared to black women's bodily service to their communities, nor the gospel activist advocating postmodernism's social dialog on LGBTQ+ and environmental issues. Instead, OT Scripture is fulfilled in Jesus, the reigning Messiah, whose ministry on the cross is the means of liberation from sin rather than from one's earthly oppressors. This message is clear, as indicated in John 1:1-4. Jesus is the Word of God and Creator of all things unto himself. He came to proclaim liberty to all afar off from captivity and slavery to the world, Satan, and sin (Acts 10:38; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; Rom. 6:23).

### **Inerrancy of the Whole**

Infallibility and inerrancy indicate that the original texts of the Bible are "God-breathed." Scholars who are advocates of biblical inerrancy concede that there is a possibility for human error in exposition and translation, and consequently only uphold as the Word of God when those interpretations "faithfully represent the original."<sup>401</sup> The following statement is significant: "We deny that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science."<sup>402</sup> In the former "Short Statement," of the CSBI 1978 article, the subsequent is affirmed:

Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world

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<sup>401</sup> *The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy*, Article X.

<sup>402</sup> The 1978 ICBI statement is found in Norman L. Geisler, ed. *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 493-497. The first quotation above is from Article 12 of the statement.

history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.<sup>403</sup>

John R. W. Stott, a critic of this view, stated, “Simply to say that the Bible is inerrant may be misleading because there are things contained in the Bible that are not affirmed by the Bible. What does it affirm in Genesis 1, 2, 3? Is it affirming that the world, the universe was made in six days or not? So, we have to argue about the hermeneutical question.”<sup>404</sup>

Those who oppose the inerrantist’s viewpoint contend that the Bible embraces and declares certainties regarding science, history, and geography. However, the view from inerrancy states: Scriptures affirm soteriological matters, not matters of a scientific, geographical, or historical perspective, except as these latter questions are inevitably associated with its soteriological cases. This position is reemphasized in the second Chicago Statement of 1982,

Article 6:

We deny that, while Scripture is able to make us wise unto salvation, biblical truth should be defined in terms of this function.<sup>405</sup>

Harold Lindsell argues that it is a “gross distortion” to assert that individuals who consider the inerrancy of Scripture presume each statement made in the Bible is true (as opposed to accurate).<sup>406</sup> He expressed that there are false statements in the Bible, but they are reported accurately.<sup>407</sup> “All the Bible does, for example, in the case of Satan, is to report what Satan

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<sup>403</sup> “The Short Statement,” *The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy*, International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Chicago, IL., The Short Statement.

<sup>404</sup> “The Church in the Modern World,” *Mission Journal*, (October 19, 1985), 3-7.

<sup>405</sup> Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus, ed., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), 892.

<sup>406</sup> Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 38.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*

actually said. Whether what he said was true or false is another matter. Christ stated that the devil is a liar.”<sup>408</sup>

Norman Geisler suggested another view of inerrancy that echoes Lindsell’s indications against inerrancy, though he proposes that the literal interpretation of Scripture should be examined in seeing both scientific and historical information.

Many who believe in the *inspiration* of scripture teach that it is infallible but not inerrant. Those who subscribe to infallible believe that what the scriptures say regarding matters of faith and Christian practice are wholly useful and accurate. Some denominations that teach infallibility hold that the historical or scientific details, which may be irrelevant to matters of faith and Christian practice, may contain errors. Those who believe in inerrancy hold that the scientific, geographic, and historical details of the scriptural texts in their original manuscripts are entirely accurate and without error. However, the scientific claims of scripture must be interpreted in the light of its phenomenological nature, not just with strict, clinical literality, which was foreign to historical narratives.<sup>409</sup>

Grant Osborne highlights several key points concerning the simplicity and clarity of Scripture and the correct administration of hermeneutical principles and exegetical practices. One committed to proper interpretive procedures has a keen understanding of the use of appropriate hermeneutic principles. The faithful interpreter holds power to grasp the author’s thoughts by taking its full authority and heading at a glance while possessing the ability to sharply observe the text with a clear understanding of the import of words, phrases, historical data, and the author’s drift.

According to Osborne, hermeneutics has only considered the reader’s power to understand Scripture and interpret it independently very recently. The assumption of “reading is to understand” has often been overstated, especially after Scottish “common sense” gave the

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<sup>408</sup> Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 38.

<sup>409</sup> Norman Geisler and William Nix., *A General Introduction to the Bible*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 17.

impression that the reader of Scripture can interpret it by the surface text's information alone without the need for hermeneutical principles. However, this is improper because every reader of Scripture brings a bias or preunderstanding of the biblical text inherited from one's beliefs or ideas inherited from one's background. In this logic, everyone is a "reader response" interpreter. Nevertheless, the problem with this perspective is that it can engender one's prejudices influencing or forcing the biblical text to conform to one's conceptions. The result of some of these individualized interpretations of Scripture invades today's church having their cause and effect in this hermeneutical process's perspicuity, leading to more misunderstanding and even heresy amongst those who ignore the basic principles of interpretation.<sup>410</sup> "Therefore, in the text above Sacred Scripture is commended for three things: First, for the authority with which it changes: 'This is the book of the commandments of God.' Second, for the eternal truth with which it instructs', and third, for the usefulness with which it entices, when it says: 'all that keep it shall come to life.'"<sup>411</sup>

### **The Chicago Statement**

Articles 9, 10, 11, and 12 encounter the word of God and inerrancy by defining key terms and answering questions regarding this concern. The early articles acknowledge that human authors delivered the Bible to humanity. Acknowledging that human beings err would conclude that the Bible is necessarily errant. However, is this the issue? Does the Bible cease to be authentically human if it does not contain errors? If inerrancy only applies to the original autographs, is the argument meaningless because the original manuscripts do not exist? Why

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<sup>410</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 27.

<sup>411</sup> Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, 5-6.

can't inerrancy be applied to salvation, history, science, and other "unimportant" or "non-essential matters?" These inquiries are dealt with at this time.

### **Inerrancy**

Article 9 states: "We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the biblical authors were moved to speak and write. We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word."<sup>412</sup> Inerrancy, as this article implies, guarantees that Scriptures are true and trustworthy and are not deceptive, false, or fraudulent in their communication.

As Article 4 dealt with the limitations of human language, Article 9 encounters truth being spoken by non-omniscient creatures. God conferred infallibility to Scripture, but did he confer omniscience to its writers? This inquiry distinguishes infallibility from omniscience, though, for God, the two are united. For men, there is a difference. Omniscience correlates to knowledge and infallibility, not the trustworthiness of one's pronouncements. One who intends to deceive can make a false statement, and one with little knowledge can make infallible statements if guaranteed to be trustworthy. Though the biblical writings are inspired, it does not mean that the writers knew everything or were infallible. Though what they communicate is not exhaustive, it is true and trustworthy.

As a fallen creature, man's proclivity to offer distortion or error into God's word is one's denial of Article 9, a point previously delivered by Article 6. The frequent charge that verbal inspiration or the confession of Scripture's inerrancy holds a docetic view, where it relates to a certain misshaping of the biblical view of Jesus, is now in plain view. During the Christian

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<sup>412</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 39.

church's earlier days, the school of Gnosticism assumed that Jesus did not possess human nature or body but only the impression. The heresy of Docetism denied the incarnation of Jesus and argued that he had a phantom body. However, Docetism, in its more sophisticated interpretation, applies to any failure to consider the limitations of Jesus' human nature.

Barth accuses advocates of biblical inerrancy of holding a view of inspiration in which the intrusion of the divine characteristics of infallibility cancels out the true humanity of the biblical writers. He believed that humanity is susceptible to error, a true statement, but his view does not mean that error is necessary for humanity. Thus, for Barth's point to be valid, it would be required to claim that Adam had to err before the fall or that he was not human. Similarly, in heaven, experiencing glorification and perfected sanctification, it would be required to claim that one continues to err to remain human. If both assumptions are accurate, they will apply to Christ incarnate, recognizing that error would be inherent in his humanity and, to be human, Christ would need to pervert the truth. Without believing inspiration, conceding this belief is evidence of one's fallenness and the propensity to err, barring that one must err to be human. If the possibility exists that the truth can be spoken without error by an uninspired person, then the point is made more straightforward in the case of inspiration if one does so under its influence. The necessity of knowledge's limitations is finiteness, but not the necessity of its perversion. Scripture's trustworthiness should not be denied because of one's finiteness.

### **Autographs**

Article 10 assesses the perennial issue of the relationship of the present text of Scripture to the original documents that have yet to be preserved except through copies. Article 10 states:

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the



Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.<sup>413</sup>

As indicated previously, inspiration involves, for the most uncompromising reason, the original autographs of Scripture, the original inspired works of the biblical authors. This assertion relates to God's infallible control in the original Scripture's production, not the copying and translating process perpetuated through the ages. The existence of minute variations between manuscript copies is apparent. Those reading Scripture in languages other than Hebrew or Greek will inject additional variants. Thus, a perpetually inspired transmission of the text differs from what the document argues.

Some recommend that the case for inspiration and its appeal to the lost original manuscripts is irrelevant since they do not presently exist. Others recommend against using this logic because it denigrates the critical work of textual criticism, which attempts to reconstruct the original text by carefully evaluating the present manuscripts. All manuscript copies from antiquity are considered to accomplish this task. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the most extensive and reliable attestation from which the original text can be reconstructed to a reasonable inevitability in more than ninety-nine percent of the cases presented. Though there have been complexities in a few cases, the developments have remained within the Scripture's meaning without clouding a doctrine of the faith or life's directive. Thus, in the Bible, as seen (and as it is conveyed through faithful translations), one has the very word of God for practical purposes since the manuscripts obtain the whole necessary truth of the originals.

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<sup>413</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 41.

Article 10 further affirms that Scripture is the Word of God in as much as copies and translations faithfully represent the original. Though the original documents are presently lost, the correspondence of good reconstructions of the biblical text to their extent is considered the Word of God. Because there is evidence of copy and translation errors, a distinction must be made between the original inspirational autographs and the human labor associated with copying them. The importance of this denial recognizes that textual criticism has not been able to ascertain the minuscule segments of the existing manuscript's reading with absolute certainty. However, no essential article of the Christian faith is affected.

The argument that limits inerrancy and inspiration to the original manuscripts is relevant and makes a difference in allowing the church to reject the teachings of errant text if the originals were errant. Suppose the original text is inerrant (and reconstruction of the inerrant text is accomplished by textual criticism). In this case, where the text is not in doubt, no legitimate grounds exist for disobeying a Scripture mandate. For example, if two theologians agreed upon the inerrancy of the original text and agreed that the present copy was an accurate representation of the original, they both agreed on the text's teaching. Then, both theologians would be under divine obligation to obey the text. On the other hand, if the original manuscripts were possibly errant and the two theologians agreed that the present copy faithfully represented the original and agreed with what Scripture taught, neither theologian has a moral obligation to obey the teachings of the errant original. Thus, the character of the original manuscripts is an essential and relevant issue.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 42.

## Infallibility

The infallibility of Scripture is the central affirmation of Article 11. Positively addressed, infallibility indicates Scripture's truthfulness and reliability. Negatively, infallibility is defined as the quality which does not attempt to mislead. "We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration, is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses. We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated."<sup>415</sup>

A critical point of controversy, especially in the modern era, is to deny Article 11. Some maintain the Bible's infallibility but not its inerrancy. Thus, in this aspect, the two are divorced. The argument that denies infallibility and inerrancy in its assertions is the impossibility of consistently maintaining that something is infallible and errant simultaneously. A dichotomy embraces maintaining the divorce between infallibility and inerrancy.

A historical and technical distinction remains between infallible and inerrant, though both have been employed interchangeably and as synonyms. Infallibility handles the inquiry of ability or potential or that which cannot make mistakes or err. The distinction between infallible and inerrant is potential and actual or the hypothetical and the real. Inerrant distinguishes that which does not err. However, if one is infallible and cannot err, one does not. Asserting that one is both infallible and errant simultaneously distorts both words' meanings and else stands in a state of confusion. In this framing, neither infallibility nor inerrancy can be divided though each is differentiated in its meaning. If anything is infallible, it is incapable of erring. Therefore, if it can err, it is not infallible.

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<sup>415</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 43.

In cases where a lower view of Scripture is articulated, infallibility has been substituted for inerrancy, though infallibility is a higher term in its original and technical meaning. Furthermore, critical to this observation is that something fallible can be theoretically inerrant. However, that which is infallible could not be theoretically errant simultaneously.<sup>416</sup>

### **Inerrancy of the Whole**

Article 12 affirms the inerrancy of sacred Scripture clearly and unambiguously:

We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit. We deny that biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.<sup>417</sup>

The affirmation in Article 12 presents inerrancy's meaning in negative terms, "free from falsehood, fraud, and deceit."<sup>418</sup> Inerrancy is defined by establishing unmovable parameters and boundaries one should not transgress. Consequently, inerrant Scripture's assertions and teachings are incapable of falsehood, fraud, or deceit and explicitly reject the propensity of some restricting infallibility and inerrancy to distinct components of the biblical message. This practice includes spiritual, religious, or redemption themes but excludes arguments from the domains of history and science. The trend has been to reject the Bible as regular history in certain areas resulting in theories being established to limit inspiration to redemptive history and its theme. Authorizing this approach permits the historical dimension of redemptive history to be errant. However, Scripture's writing is unique from other forms of history, but it does not deny its intimately

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<sup>416</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 44.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

involved historical dimension. As redemptive history, the Bible displays God's salvific acts occurring in the space-time world.

Article 12 further stipulates that scientific hypothesis about earth history used to overturn Scripture's teaching on the creation and flood is denied. It also denies that the Bible communicates only in areas of spiritual value or redemptive themes. The Bible speaks concerning the earth's origin, man's creation, events about creation, and critical scientific matters, such as the question of the flood. This second denial does not implicate that scientific hypothesis or research does not benefit the student of Scripture or that science does not contribute to understanding biblical material. It only denies that teachings can overturn the fundamental teaching of Scripture from external sources. On the other hand, one has yet to be given a license to reinterpret Scripture haphazardly or force it to conform to secular theories of origins. For example, suppose secularists claim that humanity's origin resulted from a cosmic accident or the by-product of alien forces. The hypothesis cannot be reconciled with God's intentional act of creation without harming Scripture itself.<sup>419</sup>

### **Criticism of Black Liberation Theology and Biblical Inerrancy**

The criticism of BLT has determined its boundless hermeneutical traditions steeped in the past's and postmodernism's social, economic, and political ideologies. Depending on what moment in time and who the interpreter is has determined Scripture's use in the process. Though Cone's formal introduction in the 1960s and definitive framework for BLT have provided its proponents with a foundation for examining Scripture and determining how it is to be used to communicate its fundamental tenets, recent evidence exposes its ability to embrace *new* revelation using the Bible as justification. As one has interrogated black liberation theology

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<sup>419</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 45-46.

across a broad spectrum of its advocates, the evidence is clear that its interpretive methods change as culture determines, let alone the reader's experiences and prejudices.

Perceived as orthodox Christianity, BLT's sway has infiltrated numerous predominantly Black American congregations without suspicion of its underlying bigotry against biblical authority.<sup>420</sup> Millions are subjected to BLT-laden sermons every Sunday morning in America, including Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and churches of other denominations. As of 2006, "Approximately 40% of Black American churches identify with Black Liberation Theology."<sup>421</sup> Major Black American denominations such as the Church of God in Christ and the African Methodist Episcopal Church includes thousands of churches. However, in 2008 as published by Pew Research Center, citing a New York Times editorial by Michael Powell, "theologians estimated that a quarter of black pastors, at most, consider their theology as liberationist. Still, Black Americans are less likely than U.S. adults overall to be religiously unaffiliated (21% vs. 27%)."<sup>422</sup>

BLT's acceptance within multi-ethnic denominations with predominantly black congregations is not uncommon today. For example, black political activist Al Sharpton embraced BLT tenets in a United Church of Christ congregation. Jeremiah Wright, a black pastor of 40 years at Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ, gained significant attention in the 2008

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<sup>420</sup> Samuel Sey, "What Is Black Liberation Theology?", *The Ezra Institute*, June 08, 2020: <https://www.ezrainstitute.com/resource-library/articles/what-is-black-liberation-theology/>.

<sup>421</sup> Sandra L. Barnes, "An Analysis of Black Church Usage of Black Liberation and Womanist Theologies: Implications for Inclusivity," *Race, Gender & Class* 13, no. 3/4, 2006: 339.

<sup>422</sup> Michael Powell, "A Fiery Theology Under Fire", *The New York Times*, May 04, 2008: cited by Pew Research Center, "A brief Overview of Black Religious History in the U.S", February 16, 2021: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/02/16/a-brief-overview-of-black-religious-history-in-the-u-s/#fn-34217-41>.

presidential election for expressing his political views against the American government's roles in the attacks of September 11 and Pearl Harbor, the HIV crisis, and other political or social matters. The airing of Wright's famous sermon in the news media gave the world a taste of what black liberation theologians believed about the American government's role in its white racial agenda against blacks. Former president Barack Obama attended Wright's church for more than 20 years, and many believe his presidential policies reflected those of his former pastor and some of BLT's principles. Wright said,

When it came to treating her citizens of African descent fairly, America failed. She put them in chains, the government put them on slave quarters, put them on auction blocks, put them in cotton field, put them in inferior schools, put them in substandard housing, put them in scientific experiments, put them in the lowest paying jobs, put them outside the equal protection of the law, kept them out of their racist bastions of higher education and locked them into positions of hopelessness and helplessness. The government gives them the drugs, builds bigger prisons, passes a three-strike law and then wants us to sing "God Bless America". No, no, no, not God Bless America. God damn America— that's in the Bible— for killing innocent people. God damn America, for treating our citizens as less than human.<sup>423</sup>

After Wright's sermon, the significance of BLT in black pulpits shocked many Americans who did not know the resentment many blacks held. The idea of BLT's existence in the church was unbelievable to many Christians— black, white, and others. With the rise of BLT and other views in postmodernism against Scripture's infallibility, the church seems at an impasse when Scripture's authority and inerrancy are contested by those who reject the gospel's message. However, biblical authors answered direct objections when challenged by their opponents.

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<sup>423</sup> Jeremiah Wright, "Confusing God and Government" (Sermon delivered at Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, 2003).

### Biblical Capacity for Error

BLT's primary declarations against the authority and inerrancy of Scripture are saturated in its many historical expressions over time. As previously communicated in this chapter, BLT's humanistic traits characterize that holy Scripture is neither trustworthy nor God its Author. Even before Cone said, "we should not conclude that the Bible is an infallible witness,"<sup>424</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. denied almost all of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Nothing could be further from the truth for those believing that King was a conservative Christian. His writings at Crozer Theological Seminary prove that King rejected the deity of Christ, believing it "harmful" and "detrimental":

We may find the divinity of Christ not in his substantial unity with God, but in his filial consciousness and in his unique dependence upon God. It was his felling of absolute dependence on God, as Schleiermaker would say, that made him divine. . . . The orthodox attempt to explain the divinity of Jesus in terms of an inherent metaphysical substance within him seems to me quite inadequate. To say that the Christ, whose example of living we are bid to follow, is divine in an ontological sense is actually harmful and detrimental. To invest this Christ with such supernatural qualities makes the rejoinder: 'Oh, well, he had a better chance for that kind of life than we can possible have.' In other words, one could easily use this as a means to hide behind his failures. So that the orthodox view of the divinity of Christ is in my mind quite readily denied.<sup>425</sup>

Denying the virgin birth, as King did, further provides proof of his rejection of the doctrine of inerrancy. If this is not evidence enough for King's belief for the biblical capacity for error, perhaps his rejection of the bodily resurrection of Christ is:

At the age of 13, I shocked my Sunday School class by denying the bodily resurrection of Jesus. From the age of thirteen on doubts began to spring forth unrelentingly. At the age of fifteen I entered college, and more and more could I see a gap between what I had learned in Sunday School and what I was learning in college. This conflict continued

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<sup>424</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 67.

<sup>425</sup> James Attebury, "The Theological Beliefs of Martin Luther King Jr.," *Christian Theology and Apologetics*, January 21, 2017: <https://jamesattebury.wordpress.com/2017/01/21/the-theological-beliefs-of-martin-luther-king-jr/comment-page-1/>.



until I studied a course in Bible in which I came to see that behind the legends and myths of the Book were many profound truths which one could not escape. . . . As stated above, my college training, especially the first two years, brought many doubts into my mind. It was at this period that the shackles of fundamentalism were removed from my body. This is why, when I came to Crozer, I could accept the liberal interpretation with relative ease.<sup>426</sup>

Christianity's truth stands or collapses on the Messiah's physical resurrection. Scripture cannot be treated as some random book or mail-order catalog. It is God's infallible word. "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith" (1 Cor. 15:14). King's explicit rejection of biblical truth ranks with Cone and other black liberation theologians who mishandle Scripture for a black theology that rejects sin. House concluded, "Instead, both sin and salvation are on the vertical plane and relate to acts of and for freedom from oppression."<sup>427</sup> For illustration, Ananias Mpunzi said, "Black Theology has no room for the traditional Christian pessimistic view of man, the view that we are all by nature overwhelmingly and sinfully selfish."<sup>428</sup> This evidence provides further dialogue for understanding Paul's statements on godlessness in the last days: "so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith" (2 Tim. 3:1-9).

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<sup>426</sup> James Attebury, "The Theological Beliefs of Martin Luther King Jr."

<sup>427</sup> House, "An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology", 163.

<sup>428</sup> Ananias Mpunzi, "Black Theology as Liberation Theology", *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, 137.

## CHAPTER SEVEN– Concluding Arguments

### 2Timothy 3:16-17

This dissertation has argued that the components of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reinforce the doctrine of inspiration and authority of Scripture and undercut the hermeneutical perspective of Black Liberation Theology and its proponents. With support from the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, diverse Scriptural and historical perspectives of inspiration have determined that 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is the most definitive biblical text on Scripture's nature, function, and purpose. Thus, the scholarly debate on biblical inspiration and authority has taken on a more critical exchange, as stated in this research, while examining how BLT has communicated its diverse expressions utilizing the hermeneutical reader-response method in conjunction with other methodological perspectives.

This investigation has exposed that BLT's current dialog has infiltrated the church and the academy and continues to shape critical thinking in postmodernism. Though stealthy in its earlier development, Cone, with support from black leaders of the church and secular communities, provided a theological framework that repackaged the biblical gospel that offers to black and brown oppressed people and their groups utopia in this present world without confronting their sins. On the central issue, the denial of the authority and inspiration of Scripture, these liberation theologians' interpretations have placed them in opposition to evangelicalism. Thus, Scripture is only "inspired" when God periodically speaks to individuals, whereas one must be suitable to Scripture— we are not masters of it but only objects of it.<sup>429</sup> The

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<sup>429</sup> McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 80.

individual, not God, determines Scripture’s authority— a view that changes not only the gospel, but denies the divinity Jesus as God’s Christ.

Paul’s definitive statement regarding the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:1), beginning with “in the last days,” defines rampant wickedness and human character— they will abandon sound doctrine. As for Timothy (in Paul’s words, “but you”), he is to remain faithful and strong in these times, observing Paul’s teachings and example (3:10-13). That which Timothy must be faithful to is “the sacred writings” (τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα) (3:15). “All Scripture is God-breathed” (πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος) defines Scripture’s nature; “and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness,” defines Scripture’s functions (3:16), “so that the servant of God, (accompanied by the ἵνα clause), may be thoroughly equipped for every good work,” describes Scripture’s purpose (3:17).

Recommending that the Bible is the revelation of God and that it is infallible is the anthesis of BLT. According to Cone, “We should not conclude that the Bible is an infallible witness.”<sup>430</sup> His statement not only challenges the authority and inspiration of Scripture but abandons it and the gospel. His deficient view of the doctrine of authority and inspiration of Scripture creates not only another gospel but also another god— a false Jesus, who is not divine, nor the propitiation for sins. He is the “black Messiah”<sup>431</sup> and not the traditional “lamb of God.”<sup>432</sup> Colin Morris said,

If Jesus was oblivious of all the violence around him, or regarded it as unimportant, then our efforts to make him relevant to the life of our time are futile because he was irrelevant to his own time. And what is more, he was a dangerous, blundering fool, doing

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<sup>430</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 67.

<sup>431</sup> Henry, “Toward a Religion of Revolution”, 30.

<sup>432</sup> Cleage Shrine, cited in Henry, “Toward a Religion of Revolution”, 30-31. See also Colin Morris, *Unyoung, Uncolored, Unpoor* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1969), 102.

ambiguous acts and saying provocative things that invited bloody retaliation upon his followers, all the while protesting that he was being misunderstood.<sup>433</sup>

Cone stated, “It is my thesis...that Black Power, even in its most radical expression, is not the antithesis of Christianity, nor is it a heretical idea to be tolerated with painful forbearance. It is, rather, Christ’s central message to twentieth-century America.”<sup>434</sup> Given contemporary discussion, Jesus is not a model, but rejected. In this awareness, blacks must not be bound to biblical literalism because Jesus’ choices are not their choices, but instead, one must inquire, “What is Jesus doing and where is he at work?”<sup>435</sup> One believing in Cone’s Jesus will always be oppressed and a slave to sin and to the god of this world, Satan. One’s demise is the world system to which one is bound.

## **The Word of God: Truth, Consistency, and Accommodation**

### **Jesus: The Old and New Testament**

Jesus Christ’s superiority is more significant than anything else in creation. This truth aligns with the “I AM” sayings of the Johannine Fourth Gospel and also discloses that Jesus teaches that He is God. In chapter one, the author of Hebrews declares Christ’s superiority by explaining that he is superior to the angels, with a continual theme in the following chapters. God’s final revelation was given in the Son, the Davidic king who brings about God’s reign on earth and emphasizes his superiority to angels versus the former communication of the older revelation, Sinai’s law, by angelic intermediaries.<sup>436</sup> Correspondently, one must give solemn

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<sup>433</sup> Shrine, cited in Henry, “Toward a Religion of Revolution”, 30-31.

<sup>434</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid, 139-40.

<sup>436</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2005), 598-600.

regard to God's message. "Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (Heb. 2:1).

The gospel must be the message that one hears. Christ is the mediator through whom God speaks in these last days "whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb. 1:2). The eternal Son is given as a high priest whose perfection and exaltation was complete through his cross-work. The contrast between Christ and the angels is but a shallow rubric to reveal this idea.

The truth and teaching of the gospel must be held with the most heightened consideration. They are the supreme moment and matters of life and death. When one understands their worth, one will cherish and obey them. The grave danger of drifting away from and losing them cannot be overstated, for hopelessness follows when one is tempted to abandon one's profession of faith.<sup>437</sup> Bruce's words imply that the preacher talks directly to the listeners' hearts, compelling them to stand firm and endure in their faith in Christ.

Similar connections between verses 2:1-4 and the rest of the chapter include two further themes. First, *the humiliation and glory of the son of man* (2:5-9) emphasize the superiority of Christ to the angels by biblical evidence supported by Deuteronomy 32:8. The view displays the angelic beings entrusted to the present world, but not the world to come. A clear implication of this angelic administration over various nations is provided in Daniel 10:20. The prophet illustrates the angelic "prince of Persia" and "prince of Greece, while "Michael, "the great prince," champions the people of Israel."<sup>438</sup> Other angelic governors are portrayed as hostile

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<sup>437</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to The Hebrews*, 66.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

principalities and powers in Ephesians 6:12. Christ's enthronement "at the right hand of God," the place of exaltation," and replacement of the preceding world, inaugurated, but not yet present, awaits the consummation of the coming Christ.

Following, *the son of man, the savior, and high priest of his people* (2:10-18) emphasizes the one "for whom and by whom all things exist," the perfecting work of God the Father through Jesus Christ. "The only way to discover what is a worthy thing for God to do is to consider what God has actually done."<sup>439</sup> Christ is made perfect through his sufferings and is the radiance of his Father's glory. As a perfect high priest, he sympathizes with those by sharing one's experience and acting on one's behalf. He is the reconciler and only mediator between God and man—"in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Upon Christ's suffering, noted in Psalm 22:22, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Bruce said, "No Christian of the first century would have failed to recognize Christ as the speaker—the expression in the hour of dereliction on the cross."<sup>440</sup> "Finally, Hebrews links with some other New Testament books (e.g., 1 John) that are vitally interested in the problem of the perseverance of Christians and the nature and danger of apostasy."<sup>441</sup>

The criteria for evaluating Jesus from historical sources has often proved autobiographical because the resultant Jesus mirrored that of the author and researcher. Several factors led to the failure of this undertaking over time. On the one hand, it was doubtful that researchers could arrive at the historical Jesus.<sup>442</sup> It is evident from even a cursory reading of the

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<sup>439</sup> Bruce, *The Epistle to The Hebrews*, 79.

<sup>440</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>441</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to The New Testament*, 602.

<sup>442</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 11.

literature that scholarly attitudes toward the historicity of the gospel materials vary drastically. Some scholars possess a positive attitude toward the gospel materials and state, “In the synoptic tradition, it is the inauthenticity, and not the authenticity, of the sayings of Jesus that must be demonstrated.”<sup>443</sup>

Contrarily, some possess an equally negative attitude toward the materials and question the value of such an undertaking. ... “clearly, we have to ask ourselves the question as to whether this saying should now be attributed to the early Church or the historical Jesus, and the nature of the synoptic tradition is such that the burden of proof will be upon the claim to authenticity.”<sup>444</sup> This latter view presumes that the gospel traditions are “guilty,” i.e., historically not authentic, unless they can be proven “innocent.” Scholars involved in the so-called quests for the historical Jesus have typically come to this task with a relatively small number of significant questions about Jesus and early Christianity, which they hope to answer or, at least, shed light upon them. Robert Stein presents several considerations for believing that the Gospel accounts are accurate:

Eyewitnesses would have ensured that authentic stories were accepted and inauthentic ones rejected; The central Jerusalem church would have ensured that authentic stories were accepted and inauthentic ones rejected; the New Testament epistles show that care was taken to distinguish Jesus’ teaching from apostolic teaching; the transmission of the difficult or hard sayings of Jesus shows how faithful the church was in passing on the teachings of Jesus accurately; the fact that a number of the important difficulties the early church faced are not treated; in the Gospels shows that the early church was not in the habit of putting inauthentic teaching in the mouth of Jesus; and the culture had a strong moral character, which would have made the accurate transmission of stories natural.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (Norwich NR6 5DR, UK: SCM Press, 2012), 37.

<sup>444</sup> Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1967), 39.

<sup>445</sup> Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 17-24.

The historicity of the gospel resources has been dispensed in several ways in the past. One popular method was to evaluate the general historicity of the gospel materials by comparing those historical portions of the gospel materials which have parallels in secular or non-Christian historical records and see whether these records support or tend to deny the historicity of the gospel parallels. Perhaps some general attitude might develop toward the accuracy or inaccuracy of the gospel accounts. Another attempt has been to establish if a gospel writer was an eyewitness to the accounts he records in his Gospel. If he were an eyewitness, this would lend credence to the historicity of his account. The problems with this approach, however, are two-fold.<sup>446</sup>

For one, only two of the gospels are traditionally associated with eyewitnesses, and it is a much-debated question whether any of them were written, as now found, by an eyewitness. Secondly, even if eyewitnesses wrote them, this does not in itself demonstrate that what they wrote is an accurate historical account of the life of Jesus. It does not necessarily follow that eyewitness accounts of historical events are a priori accurate historical accounts. Such accounts are, of course, better historical records than non-eyewitness accounts. One cannot, however, assume that one has proven the historicity of the gospel accounts if one can demonstrate that the testimony of an eyewitness stands behind them. On the other hand, it seems logical to assume that if eyewitness testimony of the gospel materials could be established, then the burden of proof should rest upon those who deny the historicity of the reported events.<sup>447</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Robert H. Stein, "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity," R.T. France & David Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives*, Vol. 1, *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 225-263.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid.*



A vast number of different pictures of Jesus have been proposed by scholars working on the historical Jesus since the nineteenth century. It is possible to identify a small number of broad categories regularly exploited, such as teacher, miracle worker, prophet, messianic pretender, and Savior. Some scholars adopt a single category, while others exploit multiple categories to explain Jesus. Portraits of Jesus that focus on him as a teacher often differ over whether or not it was something in Jesus' teaching which led to his crucifixion, and if so, what exactly. One of the significant problems with such models of Jesus is that they often struggle to explain why the resurrection accounts believed in such a teacher, why the Christian movement took on the shape it did, and why it came to these beliefs about this teacher. Generally, the problem with such pictures of Jesus is not what they assert but what they deny or ignore. The dubious rejection of much of the material in the canonical gospels makes these sketches so distorting.<sup>448</sup>

Even relatively skeptical scholars have proposed portraits of Jesus that acknowledge that he performed miracles and healings. "The Gospels contain more than thirty miracles associated with the life and ministry of Jesus. In Mark alone, 209 of the 661 verses deal with the miraculous."<sup>449</sup> Some scholars go further, thinking that Jesus performed such miracles, to argue that this activity is the primary view of what characterized him and which best explains both his intentional mission and the response of his contemporaries which eventually led to his death. Marcus Borg's phrase is that Jesus was a "spirit person," by which he means Jesus was a "mediator of the sacred."<sup>450</sup> "The central characteristics of a Spirit person have already been

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<sup>448</sup> Robert H. Stein, "The 'Criteria' for Authenticity", 225-263.

<sup>449</sup> Stein, *Jesus the Messiah*, 18.

<sup>450</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998), 240.

briefly described: a person known for his or her intimacy with the sacred and for the ability to perform miracles.”<sup>451</sup>

### **The Councils**

The Christological and Trinitarian debates from Nicaea I (325) to Chalcedon (451) and the convening councils of the fourth and fifth centuries significantly affect the church of the postmodern world today.

The first ecumenical council called by the Roman emperor Constantine (ca. 288-337) was known as Nicaea I (325). The assembly consisted of about 230 bishops who were summoned to examine the divinity of Jesus Christ and its significance. Noll said, “The specific theological issue before the council at Nicaea concerned the teachings of Arius (ca. 250–ca. 336).”<sup>452</sup> Arius believed that the Father alone is God. As well, he did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ; neither did he recognize the deity of the Holy Spirit. The council of Nicaea convened in response to Arius' radical monotheistic teaching. “After such a summons and after dealing with such an issue, the church would never be the same.”<sup>453</sup>

One of the most significant controversies in the history of the Christian church is the fourth century's Arian debate which argues that Christ's Scriptural titles appearing to suggest him being of equal status with God, according to Arius, were merely courtesy titles.<sup>454</sup> “This provoked a hostile response from Athanasius, who argued that the divinity of Christ was of

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<sup>451</sup>Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics*, 240.

<sup>452</sup> Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 39.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>454</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 17.

central importance to the Christian understanding of salvation. Arius's Christology was, he declared, inadequate soteriologically. Arius's Christ could not redeem fallen humanity. In the end, Arianism was declared to be heretical."<sup>455</sup>

Origen (ca. 185-ca. 254), an Alexandrian theologian, opposed Arius's theological perspective of Jesus Christ by stressing the distinctions between the Father and the Son, also holding that Jesus' "eternal" generation was from the Father. He desired to maintain both the unity of the Trinity and the distinction between the Father and the Son. The word trinity was conceived by the North African lawyer Tertullian towards the end of the second century.<sup>456</sup>

Seven years after the assembly of the council of Nicaea, a messy array of events, including debates, arguments, letters, and meetings occurred. During this same interval, an impact on theology emerged from political developments in the Roman Empire.

During the reign of Emperor Diocletian, the final great persecution of Christians took place. Athanasius witnessed Christianity as having a divisive impact on the Mediterranean world. As early as 314, Constantine requested an ecclesiastic council of bishops to rule over an internal church argument surviving Diocletian's persecution. He thought it best not to suppress Christianity but to manipulate its possibility for unity. Thus, after gaining individual rule over the church, Constantine moved immediately, healing the battle plaguing the church, which centered on Arius' teaching by the year 324.<sup>457</sup> The outcome of Nicaea I concluded with the condemnation of Arian theology and the affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ, resulting in the Nicene Creed because of the influences of Athanasius.

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<sup>455</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 39.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Three other councils assembled after Nicaea. The second, The Council of Constantinople (381) was called by Emperor Theodosius. The result was the reaffirmation of the tenets of the Nicene formula and the denunciation of three heretical dogmas, Arianism (the teachings of Arius), Macedonianism (a belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, but the Holy Spirit held as a creature), and Apollinarianism (the denial that Jesus had a soul).

The third, The Council of Ephesus (431) was called by emperor Theodosius II. This assembly addressed the argument of Nestorianism (opposition against hypostatic union of Jesus Christ); taught that the divinity and humanity of Christ are separate but occupying the same body.

Finally, The Council of Chalcedon (451) was called by Emperor Marcian to speak to persistent questions concerning the two natures of Christ, the beliefs of Eutyches. The consequence was a revision of the Nicene Creed noting that “Jesus was “one person” consisting of “two natures.” But despite Emperor Marcian’s hope, this formula did not define the church’s doctrinal life “for all time”; nor did it bring an end to the acrimonious disputes that had led to the council.”<sup>458</sup>

The Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon set many precedents for the modern church by providing a statement of faith for Christendom in the form of creedal affirmation enunciating the Trinitarian existence of the Sovereign God of the Bible. Doctrinal orthodoxy and fidelity to scriptural interpretation was canonical even though the existence of Arian theology remained prevalent. This state of affairs caused some church leaders to search for a median between these two opposing doctrines. “The Council of Chalcedon was an important event—and a critical

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<sup>458</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 60.

turning point—in the history of Christianity both because it clarified orthodox Christian teaching and also because of the way that it accomplished that clarification.”<sup>459</sup>

Though Nicaea did not do away with heresies that are still prevalent today, (example: Arian theology in the form of the Jehovah’s Witnesses), its creedal legacy remains intact as a secure foundation for today’s church in a postmodern world. With the influence of pluralism, science, and new age religion, Nicaea stands as a testimonial in the middle of turbulent times.

### **The Reformation**

Several characteristics of the Reformation period are still present in evangelical Christianity today. R. C. Sproul said, “In 1 Timothy, Paul often calls us to hold fast to “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness” (6:3). He is referring to the gospel, which can be summarized in the five *solas* of the Reformation: *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, *sola Scriptura*, and *soli Deo gloria*.”<sup>460</sup>

*Sola fide*, that is, faith alone, is the vital ingredient that distinguishes Protestant theology from Roman Catholicism, a key point made by Noll. “He observes that John and Charles Wesley vigorously reaffirmed the central message of Protestantism: *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *sola Scriptura*—salvation was by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) as communicated with perfect authority in the Scriptures (*sola Scriptura*).”<sup>461</sup>

*Sola fide* is entwined with the doctrine of justification in which the sin of the human being is imputed to Jesus Christ (*solus Christus*) and His righteousness is imputed to the sinner,

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<sup>459</sup> McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 60.

<sup>460</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone.*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/faith-alone/> [accessed June 09, 2022]

<sup>461</sup> Noll, *Turning Points*, 219.

setting man right before the holy God (*soli Deo Gloria*; to God alone be glory). “The Protestant (and biblical) doctrine of justification also affirms the necessity of faith, grace, and Christ, but it adds the important term alone. No one keeps God’s law perfectly and our good works are “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6, KJV); therefore, our works can in no way be the ground of our acceptance before God.”<sup>462</sup>

Other elements of Protestantism were influential, but were often understated. For example, Noll noted that “Protestant historians have tended to treat the Diet of Worms as if it were significant only for Luther’s dramatic speech.”<sup>463</sup> But one of the major events that is often overlooked as most important for Protestantism was Luther’s marriage to Katherine von Bora. As a former monk and member of the Catholic Church, the occasion was one for the history books as expounded by Noll as “setting the Protestant course for family and vocation. From Worms, at least to Protestant eyes, there was no turning back.”<sup>464</sup> Though his actions may seem insignificant today, Luther’s exemplar is the biblical picture of the church supported by marriage and family.

Another characteristic of the Reformation period that is present within the church today is the Bible and its translation into many languages. With the invention of the Guttenberg printing press, each believer can educate themselves with a personal copy of God’s word. Without the translation of the Bible from its earlier language forms and the ability to mass produce it, perhaps protestant evangelicalism would not have flourished from the Reformation forward. As well, the education of future church leaders and laity would not be possible on a grander scale. “The

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<sup>462</sup> Sproul, *Faith Alone*.

<sup>463</sup> Noll, *Turning Points*, 216.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

theological disputes that flourished in the wake of the Ninety-Five Theses represented the first full-scale exploitation of the printing press in European history.”<sup>465</sup>

The Reformation restored the gospel to the sacraments and the sacraments to the congregation. Sacramental restoration removed a system where individuals observed rituals that they believed helped them to manage their sins; a practice described as works of self-righteousness by Luther. These expressions included penance, purgatory, indulgencies, and the cult of the saints. The late medieval mass was fundamentally something the laity watched, not a meal they ate. “Luther restored the gospel to the Lord’s Supper. Along with recovering the biblical gospel, the Reformers recovered a doctrine and practice of the sacraments that flow from and fit with the gospel. Because Christ has paid the entire debt of our sins, the sacraments picture and promise complete forgiveness; and because the gospel gathers God’s people into a local body, the sacraments embody and enact the congregation’s unity in Christ.”<sup>466</sup>

Characteristics that marked the Reformation period that are no longer present in Christianity today include state churches, monarchical rule of the church, and apostolic succession.

John M. Headley cites Luther’s work *Operations on the Psalms* in which the Church is defined as the spiritual collection of the faithful wherever they may be. This understanding of the Church was reflected in the Augsburg Confession (1530) which stated: Also, they teach that one holy church is to continue forever. But the church is the congregation of saints, the assembly of all believers; whatever his later attitude to the territorial church in the early period up to 1525, Luther's theology ruled out identification of the Church with the political community.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Noll, *Turning Points*, 156.

<sup>466</sup> <https://www.9marks.org/article/the-reformations-restoration-of-the-sacraments/>

<sup>467</sup> <https://www.andrews.edu/library/car/cardigital/Periodicals/AUSS/1970-2/1970-2-02.pdf>

In addition, Luther felt that Christians should throw off economic, political, and spiritual tyranny that bound them to Rome and the papacy.

Luther's explanation of the gospel and the framework necessary to support it challenged both the pope and the emperor's point of view. At the Diet of Worms, he was called a heretic and was ordered to recant his writings. "His representation argued about the rule of the spiritual kingdom was that it is a purely inward form of government, basically a government of the soul which has no connection with the temporal affairs and is entirely dedicated to helping the faithful attain salvation."<sup>468</sup> Luther also argued that Christians live in the kingdom of Christ and also the world; the church, equated with Christ, ruled by Him, and completely separate from the world. The realm of temporal authority has been given by God to secular heads of state to ensure that domestic peace is preserved among sinful men.

### **The Gospels**

The Gospels provide the opportunity to mirror-read the social and historical conditions embedded in each gospel in order to reconstruct the community (or communities) that lay behind each individual writing. The assumption holds that the churches addressed in each Gospel were grappling with the difficulties or comprised of identical people found in the writings sent to them. Viewing churches principally (rather than individuals, non-Christians, or a more general Christian public) is primarily assumed rather than demonstrated. This compilation of expositions contends that this entire section of modern Gospel criticism is misunderstood and should be

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<sup>468</sup> <https://www.lawctopus.com/academike/absolutism-lutheran-reformation/>



replaced with an approach that observes all four Gospels as addressing a broader audience to most, if not all, Christians in their day and age.<sup>469</sup>

Richard Bauckham highlights the insufficiency of actual evidence for the theory of the Gospels addressing specific and definable early Christian communities. He cites six specific reasons for not believing in this model:

1. The high level of mobility and communication in the first-century Roman world that facilitated the rapid circulation of documents as valuable and significant as the Gospels.
2. The tight knit community of Christians that transcended local churches.
3. The NT evidence that most of the early Christian leaders moved frequently.
4. The typical ancient practice of sending letters from one church to another.
5. The evidence (from Papias, Ignatius, and the Shepherd of Hermas) of close contacts among churches in the early second century.
6. The conflict and diversity in early Christianity with an awareness of the events taking place in different churches within different empirical regions.

In other criticism, Bauckham contends that the writing of gospels to individual communities has gone virtually unquestioned by the academy. He also argues that the New Testament texts' prevailing evidence indicates that the early Christian movement communities were in constant contact. As such, the constant movement of Christians and the transmissions of texts and traditions among various churches indicate that it is more likely that the Gospels were written with a broader Christian audience in mind as opposed to a specific church or group of like-minded churches. In the course of his discussion, he raised the issue of the connection between gospel genre and the potential effect on implied audiences. Bauckham writes, "Of course, the genre of the Gospels is debated, but recent discussion has very much strengthened the case – in

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<sup>469</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, 'For Whom Were Gospels Written?' in Richard J. Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 9-48.

fact all but conclusively established the case— that contemporaries would have recognized them as a special category of the Graeco-Roman bios (which we can translate “biography” provided we understand the term in the sense of ancient, not modern biography).<sup>470</sup>

Two issues central to Bauckham’s thesis are accentuated here. First, he underscores the importance of the relationship between genres and authorial and audience expectations. Authors write within specific genres because those genres are best suited for presenting the information that the author is trying to communicate. Genres then form a sort of contract that guides the expectations of the reader/hearer, allowing one to interpret the information offered by the author. Subsequently, Bauckham hints at the specific connection between biography and gospel (as a literary category). Evidence from the genre of Greco-Roman biography implies that biographies were written for larger groups rather than smaller ones. Richard Burridge, on the other hand, points out that biographies were written by individuals and not by schools or committees.<sup>471</sup> He continues, “The biographical genre for the Gospels argues against too much community emphasis; the evangelists’ selection of previous material and their treatment of their sources, plus their own special material, all imply the creative personality of an author.”<sup>472</sup> This observation cannot be understated.

If the Gospels are, in fact, biographies, then two suggestions are conceivable. Either the Gospels followed the basic generic pattern of biography, were written for a broad potential audience, or the Gospels were used innovatively, breaking with the generic pattern (and expectation) and were written for a minute and definite (sectarian) audience. Furthermore,

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<sup>470</sup> Bauckham, ‘For Whom Were Gospels Written?’, 28.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., 125-30.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid., 126. See also, Richard Burridge, *What Are the Gospels?* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2018), I.50-53.

Bauckham widens the interrogation posed by Stanton, where he questions whether or not an evangelist would write a narrative to such a small group of people.<sup>473</sup> “Thus, viewing the gospels as ancient biographies can liberate us from the circularity of deducing the communities from the text and then interpreting the text in light of these (deduced) communities.”<sup>474</sup> Even as important and thorough as Burridge’s treatment of the subject has been, there are still a number of questions left to be answered in regard to the genre of the Gospels and their implied audiences and a number of these questions have been raised since the publication of Burridge’s important and insightful essay.

### **The Chicago Statement**

#### **The Word of God and Truth**

When discussing the Bible’s truthfulness, “truth’s” meaning should be self-evident. However, this is certainly not the case. One has argued that BLT, its preceding and contemporary proponents reject the doctrine of authority and inspiration of Scripture. The historical question of “What is truth?” remains central to this debate. Some argue that Scripture is only trustworthy if it conforms to modern standards of scientific precision or, for example, science’s usage to explain natural phenomena. Others entirely oppose this view and argue that Scripture’s truthfulness is contingent upon attaining its general spiritual ends, regardless of whether it makes false statements. Articles 13 through 15 interrogate these extremes by asserting that the Bible can only be evaluated by own its truth principles which, in many cases, do not include modern forms of scientific expression. However, the articles simultaneously argue that what Scripture does say is

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<sup>473</sup> Graham N. Stanton, ‘The Communities of Matthew,’ in Jack D. Kingsbury, ed., *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical & Social-Scientific Approaches* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 49-64; esp. 51 & 58.

<sup>474</sup> Bauckham, ‘For Whom Were Gospels Written?’, 143.

without error and does not mislead the reader in any way. Article XIV delivers how alleged discrepancies still need to be resolved should be handled.

### **Truth**

Article 13 states:

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.<sup>475</sup>

Regarding inerrancy in the affirmation and denial of Article 13, the qualifications listed in the denial clause may indicate that the word's use is no longer appropriate concerning the Bible. Some hold that inerrancy has "suffered the death of a thousand qualifications."<sup>476</sup> It is necessary to qualify the differences in what is being affirmed and denied when considering God because of the complexity of CSBI's concept. Qualifying these differences serves to sharpen inerrancy's precision and usefulness. Noted in Article 13 is inerrancy's use as a theological term referring to Scripture's truthfulness in all that it affirms and denies corresponding with reality. The qualification of other theological terms must be examined frequently because of the changing ways words are taken in the literal sense. For example, omnipotence, in its literal sense when referring to God, does not mean that God can do anything. It does not mean that God can die, lie, or he could be and not be God at the same time. Nevertheless, omnipotence is a practical and

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<sup>475</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 46.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

fitting term in theology when referencing God's complete sovereignty and authority over creation.

Some have thought that inerrancy should be removed from the church's vocabulary because the term must be qualified. However, the qualifications of the term are familiar and relatively simple. Inerrancy is an appropriate safeguard from those who would subtly attack the truthfulness of Scripture. Its use articulates that the Bible does not violate its truth principles and does not contain assertions that conflict with objective reality. It does not indicate that the Bible is free from grammatical abnormalities.

The first denial states that "the Bible ought not to be evaluated according to standards of truth and error alien to its own use or purpose."<sup>477</sup> Evaluating the Bible's inner truth claims by utilizing foreign standards to its view of truth is inappropriate. The truthfulness of Scripture must be evaluated according to its own standards. This idea means that Scripture must be internally consistent with the biblical concept of truth and that all claims must conform with reality, whether historical, factual, or spiritual.

The second denial provides an inventory of qualifications that are unintended to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the considerations that must be considered when one seeks to define the word inerrancy.

*Modern Technical Precision.* For example, inerrancy is not corrupted by modern technical precision in the Bible's occasion to use round numbers when reporting crowd size, the size of an army, or others. Therefore, using qualitative measurement in Scripture's historical reporting does not involve deceit, falsehood, or fraud.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 47.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

*Irregularities of grammar and spelling.* For expressing Scripture's truth, grammatical correctness is not necessary, nor fluent style or attractive speech. For example, how one speaks, though crude in one's articulation, has nothing to do with the truth or falsehood of one's statement. "Inerrancy is not related to the grammatical propriety or impropriety of the language of Scripture."<sup>479</sup>

*Observational descriptions of nature.* On many occasions, Scripture speaks clearly from the observer's perspective of common observation, given natural phenomena such as the sun rising and setting or moving across the heavens, where it is appropriate to explain things as they appear to the human eye. Imposing a foreign perspective and standard on Scripture would deny the reality of planetary motion and make the terms sunrise and sunset inappropriate explanations of things appearing to the observer.<sup>480</sup>

*The reporting of falsehoods.* Because there are falsehoods reported in the Bible, such as Satan's lies and false prophet's teachings, some have claimed that Scripture is not inerrant. Though these false statements are, in fact, part of the biblical record, they have been declared as lies and falsehoods. Thus, the truth of the biblical record has not been perverted but enhanced by these statements.<sup>481</sup>

*The use of hyperbole.* Hyperbole's use has been implored as a technical reason to reject Scripture's inerrancy. As a literary device in Scripture, hyperbole implicates using an intentional exaggeration to accentuate a statement by providing weight, intensity, and emphasis on something that otherwise may be lacking. The Bible is filled with hyperbole's use as observed by

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<sup>479</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 49.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

the framers of this document, but its use does not vitiate inerrancy. Therefore, hyperbole is consistent with Scripture's truth.<sup>482</sup>

Other matters do not destroy the truthfulness of Scripture, such as free citations or the arrangement of topical material when employed by New Testament writers referencing the Old Testament from various selections of material and parallel accounts where writers differ in including information that others do not or remove information that others include. Though they arrange their material differently, biblical writers do not affirm that Jesus said something on one event that he never said on that event, nor are they asserting that a parallel account differing from their own is wrong for omitting what they included. Jesus said considerably similar things on various occasions.

A correspondence view of truth, meaning used by both the biblical perspective and everyday life, follows the biblical standards of truth and error. "This part of the article is directed toward those who redefine truth to relate merely to redemptive intent, the purely personal or the like, rather than to mean that which corresponds with reality."<sup>483</sup> For example, Jesus' affirmation of Jonah being in "the belly of the great fish" is a true statement because of its redemptive significance and because it is true literally and historically. Its significance can be compared to the New Testament statements regarding the Old Testament individuals Adam, Moses, David, and others, as well as events of the Old Testament.

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<sup>482</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 50.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*

## Consistency

Article 14 states: “We affirm the unity and internal consistency of Scripture. We deny that alleged errors and discrepancies that have not yet been resolved vitiate the truth claims of the Bible.”<sup>484</sup>

God’s Word reflects his truthful character because they both reflect the internal unity and consistency of God’s Word flowing from God’s nature, truth. However, much of the information is of broad, diverse scope and interest in which God’s truth brings unity because of its consistency and coherency.

Problems of textual harmonization appearing contradictory or containing alleged errors or discrepancies that critics have pointed out repeatedly are dealt with in the denial of Article 14. Though some discrepancies have yet to be resolved, scrutiny has been applied to investigating these texts with positive outcomes. Many contradictions have been resolved by the early church and others more recently. The trend’s direction has been to reduce problems rather than increase them. Archaeology has provided substantial help in resolving problems concerning newer discoveries of biblical manuscripts and parchments and the meaning of language in that age by providing optimism concerning future solutions for remaining complications. Further scrutiny may be required for those problems yet to be resolved. This approach to resolving difficulties may seem like an exercise in “special pleading.” However, sacred Scripture merits special carefulness. A spirit of humility urges that one exhaust all potential illuminative studies before jumping to a conclusion when faced with an unresolvable contradiction acknowledging that all efforts have not been exhausted to give an appropriate and careful hearing to the biblical text. Some of the most significant findings helping one understand Scripture have been digging more

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<sup>484</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 51.



deeply to reconcile textual difficulties. It should not be considered strange that the Bible would not have some difficulties harmonizing with its sixty-six books written over 1400 years.<sup>485</sup>

The Bible has often been charged with many contradictions. However, these assertions are needless by the evidence, especially when comparing the vast amount of material encountered with the number of difficult passages of Scripture. To ignore the truth of Scripture because of unresolved complications is tactless. A parallel of anomalies lives with the scientific world that is so influential that it makes it critical for scientists to reconsider their theories about the disposition of geology, biology, and the like. When anomalies seem not to fit a viable theory with an overwhelming weight of evidence, the accepted practice in the scientific world is not to throw away the whole theory because difficulties have not been resolved. With this analogy in science, when Scripture is centered on, nothing should be considered than applying the scientific method in one's research of Scripture itself.

There are difficulties in Scripture that every student of the Bible must face honestly and in a straight direct way with one's most profound intellectual efforts. One's goal should be to learn from Scripture by examining the text repeatedly. Those difficulties unresolved while being resolved often generate light to the one examining Scripture while delivering a more profound knowledge of God's Word.

### **Accommodation**

Article 15 states: “We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy is grounded in the teaching of the Bible about inspiration. We deny that Jesus’ teaching about Scripture may be dismissed by appeals to accommodation or to any natural limitation of His humanity.”<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 52.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

The affirmation of Article 15 views the doctrine of inerrancy as inseparably related to inspiration's teaching in Scripture. Though the word "inerrancy" does not appear in Scripture, its concept does. Scripture, however, does have its claim to being God's Word, with the prophets' words being prefaced with "Thus sayeth the Lord." "Jesus speaks of the Scriptures of the Old Testament as being incapable of being broken (Jn. 10:35). He says that not a jot or tittle of the law will pass away until all be fulfilled (Matt. 5:18). Paul tells us that all is given by inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16)."<sup>487</sup> It is unthinkable that God would inspire anything fraudulent. Thus, inerrancy is a result of inspiration. Though it is not explicitly used in Scripture, it complements the concept of inspiration. Because the Bible does not use the words "inerrant" nor "inerrancy," it should be thought that there is no ground for inerrancy's doctrine. The same could be said about the word "trinity" since it is not used. Nevertheless, its doctrine is unmistakable and taught throughout the New Testament. It is not necessary to discover a verbal resemblance between a doctrine when the Church affirms it and the words of the Bible itself. This article's affirmation implies that the doctrine of inerrancy is established ultimately upon Jesus' teachings, with the framers of this document expressing no lower nor higher view of Scripture than that kept and instructed by him, a view explicit, as well, in the denial clause. As expressed in the denial, Jesus' teaching about Scripture must be considered. The trend in recent Protestantism is to argue that Jesus held and taught a doctrine of inspiration that would correspond with inerrancy's concept, then argue simultaneously that his view was restrained because of his humanity. Based on his humanity, the view of inspiration held by Jesus is "excused" because he was a product of his time, and he could not have known the issues introduced lately by higher criticism. Subsequently, like the rest of his contemporaries, Jesus accepted the prevailing notion of his day of viewing Scripture uncritically.

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<sup>487</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 53.

For example, Jesus was unknowing of the documentary hypothesis to destroy any severe claim for Mosaic authorship of the Old Testament's first five books.<sup>488</sup>

From a Protestant perspective, Jesus' ignorance of Scripture's truth is excused because he would have been omniscient in his humanity. However, this view is certainly not the case since for him to know all things in his humanity would confuse both his divine and human natures. Omniscience is an attribute of deity, not of humanity. Since Protestants do not believe, generally, that Jesus was deified in his human nature, it appears understandable in his lacking knowledge that he made mistakes concerning Scripture, which is the reasoning disallowed by the denial part of Article 15.

These explanations have raised problems that are too numerous and profound to receive thorough treatment here. Nevertheless, even though Jesus' human nature was not omniscient, his claims to teach by the Father's authority only (Jn. 8:28) and be the incarnation of truth (Jn. 14:6) would be fraudulent claims if what he taught was in error. Even if Jesus' error occurred from his ignorance, he would be guilty of sin for claiming to know the truth that he did not know, and as a result, his atonement for himself, let alone his people, would be futile. Thus, the doctrine of Scripture is engaged with the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus' high view of Scripture, the framers of this confession firmly hold the high view of Scripture.

As mentioned earlier, many tend to believe Jesus when he addresses heavenly matters of redemption and salvation but correct him regarding historical matters such as the Pentateuch's writing and those relating to Scripture's doctrine. Those rejecting Jesus, at this point, when speaking historically, violate his teaching principle, as indicated by John 3:12: "How can you believe me concerning heavenly things when you cannot believe me concerning earthly things?"

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<sup>488</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 54.

A generation of scholars is willing to believe Jesus regarding heavenly concerns while rejecting his teaching about earthly concerns. Critical methods may falsify Jesus' sayings about history, but what he says about heavenly matters is beyond proof or fabrication. This confession's framers believe Jesus' principle of his teaching's trustworthiness affecting heavenly and earthly matters must be maintained up to the present.<sup>489</sup>

### **The Failings of Black Liberation Theology**

BLT addresses the symptoms of oppression, but never the cause. The view that BLT elevates being black and oppressed in America confronts objective truth. For BLT, one's experience becomes the binding authority for interpreting truth's reality, which is critical in all religious matters. However, "The theme of oppression is an inadequate center for black theology. The theme of the Bible is the Lord Jesus Christ—the One who was to come, came, and is coming again."<sup>490</sup> House's inspection, a point repeatedly underscored throughout this dissertation, undercuts BLT's foundation for privately communicating God's word.<sup>491</sup> Making it explicitly black does not hold God nor Christ in the proper biblical perspective but expositis Scripture without holding it to context or canonical reference. For example, in 2 Peter 1:19, the imagery of the morning star is perhaps a reference to Numbers 24:7: "I see him, but now; I

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<sup>489</sup> Sproul and Geisler, *Explaining Biblical Inerrancy*, 55.

<sup>490</sup> House, "An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology."

<sup>491</sup> 2 Peter 1:19-21 provides the basis for canonical consciousness and awareness for answering the question, who is Christ?" Peter's alignment with Paul's "all Scripture is God breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16-17) considers only God's inerrant word as central to understanding the depth of the prophets' message and its fulfillment in the Christ of God who will come and will return. It is interesting that Beale and Carson make this point: "At Parousia, we will no longer see through a glass darkly, we will no longer need the mediating revelation of Scripture, Christ will rise in our hearts." G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1048.

behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will arise out of Israel” is early Judaism’s observation of a “star” connecting it with the coming Messiah. This thesis is the “prophetic word more fully confirmed” (2 Pet. 1:19). Thus, “knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Carson and Moo said, “His [Peter] extended polemic against the false teachers reminds us of the seriousness of deviating from the faith either in theology or in morals. The particular false teachers against whom Peter writes strayed theologically by casting doubt on the Parousia and coming judgment (1:16-21; 3:3-4).”<sup>492</sup> This awareness is also evident in Cone’s theological perspective.

BLT is earthly not eschatological. Unlike evangelical theology, given salvation, it does not offer personal deliverance from sin through Jesus Christ’s redemptive work on the cross. Neither is one justified by faith alone in him. BLT’s stress is freedom from the collective sins of dominating forces in society over black people. Its emphasis is earthly deliverance from oppression and, again, this weight offers no Parousia. Any discussion of the ascended Christ and his preparation of a heavenly dwelling, his return, and any appeal to an eschatological kingdom with him as King is seen as an attempt to dissuade blacks from the goal at hand, the absolute liberation of their whole persons. The vertical expression of both sin and salvation relates only to those acting for the freedom of the oppressed, therefore advancing the kingdom of God, which automatically excludes the rich. Mpunzi said, “Black Theology has no room for the traditional

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<sup>492</sup> Carson and Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 665.

Christian pessimistic view of man, the view that we are all by nature overwhelmingly and sinfully selfish.”<sup>493</sup> This observation is scripturally and logically incorrect.

### **Denies the Deity of Christ**

Cone’s theological center is too narrow and relies on the reader’s lens of experience to interpret Scripture. Thus, the Messiah of Scripture, who has come and will return, does not fit into BLT’s “this world” Jesus, who is a freedom fighter and judge providing justice, economically, socially, and politically for the black and oppressed. He is not the Savior, nor Son of God, who atones for the sins of oppressed humanity. This idea is conveyed by Black American philosopher, Cornel West, a close friend, and confidant of Cone, who further explains the core beliefs of BLT:

Black theology refuses to accept a God who is not identified totally with the goals of the black community. If God is not for us and against white people, then he is a murderer, and we had better kill him. The task of black theology is to kill Gods who do not belong to the black community. Black theology will accept only the love of God which participates in the destruction of the white enemy. What we need is the divine love as expressed in Black Power, which is the power of black people to destroy their oppressors here and now by any means at their disposal. Unless God is participating in this holy activity, we must reject his love.<sup>494</sup>

West echoes Cone’s words by vividly portraying another Jesus. Again, in Cone’s own words, “Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of

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<sup>493</sup> Ananias Mpunzi, “Black Theology as Liberation Theology.” in *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, p. 137.

<sup>494</sup> Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 78.

liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>495</sup> Not only does BLT provide the evidence that it is not Christian in the traditional meaning (that it is aligned with Scripture), but its version emphasizes the individual “body” of blacks only, in the context of being freed from oppression by having “peace on earth and liberation from the past” as expressed by Jürgen Moltmann. “The task of the Christian is to await and anticipate his dominion in the future redemption of his body. This is not just Christian *charitas*, but a practical proof of hope in the redemption of the body.”<sup>496</sup> Moltmann’s sympathy with liberation theology communicates Jesus as passive and weak in the face of social injustice. His suffering on the cross was due to his prophetic ministry. However, the Gospels are not interested in his sufferings in nature and fate, or as a poor carpenter’s son, his economic suffering.<sup>497</sup> “There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment, to speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness.”<sup>498</sup>

Accordingly, God’s blackness is associated with the black struggle of negative body images from the encroachment of white oppression and the scars of slavery. Black theology serves as both the need and answer for the reconciliation of the “black self,” where “the conscious lives of blacks are experienced as bound by unresolved binary dialectics of slavery and

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<sup>495</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2.

<sup>496</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “Toward a Political Hermeneutics of the Gospel,” *New Theology* No. 6, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York, NY: Macmillan Co., 1969), 87. (*italics his*)

<sup>497</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 51.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

freedom, negro and citizen, insider and outsider, black and white, struggle and survival.”<sup>499</sup> For Brown-Douglas, the primary offender in this assault of black self-identity is “White Christianity.”

Kelly Brown Douglas, in assessing the Platonized form of Christianity promulgated by many African American Christians, argues that this form of Christian belief leaves little room for “pro-black” considerations of the black body. That is, since, according to Platonized Christianity the body and soul cannot together exist in any fruitful capacity, the body in general, and the black body in particular, becomes a vessel of “sin,” sexual lust, and is thus antithetical to the nature of God...Therefore, she holds, black Christians who adopt Platonized forms of Christianity (often found in slaveholding Christianity and current strands of conservative evangelicalism) suffer psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, and physically, paradoxically expanding and advancing the misuse of the black body.<sup>500</sup>

Blacks were challenged to view God in provocative and liberative terms. “Black Christians had their own thoughts about their bodies and their souls and their destinies.”<sup>501</sup> The trinitarian perspective associated with BLT defined the blackness of God as the essence of his nature found in the concept of liberation. As Creator, God identified with oppressed Israel, but in redemption God became the Oppressed One in order to free the oppressed from oppression, and as the Holy Spirit, God continues liberation’s work.<sup>502</sup> “Moreover, God the Spirit works in His people in real-

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<sup>499</sup> Anthony B. Pinn, ““Black Is, Black Ain’t”: Victor Anderson, African American Theological Thought, and Identity.” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 43/1 (Spring 2004): 56.

<sup>500</sup> Derek S. Hicks, “Sovereignty in My Sacred Self: Journey Toward Empowering the Socially “Powerless” Black Body,” *Council of Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin* 36/2 (April 2007): 46.

<sup>501</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, “Black Consciousness and the Black Church in America,” *Missiology* 1/2 (April 1973): 8.

<sup>502</sup> Lincoln, “Black Consciousness and the Black Church in America”, 14. The thought is to separate Jesus from being God. The question is his divinity of which Black Liberation Theology does not recognize. Jesus is viewed primarily as a political deliverer and stands on the side of the black and oppressed.



life situations, not only in some ethereal sense.”<sup>503</sup> The trinitarian views of BLT fits with Moltmann’s theological deconstructions of Scripture. Donald MacLeod provides a fitting explanation of these perspectives: “He pleads, instead (and in classic Liberation terminology), for an orthodoxy which is matched by orthopraxis; one which draws out the consequences of the cross for politics: ‘The church of the crucified Christ must take sides in the concrete social and political conflicts going on about it and in which it is involved, and must be prepared to join and form parties.’”<sup>504</sup>

Christian theism, on the other hand, does not consider race or color. From Scripture’s perspective, God created one race of people for his glory, and man is the crowning glory of his creation. All are one in Christ as one body of believers. This body is and is exclusively Christ’s church, of which he heads. As a result, man has inherent value, dignity, and worth expressed by Christ’s redemptive work and the administration of reconciliation for all who are justified by faith alone in him. Here, the confines of Christian theism do not make room for racism or classism. There are those that will question this fact based on what has been practiced by some in America and in other cultural instances who embraced Christian theism, yet embraced racism, classism, and slavery. What should the church do with this narrative in postmodernism? The answer is *nothing*. Narrative is not the normative in America or anywhere else for that matter. But the one idea that brings all of humanity’s failings into check is the supremacy of Christ. In this case, the behavior will be ended.

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<sup>503</sup> House, “An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology.”

<sup>504</sup> Donald MacLeod, “The Christology of Jürgen Moltmann”, *Themelios*, Vol. 24, Issue 2. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the-christology-of-jurgen-moltmann/>. MacLeod cites Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 53.

### The Gospel as Liberation

The gospel is the central and most critical message of Scripture, which Christians can never move beyond, expressing God's grace and mercy through Christ, the Lord, and redeemer from heaven. However, the misinterpretation or simplification of the message accommodates a cultural narrative in which the consequences only benefit those wanting and needing to justify their sins. For example, when the gospel is wrongly communicated, one believes he is owed something, and God becomes a philanthropist. Nevertheless, when the gospel is presented as what God has done in the resurrected Savior to deliver one from sin, God becomes the antagonist because the truth requires one's brokenness to be accepted by him. God neither owes anyone nor is moved by anything less than one's total surrender to the Savior, accepting that one is worthy of judgment. However, BLT, another gospel, puts race first.

Long before CRT was considered a formal framework, "blackness" and "whiteness," according to Cone, became terms of ideology and skin color. For example, a black person participates in "whiteness" if one's actions are oppressive to blacks, which is natural to all white people. If a white person participates in "blackness," one is working to eradicate the oppression of blacks. Cone's gospel is the black experience through the lens of oppression. This idea is effectively black theology and is unmindful of historic Christianity, which is intentionally ignored and expressed as White American theology, "the symbol of the antichrist," and "the activity of deranged [White] individuals intrigued by their own image of themselves, and thus unable to see that they are what is wrong with the world."<sup>505</sup>

Cone said, "American White theology is a theology of antichrist insofar as it arises from an identification with the White community, thereby placing God's approval on White

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<sup>505</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 23.

oppression of Black existence.”<sup>506</sup> White Christians, by definition, are “incapable of black thinking”<sup>507</sup> and “are in no position whatsoever to question the legitimacy of Black theology,”<sup>508</sup> thus, White theology is not Christian.<sup>509</sup> This position is typical for BLT, which Cone believes is the true gospel of God’s salvation communicated through the liberation of the oppressed. “Whatever theology says about God and the world must arise out of its sole reason for existence as a discipline: to assist the oppressed in their liberation.”<sup>510</sup> BLT merges the gospel with God’s solidarity with blacks against whiteness. From this standpoint, “God has chosen to make the Black condition God’s condition.”<sup>511</sup> Therefore, the gospel is not for everyone.

In one’s former statement, Cone’s exclusion of non-blacks in his gospel is critical to framing black theology, distinguishing that God is Black and solely arguing for black people and their blackness. “There is no place in Black theology for a colorless God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of their color.”<sup>512</sup> Cone believes that it is God’s blackness that liberates and frees the oppressed. Those disagreeing with this assumption have inadequate knowledge of God. A Black God is seen in the gospel as having adopted oppressed people and standing for them *only* as his own. “The Blackness of God means that the essence of the nature of God is to be found in the concept of liberation.”<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 22.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>509</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 24.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>513</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 67.

BLT does not acknowledge a God who liberates and provides salvation for the white oppressor. He cannot redeem or love anyone other than black people. This gospel negates the assertion that God loves all others. “We will not accept a God who is on everybody’s side, which means that God loves everybody in spite of who they are and is working (through the acceptable channels of society, of course) to reconcile all persons to the Godhead.”<sup>514</sup>

Given Cone’s view of the Godhead, he distinguished roles for each member. Earlier in this chapter, one briefly pointed out these distinctions, but reiteration is advantageous in discussing further implications of BLT’s gospel being another. Cone’s following statements prove that one’s viewpoint is valid. First, “Black theology says that as Creator, God identified with oppressed Israel, participating in the bringing into being of this people; as Redeemer, God became the Oppressed One in order that all may be free from oppression; as Holy Spirit, God continues the work of liberation.”<sup>515</sup> Second, “Black theology will accept only a love of God which participates in the destruction of the White oppressor,”<sup>516</sup> and, finally, Cone’s reflection on Jesus and the cross, as quoted by one of his followers, Jemar Tisby: “James Cone penned *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* as a theological reflection on racial terrorism. ‘Both Jesus and blacks were strange fruit’, he wrote. ‘Theologically speaking, Jesus was the first ‘lynchee,’ who foreshadowed all the lynched black bodies on American soil.’ Cone goes on to explain, ‘The cross helped me to deal with the brutal legacy of the lynching tree, and the lynching tree helped me understand the tragic meaning of the cross.’”<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 66.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>517</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2019), 131.

Cone denies the need for true liberation. “They answered him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did...” (Jn. 8:39). Like the Pharisees, blinded by their sinful condition, BLT rejects that liberation in Scripture is a spiritual matter, not a genealogy question. Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (Jn. 6:29). The Pharisees are not true “sons” of Abraham, because they do not accept the One sent by God. Spiritually, though they are Abraham’s descendants by genealogy, they do not follow God or obey him. Therefore, they are not “true sons” of God.

## **Old Testament and New Testament Doctrines**

### **Redemption**

Scripture will not allow anyone or anything to jeopardize the exclusive sufficiency of Jesus. Though he is sinless, he allows John to baptize him. Christ’s identification with sinful man is personal, forensic, and historical. The sinner who believes in Jesus as Savior is justified in him alone, instantly, thoroughly, and eternally. Though a servant, Christ does not abandon his authority. His ransoming himself is an expression of the gospel, as Paul responds to those doubting Jesus’ resurrection. “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve” (1 Cor. 15:1-5).

Cone is not the first theologian to challenge the New Testament narratives of Jesus, nor will he be the last. His theological perspective is no different from others like Ehrman, as an

example, who believed that Jesus was no more than a “lower class Jewish preacher.”<sup>518</sup> The irony of such a statement is that while Cone considered himself a Christian,<sup>519</sup> Ehrman denies being one.<sup>520</sup> However, both men and many of their followers deny the divinity of Christ.

Cone’s thought of black theology presents another gospel that excludes recognizing original sin and redemption through God’s Christ and presents Christianity in two systems. One is white and wicked, while the other is black, righteous, and oppressed. Cone’s framework of Christianity created two groups that cannot co-exist. One is White American Theology, while the other is Black, fighting against injustice by any means necessary, including violence and destruction of the former, against those oppressing God’s righteousness acknowledged as black people.<sup>521</sup> “Black theology must show that the Black God has nothing to do with the God worshiped in White churches whose primary purpose is to sanctify the racism of Whites and to daub the wounds of Blacks.”<sup>522</sup> According to Cone, the God of White American Theology must be destroyed by its oppressors. This annihilation is the right thing to do.<sup>523</sup> “The God in Black theology is the God of and for the oppressed, the God who comes into view in their liberation. Any other approach is a denial of biblical revelation.”<sup>524</sup>

The Scriptural gospel awakens man’s conscience, making him aware of sin. The believer has a daily awareness and presence of sin and feels the weight of it, while the unbeliever, though

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<sup>518</sup> Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, introduction.

<sup>519</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 6.

<sup>520</sup> Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, introduction.

<sup>521</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 26.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

conscious of sin, hates the thought of its existence. The gospel anchors everything in the cross, and when one is aware, he is driven back there, again and again, knowing that the resurrected Christ is his sufficiency. This hope cannot be found in a false gospel of one's own appetite that creates a false god that does not convict one of sin. Though BLT has its own gospel of liberation, the follower is always drawn to one's earthly predicament. "Therefore, if Blacks are to have freedom, they must take it, by any means necessary."<sup>525</sup> "Oppressors are in no position to speak about the sinfulness of the oppressed."<sup>526</sup>

### **Salvation**

Historic Christianity provides humanity's universal problem: sin, where one is eternally separated from God (Rom. 5). Sin is not colorized or related to class or gender. It is universal, comprehensive, and affects both rich and poor alike. Cone's proposed idea of liberation, where one's social, economic, and political needs are the deliverance necessary for pleasing a god of one's definition, is antithetical and leaves one without hope of true liberation from the creature that stares back in the mirror. Though Cone suggests that one can determine one's sin and how one's oppression will be relieved,<sup>527</sup> BLT cannot deliver on the promise because the answer can only be found in God's Christ. This is the "good news" of the gospel of Scripture.

A false gospel breeds no true Christian, and men see very little of their need for God because they are sinners. Anything seen as a substitute for God as an object or thing desired is an idol, whether an image of stone or anything else.<sup>528</sup> Jesus said, "This is why I speak to them in

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<sup>525</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 96.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>527</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 53.

<sup>528</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 166.

parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: ‘You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them’” (Matt. 13:13-15).

It is Christ that makes one worthy of worshipping God. Without the Savior, there is nothing that one can bring to God that would be an acceptable sacrifice to him. It is only through the Son that God accepts one’s worship. The postmodern church has failed at communicating this reality and its requirement by operating in opposition to it. The owner of the church is God and the ruler of it is Scripture.

BLT presumes a God for the oppressed and another for the oppressors— two Gods, but neither offering redemption from sin. This standpoint is difficult to correspond with OT and NT bedrock biblical passages including, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deut. 6:4) and the believer’s unity (Jn. 17; Eph. 2:11-22). Similarly, BLT does not offer a savior for sin. Instead, it exchanges Christ’s supremacy for black supremacy, which repays evil for evil. Jesus is not the resurrected Savior but was only an oppressed black man who was brutally killed by Roman racists. Afterwards, he is considered Savior for the oppressed. In contrast, Ehrman sketches Jesus’s transformation from a human prophet to the Son of God exalted after the resurrection.<sup>529</sup> Thus, Cone’s theological views align with those denying Jesus’ hyperstatic union, his acts in redemption, and his resurrection. He warns proponents of BLT not to trust White American theologians whom the oppressors must destroy, though many of his views align with

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<sup>529</sup> Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, introduction.



or underscore theologians like Ehrman, who considers himself Christian/atheist. Though Bart and Kierkegaard are among the Western European theologians admired by Cone (BLT is based on Barthian theology), they are white men. Ehrman, too, is white. As white, as these theologians are, they are Cone's allies in many of their theological or doctrinal opinions, some of which are borrowed or parroted by him under the nomenclature of "blackness." However, according to BLT, these theologians' "whiteness" disqualifies them from salvation because Jesus did not come to liberate all people from sin's oppression— only those who are black. How, then, does Cone escape his dishonesty?

This observation questions BLT's righteousness demand and conveys that its gospel is hypocritical. The foundation of BLT is bitterness and victimhood, with social justice as its chief cornerstone. Because it offers no salvation for original sin, it only promises earthly liberation—a battle against worldly forces that never ends. Jesus' words are critical at this point when he says: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world" (Jn. 18:36). Seeking God's kingdom bears no weight in BLT's quest for utopia. Thus, the biblical kingdom offers no sanctuary or relief from the inevitability of sin in an evil world controlled by Satan.

The overarching theme of the Bible is the kingdom of God. The central proclamation of the gospel is that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mk. 1:15). It is further announced that "the kingdom of God has come in your midst" (Lk. 17:21). God's kingdom is spiritual and of the heart where Jesus reigns. It is not earthly. The kingdom Israel looked for did not come, yet it was in their midst. The job of God's elect is to make the kingdom visible. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses

in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The first and simplistic creed is “Jesus is Lord” (“*Yeshua Ha-Mashiach*”) as opposed to Caesar is lord (“*Kaisar kurios*”).

### **Justification**

One may ask how justification is identified in BLT since Jesus is not “a model for contemporary discussion” and “blacks are not bound by biblical literalism.”<sup>530</sup> Jacques Ellul profoundly stated, “What, in the final analysis, is the really important thing for the whole of mankind— that Jesus is indeed the Christ or that the Turks defeated the Byzantines in the early fifteenth century? These latter saw the scale of values quite clearly. It was far more urgent to know who was the Christ than it was to protect a temporal city against an ephemeral invader.”<sup>531</sup> In the case of BLT, the question of Jesus’ identity is vital to determine how the oppressed are justified. Since Cone’s doctrinal center is pragmatic and humanistic, God and Christ are not held in the proper biblical perspective, and its view of salvation is “of this world” or earthly, is there a need for justification? Cone indicated that any doctrine (whether of God, Christ, man, or salvation) disagreeing with the black demand for liberation must be rejected.

What else can the crucifixion mean except that God, the Holy One of Israel, became identified with the victims of oppression? What else can the resurrection mean except that God’s victory in Christ is the poor person’s victory over poverty? If theology does not take this seriously, how can it be worthy of the name Christian? If the church, the community out of which theology arises, does not make God’s liberation of the oppressed central in its mission and proclamation, how can it rest easy with a condemned criminal as the dominant symbol of its message?<sup>532</sup>

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<sup>530</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 139-40.

<sup>531</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Presence of the Kingdom*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 92-93.

<sup>532</sup> James Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), I. This citation is from Cone’s essay, “Christian Theology and the Expression of God’s Liberating Activity for the Poor” of Part 1: Black Theology as Liberation Theology.

BLT believes that man can solve his problems and one is therefore justified (in oneself). J. Christiaan Beker's observation provides the backing for this statement. "[A word of God] if requested at all, is sought not in scripture, but in the self in dialogue with itself, or in a reading of societal structures and movements.... The Bible is basically the document of the Christian's self-identity: within our identity crisis, it points to the source and origin of Christian self-identity."<sup>533</sup>

The doctrine that Cone promotes for justification in BLT is racial empowerment that extends the boundaries of Black politics. A clear example is evident in the AME Church's statement citing President Trump's signing of executive orders on February 9, 2017, deemed evil to blacks: "to fight crime, gangs, and drugs; restore law and order; and support the dedicated men and women of law enforcement."<sup>534</sup>

We ask that every member of this denomination, and people who are committed to justice and righteousness, equality and truth, will join with us to thwart what are clearly demonic acts. Indeed, the words of the Apostle Paul to the believers at Ephesus apply today, "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against . . . the rulers of the darkness of this present age, against spiritual wickedness in high places."<sup>535</sup>

There are no political implications or statements in the gospel. Robert Morey observes concerning BLT that "their focus is always on skin and not sin; race and not grace; gossip and not gospel. Racism is always focused on the outward instead of the inward because it cannot deal with the root problem of sin."<sup>536</sup> However, the gospel's central message is what God has done in

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<sup>533</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, "Biblical Theology Today," *New Theology* No. 6, 32. See also H. W. House, An Investigation of Black Liberation Theology, <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/blackliberation.html>.

<sup>534</sup> "Trump Administration Civil and Human Rights Rollbacks," The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, <https://civilrights.org/trump-rollbacks/>.

<sup>535</sup> Council of Bishops. (2017). Episcopal statement. Retrieved from <https://www.ame-church.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Episcopal-Statement-Council-of-Bishops-re-Trump-Actions.pdf>

<sup>536</sup> Robert Morey, "The Truth About Black Liberation Theology", <https://njjat.com/x-blackliberaltheology.html>.

Jesus Christ as the sacrificial Lamb for sin. By his death on the cross and his resurrection, one's sins are imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer. It is by faith alone in Christ that the one is justified. Those trusting in him are saved from condemnation and sanctified for good works (Mk. 16:16; Eph. 2:8-10). The gospel is God's power for salvation. Those who believe its report and are not ashamed are liberated from sin and hostility (Rom. 1:16-17). Therefore, in BLT, justification is not true, neither is it obtainable in the awareness of Scripture.

### **Eschatology: Liberation of the Earth**

The Doctrine of the Future is critical to Scripture. It answers the questions of when and how Christ will return. Its Scriptural basis is *personal* and *general* eschatology. Christ's return will be sudden, personal, visible, and bodily. These descriptions are included in Jesus' narrative concerning his return. You also must be ready: the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt. 24:44). He said, "I will come again and will receive take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn. 14:3). Two angels bore witness to Jesus' ascension: "This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go in heaven" (Acts 1:11). The theme of eschatology associated with the New Testament is frequently mentioned and is the hope of the New Testament church. Wayne Grudem asks a poignant question at this critical hour in postmodernism. "Do Christians in fact, eagerly long for Christ's return?" His answer provides a more heart-rending response. "The more Christians are caught up in enjoying the good things of this life, and the more they neglect genuine Christian fellowship and their personal relationship with Christ, the less they will long for his return."<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 1093.

One has provided throughout this dissertation Scripture's authority on all matters of Christ Jesus. The gospel covers all bases of doctrinal importance relating to God's unfolding plan for his church. God's objective includes Scripture's inspired and inerrant claims of truth throughout its historical documents that define the kingdom of God and the believer's relationship with the Messiah and his soon return.

Given Cone's BLT, its claims of autonomy for blacks in liberating themselves make no room for a future liberation beyond the earth's realm. To reiterate, salvation in BLT is physical liberation from white oppression in this life rather than liberation and freedom from the individual's sinful nature. Little room, if any, is left for personal introspection and spiritual acts of salvation. Any attempt to deter blacks from their goal of earthly liberation for any appeal of a heavenly realm is deliberately omitted from BLT's liberation standpoint. Cone said, "The most corrupting influence among the black churches was their adoption of the 'white lie' that Christianity is primarily concerned with another world reality."<sup>538</sup> Accordingly, blacks are not concerned with another life in heaven but desire to determine and enjoy their lives now. "If eschatology means that one believes that God is totally uninvolved in the suffering of men because he is preparing them for another world, then Black Theology is not eschatological. Black Theology is an earthly theology!"<sup>539</sup> Many black scholars today concur with Cone's view of eschatology (calling it *other world-ness*), believing it was white theology's mechanism for subjugating an enslaved person's longing for freedom in this life.<sup>540</sup> For example, J. N. J. Kritzing offers this same perspective:

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<sup>538</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 121.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

Jesus Christ, as the Black Messiah, occupies a central place in Black Theology as the one who sets free the captives and the oppressed (Lk. 4:18f) and who thus brings the future into the present. The coming of the Kingdom in the life of Jesus of Nazareth unites the “utopian longing for liberation” expressed in the “historical projects” of oppressed people with God’s “liberative invasion of history.” The focus is therefore not on the golden streets of the New Jerusalem but on concrete mediations of the Kingdom on dusty township streets, anticipations of the new world within the suffering of this “long Good Friday.”<sup>541</sup>

As one has presented, Cone rejects the idea of eschatology in BLT. Freedom is thought upon as fulfillment of one’s being to live and become what one should. It is obvious that this freedom is not fulfilled in the risen Christ, but in the black oppressed overcoming an earthly struggle for liberation known as freedom from the whole self.<sup>542</sup> Since all that one needs is earthly, so is his quest to find himself. This search is not in anticipation of Scripture’s Messiah, whose return is imminent and soon to come.

## **Relationship to Marxism, Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory**

### **Marxism**

BLT is immersed with Marxist ideology. It seeks to communicate that conditions in America are unfavorable to blacks and other minorities, especially regarding social change. This thought is where the rubber meets the road, and its traction drives BLT’s vehicle onto a freeway flooded with victimhood narratives that are prominent in Marxist thought. For Cone, Black theology expresses the deprivation of social and political power among blacks, where God is the

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<sup>541</sup> J. N. J. Kritzinger, “Black Eschatology and Christian Mission”, [https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/AJA02569507\\_473](https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/AJA02569507_473).

<sup>542</sup> Mokgethi Motlhabi, “Black Theology: A Personal View,” in *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, 77–78.

God of black existence, not white religion. Truth is the ultimate personal experience amid degradation and is subjective, not objective.

BLT fosters a victim mentality among blacks. According to black linguist and scholar John McWhorter, “In leading black American thought today, Victimology, adopting victimhood as an identity and necessarily exaggerating it, dominates treating victimhood as a problem to be solved.”<sup>543</sup> In this example, victimhood lives in the subconscious of blacks in America. It is a culturally inherited affirmation that they will, in the past and future, be oppressed by whites. Today, this narrative presumes the conditions for blacks have not changed substantially 40 years after the Civil Rights Act. Racism is kept alive by victimology, where whites are constantly painted as racists without the need for evidence. The result is a context for retaliation and bitterness that powers new perspectives among white victims that have not previously been harbored or expressed and creates a suspension of moral judgment and separatist opinions expressing racial solidarity.<sup>544</sup>

Sunday is interchangeable with many black liberation theologians using a context of marginalization to express their sentiment with victims of oppression. Cone said, “Black people who have been humiliated and oppressed by the structures of white society six days of the week gather together each Sunday morning to experience another definition of their humanity.”<sup>545</sup>

Since the 1970s, black theologians Cone and West intentionally embedded Marxist thought into the black church. Their diligence paid off, with Cone voicing that Marxism best addressed the conditions of blacks suffering from white oppression with its cures, citing that “the

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<sup>543</sup> John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 2.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

<sup>545</sup> Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, I.

Christian faith does not possess in its nature the means for analyzing the structure of capitalism. As a tool of social analysis, Marxism can disclose the gap between appearance and reality, and thereby help Christians to see how things really are.”<sup>546</sup>

Other black theologians such as Henry McNeal Turner and Reverdy C. Ransom agree with Cone’s comments by advocating for a social gospel formed by liberal theology and Marxist thought, preferred for its ethical framework benefitting the American black church because it is founded on a system that places two classes against one another, namely oppressors (whites) against victims (blacks).<sup>547</sup> For Marx, society was viewed as diverse social classes competing for limited resources including food, housing, employment, education, and leisure time. Cone credits him for helping black theologians see the relationship between social perceptions and theological questions and conclusions. Marx’s most significant contribution to humanity was “his disclosure of the ideological character of bourgeois thought, indicating the connections between the ‘ruling material force of society’ and the ‘ruling intellectual’ force.”<sup>548</sup> Thus, Marxism helps determine these questions because they primarily reflect the material condition of a society.

Some have asked if Marxism influenced leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Its leaders often disdain this inquiry because of the movement’s religious influences, such as those of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, known as the SCLC, headed by Martin Luther King, Jr. and others, which considered itself a Christian organization or from other religious communities sympathetic to the cause. These included both Jewish and Muslim communities. On the other hand, the radical voices of the Black Power and Black Nationalist Movements,

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<sup>546</sup> Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, I.

<sup>547</sup> Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 256.

<sup>548</sup> James Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 41.



including Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, the Nation of Islam or NOI, to name a few, disagreed with Martin Luther King Jr's non-violent approach sounded a vibrant "YES" in agreement with Marxist ideologies. Those familiar with the Black Power and Black Nationalist Movements' Marxist roots would not be surprised. However, very few would ever suspect that Martin Luther King Jr. would be sympathetic to Marxist ideology. For example, King respected Marx's view on social inequalities so much that he believed the US should move toward a socialist society. Though many would disagree with this statement, King's radical threat to American institutions was camouflaged by his quiet exterior, orotund manner, and solemn clerical demeanor. Many of his political beliefs were straightforward and expressed more explicitly in private than publicly. The FBI's perception of King's deep political radicalism was not improbable. Recent access to the SCLC's records granted by Mrs. Coretta King has revealed to researchers the scope of King's apparent radicalism and his passion against Western capitalism as a proponent of "democratic socialism."<sup>549</sup>

Cone's influence in bridging the gap between King and Malcolm X would prove that each leader and their respective alliances had a familiar ally in Marxism and BLT would become the black church's socialist voice for racial empowerment and black politics. Like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and many of his theological predecessors, Cone denied orthodox theology. Therefore, BLT's footing is both liberal theology and the social gospel. Marxism notes that truth is a question "not only of what is but of what ought to be."<sup>550</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> Adam Fairclough, "Was Martin Luther King a Marxist?" *History Workshop*, no. 15 (1983): 117–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288462>. The SCLC records, which extend to more than 140 linear feet, were opened to researchers in the summer of 1981, in Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>550</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 42.

In his 1979 essay, “Black Theology and Marxist Thought,” West’s opinion that oppressed people share a human experience as victims delivered a critical consolidation of Marxism and black theology by noting that “both focus on the plight of the exploited, oppressed, and degraded peoples of the world, their relative powerlessness and possible empowerment.” West’s observances converge black theology with Marxist thought, which urged him to call for “a serious dialogue between Black theologians and Marxist thinkers” focusing on the potential of “mutually arrived-at political action.”<sup>551</sup> West, a long-time member of the Democratic Socialists of America<sup>552</sup> believes that Marxist and black theologians can direct the social framework for change needed for victims of oppression.

Black theologians and Marxist thinkers are strangers. They steer clear of one another, each content to express concerns to their respective audiences. Needless to say, their concerns overlap. Both focus on the plight of the exploited, oppressed and degraded peoples of the world, their relative powerlessness and possible empowerment. I believe that this common focus warrants a serious dialogue between Black theologians and Marxist thinkers.<sup>553</sup>

### **Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory**

Both Black Liberation Theology and Critical Race Theory are 20th-century inventions. Their cultural and theological origins stem from mid-19th-century theories. As one has delved into BLT, Cone, its creator, borrowed many of his ideas from other religious scholars against Scriptural inspiration and authority while communicating a theology using black oppression as its base and recasting Jesus as a poor, black political activist and liberator who died for this

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<sup>551</sup> Cornel West, “Black Theology and Marxist Thought,” in Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 409.

<sup>552</sup> Chris Maisano, “Cornel West Talks with DSA/YDS”, *Democratic Left*, Democratic Socialists of America, March 21, 2013: [https://www.dsasusa.org/democratic-left/cornel\\_west\\_talks\\_with\\_dsa\\_yds/](https://www.dsasusa.org/democratic-left/cornel_west_talks_with_dsa_yds/).

<sup>553</sup> West, “Black Theology and Marxist Thought”, 409.

cause. His death on the cross only provides salvation for the black and oppressed, while white people, known as oppressors, are inherently racist and sinful. Though BLT is distinctly American, it corresponds well with CRT.

The import of Critical Theory to the US occurred in the 1930s when the Frankfurt School, a philosophical and sociological movement, fled Nazi Germany, taking root at Columbia University, and slowly finding its way into other Ivy League schools. By the mid-1960s, CT began spreading across the country through its dedicated advocates in the arrival of teachers, lecturers, media workers, civil servants, and politicians.<sup>554</sup>

Herbert Marcuse was considered CT's most influential and dangerous group participant. Though he remained in America, other colleagues returned to Europe after World War II. While teaching at Columbia, Harvard, Brandeis, and the University of California, San Diego, Marcuse drove CT's philosophical and sociological theories, acclimating them to Critical Race Theory (CRT). His approach became the preliminary for blending race with CT and delivering an association with ethnical minorities, liberal academia, and violent outside agitators to gain power. Marcuse's fame spread in 60's pop culture. During this juncture, he used the opportunity of the student riots as the springboard to make CT America's New Left core political ideology.<sup>555</sup>

Robert Grozinger summarized the results of CT and Marcuse's actions:

In thousands of more or less important, but always influential, positions of authority they succeeded in injecting an entire generation with a disgust for their own culture and history, and a selective inability to think. With their allegedly liberating tolerance, they have torn down natural and culturally nurtured inhibitions and replaced them with state

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<sup>554</sup> Robert Grozinger. *Lew Rockwell.com*. February 6, 2018. [https://www.lewrockwell.com/2018/02/no\\_author/the-frankfurt-school-and-the-new-left-sorcerers-apprentices-and-hobgoblins/](https://www.lewrockwell.com/2018/02/no_author/the-frankfurt-school-and-the-new-left-sorcerers-apprentices-and-hobgoblins/) (accessed 2022).

<sup>555</sup> Keith Preston. *Lew Rockwell.com*. January 22, 2007. <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2007/01/keith-preston/the-new-totalitarianism/> (accessed 2022).

enforced prohibitions on thinking and acting. These in turn have almost completely destroyed the natural workings and defense mechanism of a healthy society.<sup>556</sup>

The meaning of the words “critical” and “theory” must be understood in postmodernism. “Critical,” according to Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, is related to the social sciences and “is geared toward identifying and exposing problems to facilitate revolutionary political change.”<sup>557</sup> The implication is a revolution, not reform. For example, police “reform” is not a choice or the interest of revolutionary change. Instead, to “defund” the police is to abolish them altogether. “It is more interested in problematizing— that is, finding ways in which the system is imperfect and making noise about them, reasonably or not— than in any other identifiable activity, especially building something constructive.”<sup>558</sup>

The complication of understanding CT's social and political ideologies is its denial of objective truth— any method to engage some issue using CT questions whether objectivity is conceivable or desirable, as claimed by Robin DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy. “The term used to describe this way of thinking about knowledge is that knowledge is... reflective of the values and interests of those who produce it.”<sup>559</sup>

In the social sciences, “theory” can be used as an abstract noun (or in one has a theory about something) or as a proper noun, such as Critical Theory. As a catch-all term in postmodernism, CT encapsulates thoughts behind Critical Social Justice (CSJ), especially in

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<sup>556</sup> Grozinger. Lew Rockwell.com.

<sup>557</sup> Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Critical Theory: The Key Concepts* (Oxfordshire, UK: Pitchstone Publishing, Kindle Edition, 2020).

<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

<sup>559</sup> Robin DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy, *Is Everything Really Equal: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2017), 29.

academia, covering ideas, modes of thought, ethics, and methods in activism's theory and practice. "Theory is the heart of the worldview the defines Critical Social Justice."<sup>560</sup> Thus, CT is a philosophical worldview, not an analytical tool.

There have been many recent debates in evangelical circles over the use or consideration of CRT. Those leery of CRT have been accused of creating a straw man for labeling everything disagreeable or uncomfortable in understanding CRT. CRT must define itself so that the postmodern church is familiar with its seemingly subtle entrance into many pulpits in America. Unfortunately, CRT's entrance into the church is, as Jude said: "For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you" (Jude 4).

Racism, according to CRT, is engrained in the fabric of American society as institutional, pervasive, and culture-dominating. This perspective is CRT's lens to communicate "whiteness" as white privilege and white supremacy as the dominating forces that perpetuate the marginalization of black and brown people. "CRT also rejects the traditions of liberalism and meritocracy. Legal discourse says that the law is neutral and colorblind. However, CRT challenges this legal "truth" by examining liberalism and meritocracy as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege."<sup>561</sup>

CT birthed CRT by communicating systemic racism as its platform for social and political change. Amid its radicalized agenda, feminism, and gender identity politics followed. Cone's use of black and oppressed, derived from his use of Marxism's victimization ideology, has extended his theology in blackness to include black women and the LGBTQ+ as oppressed groups in the expression Black Womanist Theology and Queer Theology.

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<sup>560</sup> "Theory: Social Justice Usage," New Discourses, <https://newdiscourses.com/tftw-theory>.

<sup>561</sup> "What Is Critical Race Theory?," UCLA School of Public Affairs, Critical Race Studies, <https://spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory>.

## Relationship to More Recent Theological Advances

### Womanist Theology

Womanist theology (WT) is a black feminist expression of theology emerging with black Christian women embracing their African American identities. It identifies with and separates itself from black theology, identified as male theology, and feminist theology (FT), identified as white disease of the racism inherent in society theology. WT's emergence in the mid-1980s is not a primary sequence of concepts from these bases. However, its compass is the experiences of Black American women who believe they are repeatedly and negatively affected by classism, colorism, and heterosexism.<sup>562</sup> Kurt Buhring notes that Delores Williams, WT's founder, "arguably represents the most significant critique of Cone's early work...[He] Cone was blind to the sexism within his own theology. Along with his exposure to Latin American liberation theology's class critique, Cone's encounter with womanist thought forced him to see the interrelated quality of all forms of oppression."<sup>563</sup>

BLT's point of departure is white racism since its framework denies liberation to oppressed black people in America based on skin color. FT addresses oppressed white women, but does not deal with race categories or economics in its discourse of theology. Because of these observations, it is not universal women's theology. On the other hand, womanist theology (WT) emerged as a new anthropological paradigm to challenge the suppressed role of black women in the black church. It addresses the main categories of the daily plight of black women in the areas

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<sup>562</sup> Delores Williams, "The Color of Feminism," *Christianity and Crisis* 45 (Apr. 29, 1985): 164–165. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*; Williams, "Womanist/Feminist Dialogue: Problems and Possibilities," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9 (Spring—Fall 1993): 67–73.

<sup>563</sup> Kurt Buhring, *Conceptions of God, Freedom, and Ethics in African American and Jewish Theology* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 62.

of race, gender, and political economy, all of which are interwoven in their occupied space and influence the social construction of womanhood. Where FT recognizes that patriarchal systems are problematic and are anathema to women, and that the ecclesiastical mainstream should be avoided, WT embraces the black church as the historical institution that has helped black families survive. On the need to engage in the theological conversation on race and gender, WT agrees with BLT and FT but demands addressing the survival and liberation of men, children, workers, gays, and lesbians as these relate to global economies and the environment.<sup>564</sup>

### **Queer Theology**

Emerging from the debate on empowerment issues in the 1990s, queer theory's historical roots can be traced from the homosexual rights movement to the gay liberation movement, where its concern communicated the resistance to forms of heterosexist and homophobic domination of the nature of non-essentializing sexual identities. The homosexual community's antagonism is a grass-roots effort to represent their experiences and gain control from scientific experts who challenge their efforts of theory and practice.

Queer theology (QT) challenges the patriarchal and heterosexual institution of Christianity by refusing to accept the restrictions of its traditional theology that males must heed the law of being heterosexual. By creating a theological position of "queerness," based on liberation theology, their community can reclaim Christian theology.

LGBT is now the preferred term over "homosexual" because of the negative connotation associated with medical or mental illness. The term "community" refers to various gender

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<sup>564</sup> Linda Thomas, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm," *Cross Currents*, Vol.48, issue 4, Winter 1998-1999: <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/256.html>.

identities. “Queer” is the umbrella for marginalized sexual orientates whose gender identity does not fall into the LGBT category. The word has been reclaimed by the community and is used in academia as an activist connotation.

Both BLT and WT share a kinship with QT through activism. Cone believed that Christians should become culturally concerned for the oppressed. This statement embraces the idea that human unity is the transcendent value that outdoes the problem of race, sexism, and classism in the church and society. Christian theologians must not only be concerned with racism, but the human condition as well. Regarding sexism in Christian churches, Cone acknowledges that “sexism dehumanizes and kills, and it must be fought on every front...Anyone who claims to be fighting against the problem of oppression and does not analyze the exploitive role of capitalism is either naïve or an agent of the enemies of freedom.”<sup>565</sup>

El Kornegay, author of “A Queering of Black Theology,” documents the activism of black author James Baldwin and his encounter with “religion as prolonged crisis: the inheritance of a religious tradition that did not offer him the moral authority (power) and community where his faith, belief, sexual self, and manhood could find acceptance and safety.”<sup>566</sup> His crisis, an argument for those who identified with him, viewed black bodies and sexuality as demonized by puritanical influence. Kornegay noted that Cone’s theology has omissions related to sexuality, something he admitted by asking Baldwin to teach him *how* to write. This submission does not prevent Cone’s opinion concerning Baldwin’s and LGBTIQ’s embracing homo-bi-queer sexuality. “It does not make them “more Christian” than those denying homosexuality, believing

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<sup>565</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xvi-xviii.

<sup>566</sup> El Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin’s Blues Project and Gospel Prose* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 93. See also, Clarence E. Hardy, III, *James Baldwin’s God: Sex, Hope, and Crisis in Black Holiness Culture* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2003).



that sexuality is an “embodiment of Christian love...not a challenge, but an expression of the love of Christ.”<sup>567</sup> Noting Baldwin’s passing, Kornegay voices that “Jimmy insisted on his role as a witness and lived his prophecy.”<sup>568</sup>

At the “welcome table”, in his pass(ing)over, Jimmy sets the table with the rite of masculinity done in remembrance of what Jesus calls us—calls men—to do. Until the last, he defies hegemonic masculinity and homophobia. Therefore, his death is reminiscent of Jesus’ own death and defiance on the Cross of Empire. *Do this in remembrance of me . . .*<sup>569</sup>

### Woke Christianity

In this final examination, one must ask a series of questions? Is race or gender a priority for Christian identity? What is the proper order of faith, ethnicity, and gender? The answers to these questions are critical when approaching postmodern America’s social and political landscape.

A significant debate is being held among evangelicals as to what degree one should apply faith amid the current social crisis. Should the priority be given to one’s skin color, gender or Christianity? Is one a Christian, or is one black or white first, or is one male or female priority? This inquiry is the primary question facing evangelicals torn between the church and culture. One has indicated that black nationalists consider Christianity a white man’s religion, while those advocating for BLT’s version of Christianity say the same thing but use a different vernacular. Without the Bible, every man’s opinion and decision are sinful and provide the

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<sup>567</sup> Theodore Jennings, *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003), 164.

<sup>568</sup> Kornegay, *A Queering of Black Theology*, 119. See also Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group, 1999), 2. Long considers the use of signs and symbols to communicate religious consciousness in relation to oppression, slavery, and the black freedom movement, to name a few.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

wrong answer. One is not a Christian because he only identifies with some version of Christ. Cone would disagree with this statement. However, there are no versions of the Messiah. Only God's authoritative word provides who Jesus is. Again, the central problem with BLT is that color drives the discussion, not God's word. Woke Christianity (WC), on the other hand, attempts to reconcile BLT, CT, and other theological advances of postmodernism with historical Christianity.

Eric Mason, pastor, and author of "Woke Church," endeavors to reappropriate "wokeness" in a phraseology that calls for Christians in America to confront racism and injustice. Like Cone, his interpretation of justification proposes a separate meaning from Scripture's, though he rightly differentiates between the gospel and the pursuit of justice. However, Mason frequently remarks that pursuing justice implies the gospel. He also adjoins one's justification with the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement by saying, "God used the injustice of Rome and the Jews as a means for Jesus, the innocent, to take on my guilt and legally pay for my sin (Luke 9:22). He paid for my sin by being my propitiation" (1 Jn. 2:2).<sup>570</sup>

The foundation of Woke Christianity is Calvinism with an awareness of social justice. Communicating the message of "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) provides the central message necessary to communicate the gospel based on a perceived idea of racial injustice requiring liberation. "Wokeism" implies a social gospel. Cone's point is: "Therefore, if Blacks are to have freedom, they must take it, by any means necessary."<sup>571</sup> WC, similar to BLT, suggests that if the gospel does not address racial injustice, it is, therefore, an unbalanced gospel. WC, unlike BLT,

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<sup>570</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2018), 44.

<sup>571</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 96.

maintains an orthodox theology and believes in the authority and inspiration of Scripture. However, WC, like BLT, believes that black people are incapable of being racists and, in some ways, are morally superior to white people. Mason advocates that the church design ministries and programs that are “unapologetically Christ-driven and unapologetically black, without being seen as separatist.”<sup>572</sup> Many of the tenets of Cone are communicated in some ways, but the central message of WC is to be black and reformed while being woke and Christian. Often, this perspective leads to woke Christians elevating culture over Scripture.<sup>573</sup>

### **The Final Analysis**

As a later generation finds what seems to be more innovative ways to communicate God’s word through the lens of BLT, one thing is for sure, as Solomon has so eloquently spoken, “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccles. 1:9). This observation is specific from Scripture’s perspective where the machinations of men will continue to deceive them that they know better than God what is the root cause of their failure to please him alone. This problem is the apparent failure of BLT to liberate oppressed people that they claim are victims of a racist system of oppressors. No matter the cause or the means of Cone’s social gospel, it cannot deliver on its promises because it neither reverences nor respects God’s authority. The gospel is God’s. It never changes and “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Num. 23:19)

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<sup>572</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church*, 156.

<sup>573</sup> Though a recent interpretation of theology, Woke Christianity influences today’s church in its practical means of worship with the emphasis on race by urging white evangelicals to apologize for America’s past of slavery and systemic racist ideologies. Mason, like others, are unapologetic in communicating the victimization of blacks in both culture and the church and pursues dialog that expresses black superiority in many cases concerning whites who are inherently racist as if they are the ones who committed the acts against blacks and other minority groups.

Given BLT's advocacy for black autonomy with Cone's expressed views that one can define what one's liberation looks like provides a false impression of one's ability to overcome earthly challenges without addressing the fundamental matter at hand—the sinful heart.

Whiteness is not the problem. Neither is it the original sin. Blackness is not the problem either.

Neither are blacks exclusive from sin. Blacks are not only oppressed. Neither are whites only the oppressors. Sin is the oppression of all people. Jesus preached it— Paul wrote about it.

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Rom. 3:9-12)

One has introduced and explored some of BLT's expressions through the conduits of Marxism, CT, CRT, and Woke Christianity. For the evangelical unfamiliar with BLT, one would ask, how is it Christian, and how does it reconcile man to its Creator? The answers have been made evident in this overall examination of BLT's theological implications and its tenets used to suppose that God's word does not provide the final answers to the question of sin, racism, and social justice. Any debate on the authority and inerrancy of Scripture is merely an academic exercise unless it concerns the individual Christian's growth in God. Precisely, this is what it does. Confessing that Scripture is authoritative and inerrant should lead the individual to advance in conforming to Christ's image.

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