

A Critical Review of Donald Hagner's "Ten Guidelines for Evangelical Scholarship"

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The *International Council Statements on Biblical Inerrancy* (1978) and *Hermeneutics* (1982) presented evidenced a long, protracted struggle by evangelicals against decades of critical, liberal scholars attacks on the integrity of Old and New Testament. Now the Scripture, as well as these documents, are again under systematic assault, this time, however, not from liberals but from the rapidly developing "critical-evangelical scholarship" that espouses similar, *if not the same*, kind of arguments producing the same kind of results that the ICBI documents fought so hard to prevent. Typical of this new trend in critical-evangelical scholarship is Donald Hagner's "Ten Guidelines For Evangelical Scholarship." This advocacy for Hagner's principles, if allowed to continue, will destroy any gains made by the ICBI documents among evangelicals. These critical-evangelical scholars high-handedly disregard lessons of history evidenced by the hard-won battles of the ICBI documents.

INTRODUCTION

Baker Books blog recently published on March 12, 2013, Donald Hagner's "Ten Guidelines for Evangelical Scholarship."[\[2\]](#) These guidelines were then praised by Craig Blomberg[\[3\]](#) in the first blog comment on the baker blog where Blomberg noted, "Excellent, Don, excellent. And I'm so enjoying reading your book. I hope you still have several more good ones to come!" immediately below Hagner's listing of ten guidelines. Here are Hagner's guidelines (and we suspect many more critical, evangelical scholars would concur with his list). We cut/paste verbatim from the Hagner's blog: "*Ten Guidelines for Evangelical Scholarship*" by Donald A. Hagner:

"Proposals for an evangelical criticism that affirms the indispensability of the critical method, i.e., being "reasonably" critical:

We must:

1. See *what is there* (avoiding maximal conservatism, anachronistic approaches, harmonizing and homogenizing, partial appeals to historical evidence).
2. Affirm the full humanity of the scriptures (the word of God in the words of men).

3. Define the nature of inspiration inductively (not deductively), i.e., in light of the phenomena of scripture (doing justice to it as it is).
4. Acknowledge that no presuppositionless position is possible and that the best we can do is attempt to step outside of our presuppositions and imagine “what if.” (Only a relative degree of objectivity is attainable.)
5. Modify the classical historical-critical method so far as its presuppositions are concerned, i.e., so as to allow openness to the transcendent, the action of God in the historical process, the possibility of miracles, etc. Develop a method not alien but rather appropriate to what is being studied.
6. Maintain a unified worldview, avoiding a schizophrenic attitude toward truth and criteria for the validation of truth. That is, all truth is God’s truth, including that arrived at through our rationality.
7. Acknowledge that in the realm of historical knowledge, we are not dealing with matters that can be proven (or disproven, for that matter!), but with probability. Historical knowledge remains dependent on inferences from the evidence. Good historical criticism is what makes best sense, i.e., the most coherent explanation of the evidence.
8. Avoid the extremes of a pure fideism and a pure rationality-based apologetics. Blind faith is as inappropriate as rationalism. Faith and reason, however, both have their proper place. What is needed is a creative synthesis.
9. Develop humility, in contrast to the strange (and unwarranted!) confidence and arrogance of critical orthodoxy (concerning constructs that depend on presuppositions alien to the documents themselves).
10. Approach criticism by developing a creative tension between intellectual honesty and faithfulness to the tradition (each side needs constant reexamination), with the trust that criticism rightly engaged will ultimately vindicate rather than destroy Christian truth.

Note: The Holy Spirit cannot be appealed to in order to solve historical-critical issues or in the issue of truth-claims. Nevertheless, it is true that *for the believer* the inner witness of the Spirit confirms the truth of the faith existentially or in the heart.

Concede: Our knowledge is fragmentary and partial, and all our wisdom is but stammering. Full understanding can only come after our perfection, and then it will no longer be understanding alone but also worship.” (italics in the original)

ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED GUIDELINES

Now let us respond to each of Hagner’s ten evangelical scholarship “guidelines,” even though the “proof in the pudding” is readily seen in what has been written already. The bottom-line is that critical evangelical scholars are becoming so much like their left-wing counterparts that little differences remain on the whole. Ability to distinguish between these two groups in terms of presuppositions and conclusions is blurring rapidly.

PROPOSED GUIDLEINE ONE:

“See what is there (avoiding maximal conservatism, anachronistic approaches, harmonizing and homogenizing, partial appeals to historical evidence).”

RESPONSE:

1. *Historical criticism is really the anachronistic approach, spawned by Spinoza in the 17th century and aided by hostile, negative presuppositions. Please read, Norman Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy,” JETS 42:1 (March 1999) 3-18.*[\[4\]](#)

2. Historical criticism does not accept “what is there” but wants only to see what they *a priori* have chosen NOT to be there (i.e. slaughtering of the babies in Bethlehem [Gundry], resurrection of saints in Matthew 27:51-52 [Licona]).

3. Historical criticism, no matter how “modified,” assaults the integrity of God’s Word, i.e. this is the automatic “fruit” of historical criticism. It assaults rather than affirms; casts doubt, rather than to confirm. Liberal scholars admit this, but evangelical critical scholars seem to be blind to such effects.

4. No matter how much Hagner would attempt to modify historical criticism, would true historical critics (i.e. non-evangelicals) accept that modification?

5. Plenary, verbal inspiration allows for harmonization, while historical criticism divides God's word into what is acceptable and what is NOT acceptable to the individual historical critic.

PROPOSED GUIDELINE TWO:

“Affirm the full humanity of the Scriptures (the word of God in the words of men).”

One would guess that Hagner means that the Scripture can err since it is a human product.

RESPONSE:

1. Although the full-humanity of Scripture is true, since God is author of Scripture and God cannot lie or err, the Scripture cannot err (John 14:26; 16:13; John 17:17).
2. The Bible is fully human without error; it is God's Word as well as man's words (2 Sam. 23:2; 2 Tim 3:16). It is a theanthropic book, as Christ is a theanthropic person.
3. By Hagner's same logic, Jesus must have erred (and sinned).

PROPOSED GUIDELINE THREE:

“Define the nature of inspiration inductively (not deductively), i.e., in light of the phenomena of scripture (doing justice to it as it is).”

RESPONSE:

1. This is a false disjunction since both induction and deduction are involved in determining the doctrine of Scripture, as they are in other doctrines as well.
2. The doctrine of inspiration is based on a complete inductive study of all of Scripture which yields two basic truths: a) the Bible is the written Word of God; b) God cannot error. From which we rightly deduce that a) The Bible cannot err. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* put it, the basis for our faith is “The whole counsel of God... [which] is either expressly set down in Scripture, *or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture* (I, VI, emphasis added).

3. Of course, the doctrine of Scripture should be understood in the light of the data of Scripture. However, as the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy [ICBI] put it, “We further deny that inerrancy is negated by the Biblical phenomena. . . (Article XIII). The data of Scripture do not contradict the doctrine of Scripture; they merely nuance and enhance our understanding of it.[5]

PROPOSED GUIDELINE FOUR:

“Acknowledge that no presuppositionless position is possible and that the best we can do is attempt to step outside of our presuppositions and imagine “what if.” (Only a relative degree of objectivity is attainable.)”

RESPONSE:

1. While this is true in a very important sense, Hagner is apparently ignores the history and presuppositions of historical criticism to his own detriment.
2. The question is not *whether* one approaches Scripture with presupposition, but *which* presuppositions he uses.
3. As evangelical scholars, we approach the Bible as the inerrant written Word of God by way of the historical grammatical method of interpretation. Current critical scholarship denies both of these in the historic evangelical sense.
4. As ICBI stated it, “We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking in account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture” (Article XVIII).
5. ICBI adds importantly, “We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text of quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship” (Article XVIII). But this is exactly what Hagner and his British trained NT cohorts do.
6. Hagner comes dangerously close to denying that one can truly obtain an “objective” interpretation of Scripture. Besides being a self-defeating claim to objectivity in denying objectivity, he apparently has

not read and interacted with the excellent work by Professor Thomas Howe titled, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation*.[\[6\]](#)

PROPOSED GUIDELINE FIVE:

“Modify the classical historical-critical method so far as its presuppositions are concerned, i.e., so as to allow openness to the transcendent, the action of God in the historical process, the possibility of miracles, etc. Develop a method not alien but rather appropriate to what is being studied.”

RESPONSE:

1. If the “historical-critical method” needs to be “modified” before it can be safely used, then this is an admission that it is a dangerous method.
2. Further, if it is modified of its anti-supernaturalism, then why accept the method to begin with.
3. What value does this critical methodology have that could not have been gained by the traditional historical-grammatical method?
4. If it is not radically modified, then it does not help evangelicals. But if it is radically modified to suit evangelicalism, then why accepted it to begin with. If you have to radically modify a Ford to make a Cadillac, they why not start with a Cadillac?
5. Methodology determines theology, and an unorthodox methodology will yield unorthodox theology.

PROPOSED GUIDELINE SIX:

“Maintain a unified worldview, avoiding a schizophrenic attitude toward truth and criteria for the validation of truth. That is, all truth is God’s truth, including that arrived at through our rationality”

RESPONSE:

1. As the ICBI framers put, “Truth is what corresponds to the facts” (ICBI Article XIII, official commentary), whether God revealed it in Scripture (Jn. 17:17; 2 Tim.3:16) or in nature (Psa. 19:1; Rom. 1:1-20), and God does not contradict Himself (ICBI Articles V and XIV).
2. We deny that truth is “arrived at through our rationality,” as Hagner meant it, since God is the source of all truth, whether in general or special revelation. The ICBI framers declared emphatically, “We affirm that the written Word in its entirety is a relation given by God... [and] We deny that the

Bible ...depends on the responses of men for its validity” (Article III). As for other alleged sources of truth, “We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth’s history be properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture” (Article XII).

3. However, good reason must always be in accord with and enlightened by revelation and God’s Holy Spirit. As Article XVII declares: “We affirm that the Holy Spirit bears witness to the Scriptures, assuring believers of the truthfulness of God’s written Word. We deny that this witness of the Holy Spirit operated in isolation from or against Scripture.

PROPOSED GUIDELINE SEVEN:

“Acknowledge that in the realm of historical knowledge, we are not dealing with matters that can be proven (or disproven, for that matter!), but with probability. Historical knowledge remains dependent on inferences from the evidence. Good historical criticism is what makes best sense, i.e., the most coherent explanation of the evidence.”

1. Historical knowledge can rise above mere “probabilities.” One can have moral certainty about many things. Luke spoke of “convincing proofs” of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:3–NAU).

2. Luke begins his Gospel with the assurance to the reader that he “may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4-ESV).

3. In determining the truth of a historical presentation one certainly wants the interpretation that “makes best sense, i.e., the most coherent explanation of the evidence.” However, it begs the question whether what Hagner means by “good historical criticism” is the best way to achieve this. As a matter of fact, as manifest in the writings of many contemporary scholars who have adopted this method, it clearly did not lead to the best conclusion. Certainly, it did not lead to the most evangelical conclusion.

PROPOSED GUIDELINE EIGHT:

“Avoid the extremes of a pure fideism and a pure rationality-based apologetics. Blind faith is as inappropriate as rationalism. Faith and reason, however, both have their proper place. What is needed is a creative synthesis.”

RESPONSE:

1. To speak of “blind faith” as one of the poles, is a stray man since one can be a Fideist (e.g., like Alvin Plantinga) without having blind faith.
2. True Christian scholarship involves “faith seeing understanding,” as Bible exhorts when it asks us to “give a reason for the hope that is in us” (1 Peter 3:15). Indeed, God said through Isaiah, “Come let us reason together . . .” (Isa. 1:18). And Jesus commanded that we love the Lord our God with our “mind,” as well as with our heart and soul (Mark 12:30).
3. There are other apologetics alternatives to Fideism and a Rationally based approach. Aquinas spoke of faith *based in* God’s Word but *supported by* evidence.^[7] And Cornelius Van Til’s transcendental reduction to the necessity of accepting the Trine God revealed in Scripture was certainly no a form of pure fideism or pure rational in apologetics.
4. Faith and reason do both have a proper place and need a “creative synthesis,” but they do not find it in critical method proposed by Donald Hagner’s “Ten Guidelines for Evangelical Scholarship.”

PROPOSED GUIDELINE NINE:

“Develop humility, in contrast to the strange (and unwarranted!) confidence and arrogance of critical orthodoxy (concerning constructs that depend on presuppositions alien to the documents themselves).”

RESPONSE:

1. This guideline is an ironic example of the very orthodox view it is criticizing. It is hardly an example of humility to exalt one’s own methodology and stereotype one’s opponent as having a “strange and unwarranted!) confidence and arrogance.” Humble statements do not condemn others as having unwarranted confidence and arrogance”!
2. The humble thing to do would have been to show some respect of the orthodox view of Scripture.^[8]

PROPOSED GUIDELINE TEN:

“Approach criticism by developing a creative tension between intellectual honesty and faithfulness to the tradition (each side needs constant reexamination), with the trust that criticism rightly engaged will ultimately vindicate rather than destroy Christian truth.”

RESPONSE:

1. Certainly Hagner does not mean what he says, since he says “intellectual honesty” needs “constant reexamination” too!
2. Further, “faithfulness to the tradition” one has should not be a goal. Rather, it should be faithfulness to the Word of God.
3. Further, the phrase “rightly engaged” is bristling with presuppositions that Hagner leaves unstated, unspecified.
4. Judging by these 10 guidelines, Hagner is “engaging” in a form of biblical criticism that is ill-founded and destined to disaster. For *bad methodology leads to bad theology, and he has adopted a bad methodology.*

PROPOSED HAGNER NOTE:

“Note: The Holy Spirit cannot be appealed to in order to solve historical-critical issues or in the issue of truth-claims. Nevertheless, it is true that for the believer the inner witness of the Spirit confirms the truth of the faith existentially or in the heart.

Concede: Our knowledge is fragmentary and partial, and all our wisdom is but stammering. Full understanding can only come after our perfection, and then it will no longer be understanding alone but also worship.”

RESPONSE:

1. This is an odd comment coming from an evangelical since Scripture affirms the role of the Holy Spirit in the production of His Word: John 6:63—“The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” and 2 Peter 1:19—“And so we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do

well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.” (2Peter 1:19 NAU).

2. The Spirit of God never affirms anything contrary to the Word of God. Further, the Holy Spirit is essential in a proper interpretation and application of the Word of God (see ICBI Statement on Hermeneutics, Articles IV, V, VI). As the Holy Spirit lead the apostles in writing the Word of God (John 14:26;16:13), even so he leads the believers in understanding the Word of God (1 John 2:26-27).

3. Just because *perfect* understanding of Scripture does not come until heaven (1 Cor. 13:10-13) does not mean we cannot have an *adequate* understanding of it here. Nor does it relieve us of our obligation, to “test the spirits” to discover the “false prophets” and to know “the Spirit of truth” from “the spirit of error” (1 John 4:1, 6). After all, we have in Scripture “a sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19), and we are exhorted to use it to “contend for the Faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

THE RESULTS OF FOLLOWING THESE GUIDELINES IN HAGNER’S WRITINGS

Now let us look at the consequences of these principles that Hagner’s own recently published New Testament Introduction operates from, i.e. Donald W. Hagner. *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012.

The work is praised as follows on the Amazon website, reflecting similar wording on its jacket cover: “This capstone work from widely respected senior evangelical scholar Donald Hagner offers a substantial introduction to the New Testament. Hagner deals with the New Testament both historically and theologically, employing the framework of salvation history. He treats the New Testament as a coherent body of texts and stresses the unity of the New Testament without neglecting its variety. Although the volume covers typical questions of introduction, such as author, date, background, and sources, it focuses primarily on understanding the theological content and meaning of the texts, putting students in a position to understand the origins of Christianity and its canonical writings.” The book includes summary tables, diagrams, maps, and extensive bibliographies. It is praised by such scholars as James D. G. Dunn, I. Howard Marshall, Craig Keener and Thomas Schreiner.

One may note two strategic factors regarding Hagner’s New Testament Introduction: First, his work represents the cutting edge of evangelical, British-influenced and trained critical scholarship who are currently teaching the next generation of preachers and scholars in the United States, both on a college

and seminary level. Second, Hagner's work will most likely replace the late Donald Guthrie's New Testament Introduction that was last revised in 1990. If one wants to know where evangelical critical scholarship is moving, Hagner's work provides that trajectory.

These two strategic factors are also the work's gravest weaknesses. The work attributes the word "inspired" to the New Testament Scripture.^[9] Yet, Hagner maintains, "the inspired word of God comes to us through the medium of history, through the agency of writers who lived in history and were a part of history" which "*necessitate the historical and critical study of Scripture.*"^[10] He says that the use of the word "critical" does not mean "tearing it down or demeaning it—but rather to exercising judgment or discernment concerning every aspect of it."^[11] Therefore, Hagner asserts that "[w]e must engage in historical criticism, in the sense of thoughtful interpretation of the Bible" and "the historical method is indispensable precisely because the Bible is the story of God's act in history."^[12] What Hagner means by this is the need for historical critical ideologies rather than grammatico-historical criticism. This is the first signal that British-influenced evangelical scholars are shifting markedly away from the Reformation tradition of grammatico-historical criticism and training the next generation of preachers in historical-criticism that markedly differs in approach both presuppositionally, historically, and in the qualitative kind of conclusions such an ideology reaches. Like many British-influenced evangelical critical scholars, he believes that he can use historical-criticism and be immune from its more negative elements: "The critical method therefore needs to be tempered so that rather than being used against the Bible, it is open to the possibility of the transcendent or miraculous within the historical process and thus is used to provide better understanding of the Bible."^[13] This latter admission is telling, since it is an admission, no matter how indirect, of the dangers of historical criticism. Hagner argues that "[k]eeping an open mind concerning the possibility of the transcendent in history does not entail the suspension of critical judgment. There is no need for a naïve credulity and acceptance of anything and everything simply because one's worldview is amenable to the supernatural."^[14] Hagner apparently believes that he has discovered the proper balance of presuppositions and practice in the historical-critical method displayed in this work: "It must be stressed once again that the critical method is indispensable to the study of Scripture. It is the sine qua non of responsible interpretation of God's word. The believer need have no fear of the method itself, but need only be on guard against the employment of improper presuppositions" (p. 11). An old pithy saying, however, is that the "devil is in the details." Hagner's argument here ignores the marked

evidence or proof from history of the presuppositions and damage that historical criticism has caused by even well-intentioned scholars who have eviscerated the Scripture through such an ideology. History constitutes a monumental testimony against Hagner's embracing of the ideologies of historical criticism as well as the damage that it has caused the church.

Hagner excoriates "very conservative scholars" and "obscurantist fundamentalism" that refused to embrace some form of moderated historical critical ideology. Hagner commends Hengel's belief that "fundamentalism" and its accepting belief in the full trustworthiness in Scripture is actually a form of atheism, [15] quoting and affirming Hengel's position that "Fundamentalism is a form of 'unbelief' that closes itself to the—God intended—historical reality." [16] Hagner insists that "[r]epudiation of the critical Study of Scripture amounts to a gnostic-like denial of the historical character of the Christian faith." [17] He argues that "[r]epudiation of the critical study of Scripture amounts to a gnostic-like denial of the historical character of the Christian faith." [18] Apparently, Hagner agrees with Hengel that, Fundamentalist polemic against the 'historical-critical method' does not understand historical perception" and that "Fundamentalism is a form of 'unbelief' that closes itself to the —God intended—historical reality." [19] Apparently, Hagner (and Hengel) believes that since the Scriptures were mediated through history and human agency, this opens the documents up to the documents being fallible human products. Because of the Scripture being based in historical knowledge, one cannot use the word "certain" but only "probable," for Hagner insists that the "word 'prove,' although perhaps appropriate in mathematics and science, is out of place when it comes to historical knowledge." [20] In studying Scripture, compelling proof will always be lacking. [21]

In response, Hagner (and Hengel) apparently do not understand the issue, for fundamentalism (e.g. *The Jesus Crisis*) never argued against criticism but only the kind of criticism utilized and the philosophical principle involved in such criticism that closed off the study of Scripture a priori before any analysis could be done, i.e. historical-critical ideologies. Historical criticism is a purposeful, psychological operation designed to silence Scripture and deflect away from its plain, normal sense implications, i.e. to dethrone it from influence in church and society. While left-wing critical scholarship will openly admit this, "moderate" evangelicals like Hagner choose to ignore the intent of historical criticism. With this operating assumption about understanding Scripture, some sampling highlights of Hagner's "balanced" approach to historical-critical ideologies: First, "we have no reliable chronology of Jesus

ministry” in the Gospels.[22] Since the Gospels are “historical narratives” they involve “interpretation” by the evangelists and that “level of interpretation can be high.”[23] Since the gospel writers largely (but not completely) reflect ancient Roman *bioi* as the “closest analogy” from antiquity” and since *bioi* were not necessarily always without interpretation,[24]the “[t]he Evangelists compare well with the secular historians of their own day, and their narratives remain basically trustworthy.”[25] Second, like other critically-trained European scholars, Hagner accepts Lessing’s “ugly ditch” and the German/British concept of *historie*– (actual verifiable events) vs. *geschichte*—(faith interpretations of events) of a dichotomy between the Jesus of the Gospels and the “historical Jesus.”[26] Although critical of some historical Jesus research, Hagner concedes that “the Jesus of history was to some extent different from the Gospels’ portrayal of him” and “if we cannot look for a one-to-one correspondence between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the early church’s faith, we can at least establish a degree of continuity between the two.”[27] Furthermore, “we are in no position to write a biography of Jesus” based in the information from the New Testament since the gospels are “kerygmatic portrayals of the story of Jesus.”[28]

Third, Hagner embraces the idea that a book can be “pseudonymity” as acceptable in the New Testament canon. Hagner argues, “We have very little to lose in allowing the category of Deutero-Pauline letters. If it happens that some other person have written these four, or even six documents [e.g. Ephesians, Pastorals] in the name of Paul, we are not talking about forgery or deception.[29]” He continues, “The ancient world on the whole did not have the same kind of sensitivity to pseudonymity that is typical in the modern world, with its concern for careful attribution and copyright.”[30] And “The authority and canonicity of the material is in no way affected” by books put into final shape by disciples of the prophets.”[31] “The fact is that the Pauline corpus, with deuteron-letters as well as without them, stands under the banner of the authoritative Paul.”[32] Hagner supports British scholar, I. Howard Marshall’s view on “pseudonymous” writings in the New Testament: “In order to avoid the idea of deceit, Howard Marshall has coined the words “allonymity” and “allepigraphy” in which the prefix *pseudos* (“false”) is replaced with *allos* (“other”) which gives a more positive concept to the writing of a work in the name of another person .[33] Hagner notes that another British scholar James Dunn has come to a similar conclusion. Hagner says, “We do not know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there are Deutero-Pauline letters in the Pauline corpus, but if in the weighing of historical probabilities it seems to us that there are, we can freely admit that this too is a way in which God has

mediated Scripture to us.”^[34] Apparently, to Hagner and others, God uses false attribution to accomplish his purpose of communication of His Word that encourages the highest ethical standards upon men! Thus, for Hagner, most likely did not write Ephesians as well as The Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Timothy and Titus).^[35] They should be viewed in the category of Deutero-Pauline letters.^[36] Hagner even devotes a whole section of his Introduction to this category of Deutero-Pauline letters.^[37] He regards the book of James as possibly not written by James: “we cannot completely exclude the alternative possibility that the book is pseudonymous. Already in the time of Jerome it was regarded as such” . . . Least likely of all, but again not impossible, the letter could have been written by another, little known or unknown, person named ‘James.’^[38]” (p. 675). 2 Peter is “Almost certainly not by Peter. Very probably written by a disciple of Peter or a member of the Petrine circle.”^[39] The author of Revelation is “Almost certainly not by the Apostle John. Possibly by John ‘The Elder’ but more probably by another John, otherwise unknown to us, who may⁸ have been a member of the Johannine circle.”^[40]

Due to space limitations, a final concatenation surrounding Hagner’s view of the composition and authorship of the NT must satisfy for various assertions of Hagner’s Introduction: The Gospels involve “interpretation,” that “level of interpretation can be high” at times, and display “basic reliability,” “basically trustworthy” in their presentation; ^[41] “[I]t is a great pity that the word ‘Pharisee,’ which out to be a complementary term, has become in the English language synonymous with ‘hypocrite,’ “to be a Pharisee was to wear a badge of honor,” “to a considerable extent, Jesus himself, in his call to righteousness, actually resembled the Pharisees, as has been rightly pointed out by many Jewish scholars. And, of course, one tends to be most harshly critical of those who are closest to the truth;”^[42] “[t]hat the Jesus of history was to some extent different from the Gospels’ portrayal of him can hardly be doubted,” in the Gospels “details were added or altered to make narratives clearer or more applicable to the church. An example, in Peter’s confession, is Matthew’s alteration of Mark’s simple ‘You are the Christ’ to ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God’ [i.e. meaning that Peter did not originally say the whole statement but Matthew added to it for further meaning]; “if we cannot look for a one-to-one correspondence between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the early church’s faith, we can at least establish a degree of continuity between the two;”^[43] the oral transmission of the Gospel material has “basic reliability;” “to a certain degree, even a number of his [Jesus’] sayings are reworked by the early church, but the primary goal in all of this has been to understand them

better;”^[44] Hagner assumes modern historical-critical approaches such as form and redaction criticism: “[t]hat the tradition of Jesus’ words and deeds experience some degree of transformation in the different between the first [i.e. the Sitz im Leben of Jesus] and the third time frames [i.e. the Sitz im Leben of the Evangelist] seems inevitable. Nevertheless, such a view is not incompatible with the conclusion that the tradition has been handed down in a substantially accurate and trustworthy form. We are not talking about the kind of modifications of the tradition that end up in a gross distortion wherein Jesus of the church bears little relationship to the Jesus of history;”^[45] “Mark serves as a model followed by the Evangelists Matthew and Luke;” “the content of Mark is of fundamental importance and provides the basic building blocks of Jesus;”^[46][although] the disciple Levi-Matthew possibly is the collector and editor of the five Matthean discourses, the Gospel as it stands likely is the work of an unknown disciple or disciples of the Matthean circle—that is, associated with Matthew;”^[47] “[t]he fact is that the Pauline corpus, with deuterio-letters as well as without them, stands under the banner of the authoritative Paul;” From a canonical perspective, the corpus as it stands represents Paul, even if the Deutero-Pauline letters require special awareness and care when they are used to speak of Paul himself. It is not unfair to say that the deuterio-Pauline letters represent Paul in their own way as much as the authentic letters. But it is indeed Paul whom they represent, and therefore to that extent they involve no deception;”^[48] “[t]here is nothing crucial at stake here for those who, like, myself, treasure the NT as Scripture. The acceptance of this kind of pseudonymity, based on actual association with and dependence upon Paul or other Apostles, should in no way threaten the canonical authority of these documents;”^[49] Hagner lists the following four books as deuterio-Pauline [i.e. not written by Paul]: Ephesians (“probably by a disciple of Paul’)^[50] and the Pastoral Epistles of 1-2 Timothy and Titus (“a slight probability favors a disciple or disciples of Paul, possibly making use of fragments of Paul”);^[51] [w]e do not know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there are Deutero-Pauline Letters in the Pauline corpus, but if in the weighing of historical probabilities it seems to us that there are, we can admit freely that this too is a way in which God has mediated Scripture to us;”^[52] the book of James “very possibly by James, the brother of Jesus. But it is equally possible that the prescript is pseudonymous (or ‘allonymous’), so that the real author is unknown to us. A third possibility is that he material of the epistle traces back to James but was put into its present shape by a later redactor;”^[53] the book of 1 Peter “very possibly Peter, through Silvanus, but if not, possibly by a disciple or associate of the Apostle;”^[54] the authorship of Jude has “[n]o certainty possible, but probably Judas, the brother of Jesus and James;”^[55] 2 Peter “[a]lmost certainly not by Peter. Very

probably written by a disciple of Peter or a member of the Petrine circle;”[56] although he says he favors the authorship of the Johannine Epistles to that of the Apostle John, he also argues that “[a]uthorship of the letters by a member of the Johannine circle remains a possibility;”[57] and as for Revelation, Hagner argues “[a]lmost certainly not by the Apostle John. Possibly by John ‘the Elder,’ but more probably another John, otherwise unknown to us, who may have been a member of the Johannine circle.”[58]

In sum, Hagner’s work represents what may well replace Guthrie’s *New Testament Introduction*. One can only imagine the impact will be that British and European evangelical critical scholarship represented by Hagner’s assertions regarding his “balanced” use of historical-critical presuppositions will have on the next generation of God’s preachers and teachers! As Machen said long ago, “as go the theological seminaries, so go the churches.” [59]

RECENT SALIENT EXAMPLES FROM EVANGELICAL HISTORY...

That Demonstrate the Main Thesis of this Article: Beware of Philosophy

Many other British- and Continental-trained critical scholars, like Craig Blomberg noted above, appear to find significant hermeneutical benefit in Hagner’s principles. As noted, Blomberg commented on Hagner’s principles on the website by saying, “Excellent, Don, excellent. And I’m so enjoying reading your book. I hope you still have several more good ones to come!”[60] Many critically trained evangelicals perhaps also would decry these objections to Hagner’s principles as Hagner is wont to do in his *New Testament Introduction* as fundamentalist nonsense and attribute such conclusions to the latter’s alleged acute ignorance or misunderstanding of historical-criticism even in its “modified” form. Instead, they would give hearty cheer to Hagner’s ideas above, especially of a “modified” historical-criticism as giving great benefit to exegesis. Church history, as well as more recent *Evangelical history*, however, stands as a monumental testimony that every time the orthodox church has adopted these principles (knowingly or unknowingly), the church has lost its spiritual, as well as intellectual, foundations in being faithful stewards of both the Old and New Testaments (1 Cor 4:1-2—“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.” Clearly, one would hope that critical scholarship would always understand the higher calling of faithfulness in the academic task in relationship to scholarship. This, unfortunately, is not always the case.

What are the practical examples when these principles are imbibed, not only in Hagner's *Introduction*, but in the history of evangelicalism in the 20th and 21st Century? A few recent examples must suffice to solidify the assertions of this article. After this strategic withdrawal by fundamentalists of the first generation who fought the battle to preserve Scripture from the onslaught of historical criticism as well as its subsequent searching for the historical Jesus, subsequent generations from fundamentalist groups grew discontent with isolation from mainstream biblical scholarship that was dominated by liberals. By the mid-1960s, prominent voices were scolding fundamentalists for continued isolation. Dialogue and interaction once again became the rallying cry. Carl F. H. Henry's criticisms struck deep, "The preoccupation of fundamentalists with the errors of modernism, and neglect of schematic presentations of the evangelical alternative, probably gave neo-orthodoxy its great opportunity in the Anglo-Saxon world If Evangelicals do not overcome their preoccupation with negative criticism of contemporary theological deviations at the expense of the construction of preferable alternatives to these, they will not be much of a doctrinal force in the decade ahead."[\[61\]](#)

Echoing similar statements, George Eldon Ladd (1911-1982) of Fuller Theological Seminary became a zealous champion of modern critical methods, arguing that the two-source hypothesis should be accepted "as a literary fact" and that form criticism "has thrown considerable light on the nature of the Gospels and the traditions they employ" adding, "Evangelical scholars should be willing to accept this light."[\[62\]](#) Indeed, for Ladd, critical methods have derived great benefit for evangelicals, "it has shed great light on the historical side of the Bible; and these historical discoveries are valid for all Bible students even though the presuppositions of the historical-critical method have been often hostile to an evangelical view of the Bible. Contemporary evangelicals often overlook this important fact when they condemn the critical method as such; for even while they condemn historical criticism, they are constantly reaping the benefits of its discoveries and employing critical tools."[\[63\]](#) Ladd asserts, "One must not forget that . . . everyday tools of good Bible study are the product of the historical-critical method."[\[64\]](#) George Ladd catalogued the trend of a "substantial group of scholars" whose background was in the camp of "fundamentalism" who had now been trained "in Europe as well as in our best universities," who were "deeply concerned with serious scholarship."[\[65\]](#) He chided fundamentalists also for their "major preoccupation" with defending "inerrancy of the Bible in its most extreme form," but contributing "little of creative thinking to the current debate."[\[66\]](#) He encouraged his students to gain academic prestige by attending British and Continental prestigious schools that had long ago

abandoned faithfulness to God's Word (e.g. Robert Guelich) Although Ladd acknowledged that historical-critical ideology was deeply indebted for its operation in the Enlightenment and that German scholarship who created it openly admitted that its intention was designed for "dissolving orthodoxy's identification of the Gospel with Scripture,"^[67] instead, Ladd sent many of his students for subsequent study in Britain and Europe to enlarge the influence of conservatives, the latter of which influence was greatly responsible for the fundamentalists split at the turn of the 20th century.^[68]

Today, Ladd serves as the recognized paradigm for current attitudes and approaches among evangelical historical-critical scholarship in encouraging evangelical education in British and Continental education as well as the adoption and participation in historical criticism to some form or degree, which actions previously were greatly responsible for the fundamentalist-modernist split.^[69] Lessons from what caused the last theological meltdown had been long forgotten or carelessly disregarded.^[70]

Yet, significantly, Ladd had drawn a line for his scholarly participation that he would not cross. Ladd (d. 1982) lived during the second "search for the historical Jesus." Ladd correctly perceived, "The historical-critical method places severe limitations upon its methodology before it engages in a quest for the historical Jesus. It has decided in advance the kind of Jesus it must find—or at least the kind of Jesus it may not find, the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels" and "If the Gospel portrait is trustworthy, then 'the historical Jesus' never existed in history, only in the critical reconstructions of the scientific historians. A methodology which prides itself in its objectivity turns out to be in the grip of dogmatic philosophical ideas about the nature of history."^[71] Ladd countered, "[i]n sum, the historical-critical method is not an adequate method to interpret the theology of the New Testament because its presuppositions limit its findings to the exclusion of the central biblical message." Instead, Ladd, recognizing the contribution of a "historical-theological" method of theology based in the *Heilsgeschichte* ("salvation history) approach that takes the NT as serious history: "[m]y own understanding of New Testament Theology is distinctly *heilsgeschichtlich*."^[72]

In 1976, a book appeared upon the scene that sent massive shock waves throughout the evangelical movement: *The Battle for the Bible* by Harold Lindsell.^[73] Lindsell catalogued what he perceived was alarming departure from the doctrine of inerrancy among evangelicals. Francis Schaeffer around this same time had argued, "Holding to a strong view of scripture or not holding to it is the watershed of the evangelical world."^[74] Lindsell catalogued departures from inerrancy by the Lutheran Missouri

Synod, the Southern Baptists, and other groups. He listed what he perceived as deviations that resulted when inerrancy is denied as well as how the infection of denial spreads to other matters within evangelicalism. Because Lindsell was part of the founding members at Fuller Seminary, he especially focused on what he felt were troubling events at Fuller Seminary regarding the “watershed” issue of inerrancy.^[75] Most strategically, Lindsell attributed the “use of historical-critical method” as a foundational cause of the destruction of inerrancy among denominations. He noted, “there are also those who call themselves evangelicals who have embraced this [historical-critical] methodology. The presuppositions of this methodology . . . go far beyond mere denial of biblical infallibility. They tear at the heart of Scripture, and include a denial of the supernatural.”^[76] In *The Bible in the Balance*, Lindsell dedicated a whole chapter to historical criticism, labeling it “The Bible’s Deadly enemy”: Anyone who thinks the historical-critical method is neutral is misinformed It appears to me that modern evangelical scholars (and I may have been guilty of this myself) have played fast and loose with the term because they wanted acceptance by academia. They seem too often to desire to be members of the club which is nothing more than practicing an inclusiveness that undercuts the normativity of the evangelical position. This may be done, and often is, under the illusion that by this method the opponents of biblical inerrancy can be won over to the evangelical viewpoint. But practical experience suggests that rarely does this happen and the cost of such an approach is too expensive, for it gives credence and leads respectability to a method which is the deadly enemy of theological orthodoxy.^[77]

As an interpretive ideology, Lindsell noted that historical criticism, displayed in its disciplines form and redaction criticism, as destroying the historical trustworthiness of the Gospels. He noted: “When the conclusion is reached that the Gospels do not reflect true history the consequences are mind-boggling. We simply do not know who the real Jesus was. This undermines Scripture and destroys the Christian faith as a historical vehicle. It opens the door wide to a thousand vagaries and brings us right back to trying to find the canon within a canon.”^[78]

Reaction to Lindsell’s book was exceedingly swift and decidedly negative, especially as evidenced from British and Continental influenced scholarship.^[79] Yet, in response to it, many Bible-believing and concerned evangelicals in 1977 began to form what would become known as the “International Council on Biblical Inerrancy” that would produce the Chicago Statements on Biblical Inerrancy

(1978) and Hermeneutics (1982) as a response.^[80] Lindsell himself catalogued the reaction in a second companion volume, *The Bible in the Balance*.^[81] Donald Dayton recounted the fear that it produced among evangelicals in the following terms “Evangelicals are jittery, fearing Lindsell’s book might herald a new era of faculty purges and organizational splits—a reply of earlier conflicts, this time rending the evangelical world asunder.”^[82] Dayton again wrote that “‘Evangelical’ and ‘fundamentalist’ controversies over scriptural authority and biblical inerrancy seem endless” citing Lindsell’s work as continuing to disturb the evangelical world.^[83]

In 1979, then Fuller professor Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim responded directly to Lindsell’s assertion that plenary, verbal inspiration was the orthodox position of the church in their *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*, by attempting to argue that Lindsell’s position on inerrancy was inaccurate. ^[84] Similar to Hagner’s more recent statements, they argued, “The Bible was to be interpreted as a document in which God had accommodated his ways and thoughts to our limited, human ways of thinking and speaking. They argued that modern views of inerrancy did not reflect the church’s historic position, but resulted from “extreme positions” taken both from fundamentalism and modernism” “regarding the Bible.”^[85] Lindsell’s and many others’ views of inerrancy, Rogers and McKim alleged, were from “the old Princeton position of Hodge and Warfield” who had drunk deep from “Scottish common sense realism” rather than reflecting the historic position of the church.^[86] They noted, “Our hypothesis is that the peculiar twists of American history have served to distort our view of both the central Christian tradition [concerning inerrancy] and especially of its Reformed Branch.”^[87] They went on to note: “The function, or purpose, of the Bible was to bring people into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The Bible was not used as an encyclopedia of information on all subjects. The principle theological teachers of the church argued that the Bible not be used to judge matters of science, for example, astronomy. Scripture’s use was clearly for salvation, not science. The forms of the Bible’s language and its cultural context were open to scholarly investigation. The central tradition included the concept of accommodation God had condescended and adapted himself in Scripture to our ways of thinking and speaking. . . . To erect a standard, modern technical precision in language as the hallmark of biblical authority was totally foreign to the foundation shared by the early church.”^[88] The Bible was to be viewed as reliable in matters of faith and practice but not in all matters. Just recently in 2009, as an apparent result of his approach to Scripture, Rogers released *Jesus, The Bible and Homosexuality* that calls for evangelical

tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality, gay, lesbian and transgender issues not only for church membership but ordination for ministry.[\[89\]](#)

As a direct response to Rogers and McKim, John Woodbridge's *Biblical Authority, A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* issued an effective rebuttal of their proposal.[\[90\]](#) Lindsell's negative historical take on problems has received counter-balancing by Marsden's *Reforming Fundamentalism* produced in 1987.[\[91\]](#) By 1978, conservative evangelicals felt the need to produce *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, and in 1982 produced another on *Hermeneutics* to reaffirm their historical positions in these areas as a response to Rogers' and McKim's work.[\[92\]](#) The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy also produces official commentaries on both documents (*see Explaining Biblical Inerrancy* at www.BastionBooks.com).

As a direct fallout from these events experienced in evangelicalism, in 1982, Robert Gundry was removed from membership of ETS as a member due to his involvement in alleged dehistoricizing of Matthew reflected in his commentary, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*.[\[93\]](#) Using redaction critical hermeneutics centering in genre issues about Matt 2:7-8, he argued that the theological editor of Matthew redacted/edited the offering of two turtledoves or two young pigeons in the temple (Luke 2:24) and transformed it into Herod's slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem.[\[94\]](#) By way of another example, Gundry also asserted Matthew transformed the Jewish shepherds that appear in Luke 2 into Gentile Magi.[\[95\]](#) He has changed the traditional manger into a house. For Gundry, then, the nonexistent house was where the nonpersons called Magi found Jesus on the occasion of their nonvisit to Bethlehem. His removal, still causes strong feelings among evangelical scholarship. The vast majority of evangelicals in the Evangelical Theological Society were alarmed by Gundry's use of genre issues based in historical-critical ideology (redaction criticism) as a means to negate the historicity of events that were always considered genuine historical events by the orthodox community from the beginnings of the church.

Also as a result of Lindsell's works as well as the ICBI formation, British-trained critical theologian James Barr responded with two strategic works. In 1977, Barr composed his *Fundamentalism* as a direct reaction against the "fundamentalism" of Lindsell, noting in his forward: "It is not surprising that, in a time of unusual ferment and fresh openness among evangelicals, there should appear a book like

Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible . . .* insisting on a hard position of total inerrancy of the Bible."^[96] Instead, Barr praised Jack Rogers work, *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*^[97] as "a work indicating an openness to new trends among evangelicals" and characterized it as "an interesting expression of a search for an evangelical tradition different from the dominant fundamentalist one."^[98]

In *Fundamentalism*, Barr urged evangelicals to separate away and reject fundamentalism's characteristics in three specific areas:

- (a) a very strong emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible, the absence from it of any sort of error.
- (b) a strong hostility to modern theology and methods, results and implications of modern critical study of the Bible;
- (c) an assurance that those who do not share their religious viewpoint are not really 'true Christians' at all.^[99]

In 1984 again, in his work, *Beyond Fundamentalism*, Barr continued to urge evangelicals to continue separation from fundamentalism in these areas: "This [work] seeks to offer help to those who have grown up in the world of fundamentalism or have become committed to it but who have in the end come to feel that it is a prison from which they must escape."^[100]

Lindsell's work, as well as ICBI, continued to send shockwaves through evangelical society. In 1982, Alan Johnson in his presidential address to ETS through analogy asked whether higher criticism was "Egyptian gold or pagan precipice" and reached the conclusion that "the refinement of critical methodologies under the magisterium of an inerrant scriptural authority can move us gently into a deeper appreciation of sacred Scripture."^[101]

Not all agreed with Lindsell's approach apparently. In 1982, Alan Johnson in his presidential address to ETS through analogy asked whether higher criticism was "Egyptian gold or pagan precipice" and reached the conclusion that "the refinement of critical methodologies under the magisterium of an inerrant scriptural authority can move us gently into a deeper appreciation of sacred Scripture."^[102]

Craig Blomberg, in 1984, right after the ICBI statements raised questions regarding biblical interpretation in the Gospels. In reference to Matthew's story of the coin in the fishes Mouth in 17:24-27, Blomberg defended Robert Gundry's midrashic approach to the Gospels in the following terms: "Is it possible, even inherently probable, that the NT writers at least in part never intended to have their miracle stories taken as historical or factual and that their original audiences probably recognized this? If this sounds like the identical reasoning that enabled Robert Gundry to adopt his midrashic interpretation of Matthew while still affirming inerrancy, that is because it is the same. The problem will not disappear simply because one author p[Gundry] is dealt with *ad hominem* . . . how should evangelicals react? Dismissing the sociological view on the grounds that the NT miracles present themselves as historical gets us nowhere. So do almost all the other miracle stories of antiquity. Are we to believe them all?"[\[103\]](#)

Barr's criticisms also had stung deep among critically trained evangelicals. At an annual Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Santa Clara, California in 1997, Moisés Silva, who himself had studied with Barr ("my admiration for Barr knows no bounds"), in his presidential address, chided conservative scholarship for their lack of openness to methods of modern critical methods in an address entitled, "Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed? Evangelical Theology and Biblical Scholarship."[\[104\]](#) He took his mentor to task for misrepresenting evangelicals in terms of not recognizing that many evangelicals were open to critical methods espoused by Barr, citing not only recent evangelicals who were about also Machen and Stonehouse as among those who took "seriously liberal teachings."[\[105\]](#) Silva asserted that "there is the more direct approach of many of us who are actually engaged in critical Biblical scholarship."[\[106\]](#) Thus, by 1997, many evangelicals were openly departing from Lindsell's warning regarding historical criticism. The next year, in 1998, ETS president Norman Geisler, took another tone, warned evangelicals regarding the negative presuppositions of historical-critical ideologies in his "Beware of Philosophy."[\[107\]](#) In his presidential address, Geisler featured a 1998 work entitled, *The Jesus Crisis* that detailed growing evangelical involvement in historical-critical ideologies like questing. Just like Lindsell's books, *The Jesus Crisis* created a hornets' nest of controversy among evangelicals. To say the least, Geisler's address as well as his praise for *The Jesus Crisis* revealed a significant cleavage within evangelicalism that had developed since ICBI. While some praised *The Jesus Crisis* as needing to be written,[\[108\]](#) other evangelicals disdained the work as strident, fundamentalistic rhetoric that was closed-minded to a judicial use of historical

criticism.^[109] Darrell Bock, mentioned in *The Jesus Crisis*, reviewed it in the following terms: “As a whole, *The Jesus Crisis* displays a lack of discernment about the history of Gospels study. The book should have given a more careful discussion of difficult details in the Gospels and the views tied to them, especially when inerrantists critiqued by the book are portrayed as if they were denying the accuracy of the Gospels, when in fact they are defending it.”^[110] Bock contends, “Careful consideration also does not support the claim that even attempting to use critical methods judiciously leads automatically and inevitably to denial of the historicity of the Gospels. Unfortunately this work overstates its case at this basic level and so places blame for the bibliological crisis at some wrong evangelical doorsteps.”^[111]

In a highly irregular move for the Evangelical Theological Society, Grant Osborne was given an opportunity in the next issue of *JETS* to counter Geisler’s Presidential address, wherein Geisler’s address was criticized as well as *The Jesus Crisis* saying, “the tone is too harsh and grating, the positions too extreme.”^[112] In 2004, Geisler, a world-renown Christian apologist and long-time member of ETS, cited the Society’s acceptance of open theists among the ETS group and withdrew as a member perceiving a drift in the wrong direction for the Evangelical Theological Society of which he was a founding member (see “Why I Resigned from ETS” at www.normangeisler.net/articles). In 2001, Craig Blomberg, in his article “Where Should Twenty-First Century Biblical Scholarship, decried the Jesus Crisis: “It is hard to imagine a book such as Thomas and Farnell’s *The Jesus Crisis* ever appearing in Britain, much less being commended by evangelical scholars as it has been by a surprising number in this country. Avoiding Thomas’s and Farnell’s misguided separatism and regular misrepresentation of others’ works, a higher percentage of us need to remain committed to engaging the larger, scholarly world in contextually sensitive ways that applaud as much as possible perspectives that we do not adopt while nevertheless preserving evangelical distinctives.”^[113] Blomberg went on to praise his own brand of scholarship: “It still distresses me . . . how many religious studies departments in the U.S. (or their libraries) are unaware of the breadth and depth of evangelical biblical scholarship. This situation need not remain this way, as witnessed by the fact that this is an area in which our British counterparts have made considerably more progress in, at times, even less-promising contexts.”^[114]

Interestingly, more recently, Craig Blomberg blames books like Harold Lindsell's *Battle For the Bible* (1976) and such a book as *The Jesus Crisis* for people leaving the faith because of their strong stance on inerrancy as a presupposition. In a web interview in 2008 conducted by Justin Taylor, Blomberg responded this way to books that hold to a firm view on inerrancy. The interviewer asked, "Are there certain mistaken hermeneutical presuppositions made by conservative evangelicals that play into the hands of liberal critics?" Blomberg replied,

Absolutely. And one of them follows directly from the last part of my answer to your last question. The approach, famously supported back in 1976 by Harold Lindsell in his *Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan), that it is an all-or-nothing approach to Scripture that we must hold, is both profoundly mistaken and deeply dangerous. No historian worth his or her salt functions that way. I personally believe that if inerrancy means "without error according to what most people in a given culture would have called an error" then the biblical books are inerrant in view of the standards of the cultures in which they were written. But, despite inerrancy being the touchstone of the largely American organization called the Evangelical Theological Society, there are countless evangelicals in the States and especially in other parts of the world who hold that the Scriptures are inspired and authoritative, even if not inerrant, and they are not sliding down any slippery slope of any kind. I can't help but wonder if inerrantist evangelicals making inerrancy the watershed for so much has not, unintentionally, contributed to pilgrimages like Ehrman's. Once someone finds one apparent mistake or contradiction that they cannot resolve, then they believe the Lindsells of the world and figure they have to chuck it all. What a tragedy![\[115\]](#)

To Blomberg, apparently anyone who advocates inerrancy as traditionally advocated by Lindsell is responsible for people leaving the faith.

It is also the hermeneutic of historical criticism through which Blomberg developed his "globalization hermeneutical approach." In a very telling article of Blomberg's historical-grammatical hermeneutical approach, he advocates "The Globalization of Biblical Interpretation: A Test Case John 3-4."[\[116\]](#) This "hermeneutic" clearly has an *a priori* agenda that is imposed on the text when Blomberg summarizes the approach as "asking new questions of the text, particularly in light of the experiences of marginalization of a large percent of the world's population."[\[117\]](#) From Blomberg's perspective "[s]tudents of scripture . . . have realized that the traditional historical-critical interpretation has been disproportionately Eurocentric and androcentric . . . and various new methodologies have been

developed to correct this imbalance.”[\[118\]](#) That such a conclusion has any substantial basis in fact, beyond opinion, is not substantiated by the article. Apparently for Blomberg, the goal of exegesis and interpretation is not to understand the text as was originally intended but to search the biblical text for an already prescribed agenda of “globalization.” This is telling, for under this scheme the meaning and significance of the biblical text would be its usefulness in promoting an agenda that is already predetermined, i.e. subject the Scripture to these shifting sands of interpretation that Blomberg identifies as follows: “issues of liberation theology, feminism, religious pluralism, the disparity of between the world’s rich and poor, and contextualization of biblical material.”[\[119\]](#)

An even more recent example is that of Bart Ehrman at the beginning of the 21st century. Interestingly, Bart Ehrman directly blames historical criticism as a large reason for his departure from the faith. Ehrman is very honest and open to note that an important, strategic factor in his loss of confidence in his faith was explicitly that of historical-critical ideologies and their impact on seminary students’ thoughts:

The approach taken to the Bible in almost all Protestant (and now Catholic mainline seminaries is what is called the ‘historical-critical’ method . . . The historical-critical approach has a different set of concepts and therefore poses a different set of questions A very large percentage of seminaries are completely blind-sided by the historical critical method. They come in with expectations of learning the pious truths of the Bible so that they can pass them along in their sermons, as their own pastors have done for them. Nothing prepares them for historical criticism. To their surprise they learn, they learn, instead of material for sermons, all the results of what historical critics have established on the basis of centuries of research. The Bible is filled with discrepancies, many of them irreconcilable contradictions But before long, as students see more and more evidence [of contradictions], many of them find that their faith in the inerrancy and absolute historical truthfulness of the Bible begins to waver. There simply is too much evidence, and to reconcile all of the hundreds of differences among the biblical sources requires so much speculation and fancy interpretive work that eventually it get to be too much for them.”[\[120\]](#)

He goes on to note that “I came to see the potential value of historical criticism at Princeton Seminary, I started adopting this new (for me) approach, very cautiously at first, as I didn’t want to concede too much to scholarship. But eventually I saw the powerful logic behind the historical-critical method and

threw myself heart and soul into the study of the Bible from this perspective.” He then comments, “It is hard for me to pinpoint the exact moment that I stopped being a fundamentalist who believed in the absolute inerrancy and verbal inspiration of the Bible.”[\[121\]](#)

From Ehrman’s comments, perhaps he should be seen, not so much as a defector, but as an example of the tragic failure of evangelical mentoring in biblical education. He began his training in a conservative theological school (i.e. Moody). Someone along his path, however, at Wheaton College encouraged him to attend a more prestigious “critical” school (i.e. Princeton) to study. It was at Princeton Seminary, which long ago had left any sense of faithfulness to God’s Word, exposed Ehrman to historical criticism.[\[122\]](#) Moreover, these evangelical institutions that had previously trained him apparently did not prepare him for the onslaught of historical criticism that would impact his thinking. Ehrman should serve rather as a salient, very recent example that Hagner is wrong, both academically, but especially spiritually, in encouraging students toward historical criticism. When Seminaries become degree mills proud of numbers with attention on academia, with little attention to the quality of spiritual formation of the individual student through careful mentoring, disaster ensues. Notice that while Marshall, Hagner and other evangelicals call pseudepigraphy by a euphemism and accept it as in line with inspiration, Ehrman recognized the complete inconsistency and was honest enough to call such activity what it truly is: FORGED! [\[123\]](#)

While Ehrman is honest, evangelicals who are involved in historical-research are not quite as open and frank. Ehrman would find commonality in Linnemann’s assessment that historical-critical ideologies are an overwhelmingly strategic, negative influence. Harold Lindsell, in his work *The Battle for the Bible* (1976) as well as his subsequent work, *The Bible in the Balance* (1978), was instrumental in sounding the warning among Bible-believing people of historical criticism’s destruction on inerrancy and infallibility. Lindsell warned “The presuppositions of this methodology . . . go far beyond a mere denial of biblical infallibility. They tear at the heart of Scripture, and include a denial of the supernatural.”[\[124\]](#) In *The Bible in the Balance* devoted a whole chapter entitled “The Historical Critical Method: The Bible’s Deadly Enemy.” In it, he argued,

Anyone who thinks that the historical-critical method is neutral is misinformed. Since its presuppositions are unacceptable to the evangelical mind this method cannot be used by evangelicals as it stands. The very use by the evangelical of the term, the historical-critical

method, is a mistake when it comes to his own approach to Scripture It appears to me that modern evangelical scholars (and I may have been guilty of this myself) have played fast and loose with the term perhaps because they wanted acceptance by academia. They seem too often to desire to be members of the club which is nothing more than practicing an inclusiveness that undercuts the normativity of the evangelical theological position. This may be done, and often is, under the illusion that by this method the opponents of biblical inerrancy can be won over to the evangelical viewpoint. But practical experience suggests that rarely does this happen and the cost of such an approach is too expensive, for it gives credence and lends respectability to a method which is the deadly enemy of theological orthodoxy.” [\[125\]](#)

Yet, these evangelicals apparently believe that they themselves are immune to its subversive power. Yet, it was Lindsell himself who was a vital player in the ICBI 1978 and 1982 statements on Inerrancy and Hermeneutics that was designed to be a warning and a guard to future generations of evangelical scholars.

In yet another work, evangelical Daniel Wallace also plays down the importance of inspiration and inerrancy. In statement from his Chapter entitled “*Who’s Afraid of the Holy Spirit? The Uneasy Conscience of a non-Charismatic Evangelical*,” Wallace admits a personal struggle:

(3) This emphasis on knowledge over relationship can produce in us bibliolatry. For me, as a New Testament professor, the text is my task—but I made it my God. The text became my idol. Let me state this bluntly: The Bible is not a member of the Trinity. One lady in my church facetiously told me, “I believe in the Trinity: the Father, Son and Holy Bible.” Sadly, too many cessationists operate as though that were so. One of the great legacies Karl Barth left behind was his strong Christocentric focus. It is a shame that too many of us have reacted so strongly to Barth, for in our zeal to show his deficiencies in his doctrine of the Bible, we have become bibliolaters in the process. Barth and Calvin share a warmth, a piety, a devotion, an awe in the presence of God that is lacking in too many theological tomes generated from our circles.”[\[126\]](#)

The present writer finds this kind of statement very strange and not in accordance with the assertions of Scripture itself. Scripture presents its foundational importance of inspiration and inerrancy with a few verses of hundreds of verses that present this constant truth of God’s Words exalted status, e.g. “I will bow down toward Your holy temple And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your

truth; For You have magnified Your word according to all Your name” (Psa 138:2); God’s Word is a sanctifying force” “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (John 17:17 NAU) John 17:17; Matthew 10:38, Jesus affirmed “the Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35 NAU) or 2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” Wallace’s logic here is startlingly poor: If the documents cannot be trusted, if they are not inspired and inerrant, then one cannot have a “christocentric” anything.

In seeking to counter the damage to the determination of the wording of Scripture by Bart Ehrman work *Misquoting Jesus*, Wallace demotes inerrancy to a “peripheral” belief:

Second, what I tell my students every year is that it is imperative that they pursue truth rather than protect their presuppositions. And they need to have a doctrinal taxonomy that distinguishes core beliefs from peripheral beliefs. When they place more peripheral doctrines such as inerrancy and verbal inspiration at the core, then when belief in these doctrines starts to erode, it creates a domino effect: One falls down, they all fall down. It strikes me that something like this may be what happened to Bart Ehrman. His testimony in *Misquoting Jesus* discussed inerrancy as the prime mover in his studies. But when a glib comment from one of his conservative professors at Princeton was scribbled on a term paper, to the effect that perhaps the Bible is not inerrant, Ehrman’s faith began to crumble. One domino crashed into another until eventually he became ‘a fairly happy agnostic.’ I may be wrong about Ehrman’s own spiritual journey, but I have known too many students who have gone in that direction. The irony is that those who frontload their critical investigation of the text of the Bible with bibliological presuppositions often speak of a slippery slope on which all theological convictions are tied to inerrancy. Their view is that if inerrancy goes, everything else begins to erode. I would say rather that if inerrancy is elevated to the status of a prime doctrine, that’s when one gets on a slippery slope. But if a student views doctrines as concentric circles, with the cardinal doctrines occupying the center, then if the more peripheral doctrines are challenged, this does not have a significant impact on the core. In other words, the evangelical community will continue to produce liberal scholars until we learn to nuance our faith commitments a bit more, until we learn to see Christ as the center of our lives and scripture as that which points to him. If our starting point is embracing propositional truths about the nature

of scripture rather than personally embracing Jesus Christ as our Lord and King, we'll be on that slippery slope, and we'll take a lot of folks down with us.”[\[127\]](#)

Even more startling is Wallace's assertion's regarding evangelical theological views, like inerrancy or inspiration, that apparently reflects a similar view to Rogers and McKim (mentioned earlier in this article): “our theology is too often rooted in Greek philosophy, rationalism, the Enlightenment, and Scottish Common Sense realism” which he defines as “Scottish Common Sense Realism is a philosophical departure from that of the sixteenth-century Reformers, though it was a handmaiden of Princetonian conservative theology in the nineteenth century.”[\[128\]](#) For Wallace, evangelicals operate on a “docetic bibliology” regarding Scripture when they insist on the *ipsissima verba* or similar ideas.[\[129\]](#) Thus, Wallace's view encompasses such ideas as Luke altering the meaning of Jesus' words in Luke 5:32 (cp. Mark 2:17; Matt. 9:13) so that he asserts that “To sum up: There seems to be evidence in the synoptic gospels that, on occasion, words are deliberately added to the original sayings of Jesus” and “[i]n a few instances, these words seem to alter somewhat the picture that we would otherwise have gotten from the original utterance; in other instances, the meaning seems to be virtually the same, yet even here a certain amount of exegetical spadework is needed to see this. On the other hand, there seem to be examples within the synoptics where the words are similar, but the meaning is different.”[\[130\]](#) These statements leave one to wonder if Jesus truly said what is recorded in the Gospels or that the substance has been changed redactionally. Wallace concludes, “it seems that our interpretation of inspiration is governing our interpretation of the text. Ironically, such bibliological presuppositions are established in modern terms that just might ignore or suppress the data they are meant to address and which are purportedly derived. And there is an even greater irony here: the fact of the Incarnation—an essential element in orthodox Christology—*invites* (italics in original) rigorous historical investigation. But what if our bibliological presuppositions *reject* (italics in original) that invitation.”[\[131\]](#) What “rigorous historical investigation entails is not clearly specified, except that it would involve at least the utilization of the criteria of authenticity and dissimilarity.”[\[132\]](#)

Wallace in a recent blog (www.danwallace.com) related that “I am unashamedly a Protestant. I believe in *sola scriptura*, *sola fidei*, *solus Christus*, and the rest. I am convinced that Luther was on to something when he articulated his view of justification succinctly: *simul iustus et peccator* (“simultaneously justified and a sinner”).”[\[133\]](#) Yet, he laments the lack of unification on Protestant theology, and says that three events in his life are having an impact on his thinking: (1) His

attendance at Greek Orthodox worship: “I have spent a lot of time with Greek Orthodox folks. It doesn’t matter what Orthodox church or monastery I visit, I get the same message, the same liturgy, the same sense of the ‘holy other’ in our fellowship with the Triune God. The liturgy is precisely what bothers so many Protestants since their churches often try very hard to mute the voices from the past. “It’s just me and my Bible” is the motto of millions of evangelicals. (2) his own personal experience of seeing a personal friend of his in Protestantism deny Jesus’ deity, where he laments the lack of an ecclesiastical hierarchy “This cancer could have been cut out more swiftly and cleanly if the church was subordinate to a hierarchy that maintained true doctrine in its churches. And the damage would have been less severe and less traumatic for the church;” and (3) his realization on ecclesiastical hierarchy involved in canon formation, “What is significant is that *for the ancient church, canonicity was intrinsically linked to ecclesiology*. It was the *bishops* rather than the congregations that gave their opinion of a book’s credentials. Not just any bishops, but bishops of the major sees of the ancient churches.” He relates, “we Protestants can be more sensitive about the deficiencies in our own ecclesiology rather than think that we’ve got a corner on truth. We need to humbly recognize that the two other branches of Christendom have done a better job in this area. Second, we can be more sensitive to the need for doctrinal and ethical accountability, fellowship beyond our local church, and ministry with others whose essentials but not necessarily particulars don’t line up with ours. Third, we can begin to listen again to the voice of the Spirit speaking through church fathers and embrace some of the liturgy that has been used for centuries.” These factors of a unified ecclesiastical hierarch superceding the local church appear to be persuading toward seriously contemplating membership in the Anglican Church.[\[134\]](#)

Russ, I have thought about the Anglican Church quite a bit actually. I love the liturgy, the symbolism, the centrality of the Eucharist, the strong connection with the church in ages past, and the hierarchy. And yes, I have seriously considered joining their ranks—and still am considering it. There are some superb Anglican churches in the Dallas area. Quite surprising to me has been my choice of academic interns at Dallas Seminary in the last few years. Over half of them have been Anglican, and yet when I picked them for the internship I didn’t know what their denominational affiliation was. Exceptional students, devoted to the Lord and his Church, and committed to the highest level of Christian scholarship. And they have respect for tradition and the work of the Spirit in the people of God for the past two millennia.[\[135\]](#)

Sadly, what Wallace fails to discern is that such overwhelming ecclesiastical hierarchy is what caused the need of reformation since the Church rotted from the top down with the rise of Romanism and Anglicanism. Infection spreads much more readily, quickly in “top-down” hierarchies. Independent local churches such as those exhibited in Protestantism generally preserve a greater safeguard against spreading heresy.

Interestingly, William Craig, professor of apologetics at Talbot School of Theology, uses historical criticism to question the veracity of guards being at Jesus’ tomb. In a 2010 Ankerberg interview, Craig negates the guards in the following manner. In response to Ankerberg’s question, “Were there guards at the tomb?” Craig replied:

Well now this is a question that I think is probably best left out of the program, because the vast, vast majority of New Testament scholars would regard Matthew’s tomb story, or guard story as “unhistorical.” Um, I can hardly think of anybody who would defend the historicity of the guard at the tomb story and the main reasons for that are two: one is because it’s only found in Matthew, and it seems very odd that if there were a Roman guard or even a Jewish guard at the tomb that Mark wouldn’t know about it, and there wouldn’t be any mention of it. The other reason is that nobody seemed to understand Jesus’ resurrection predictions. The disciples who heard them most often had no inkling of what he meant, and yet somehow the Jewish authorities were supposed to have heard of these predictions, and understood them so well that they were able to set a guard around the tomb. And again, that doesn’t seem to make sense. So, most scholars regard the guard at the tomb story as a legend or a Matthean invention that isn’t really historical. Fortunately, this is of little significance for the empty tomb of Jesus, because the guard was mainly employed in Christian apologetics to disprove the conspiracy theory that the disciples stole the body—but no modern historian or New Testament scholar would defend a conspiracy theory because it’s evident when you read the pages of the New Testament that these people sincerely believed in what they said. So, the conspiracy theory is dead, even in the absence of a guard at the tomb. The true significance of the guard at the tomb story is that it shows that even the opponents of the earliest Christians did not deny the empty tomb, but rather involve themselves in a hopeless series of absurdities trying to explain it away, by saying that the disciples had stolen the body. And that’s the real significance of Matthew’s “Guard at the Tomb” story.[\[136\]](#)

In reply to this “logic” of Craig, note that *if* evangelicals accepted what the early church always and consistently witnessed—that Matthew was the first Gospel written—instead of accepting historical-critical presuppositions, then Mark actually left out Matthew’s guard story. Moreover, if Matthew made up the guards around Jesus’ tomb, then what stops Craig’s reasoning from being extended to the idea that the writers made up the “sincere” response of belief, or, for that matter, the whole idea of the resurrection? To start throwing out parts of the Gospels because they aren’t recounted in Mark or because “no modern historian or New Testament scholar” thinks they are historical is not only illogical but dangerous to Christianity.

In an earlier statement (1984), Craig seems to give credence to the guards:

So although there are reasons to doubt the existence of the guard at the tomb, there are also weighty considerations in its favor. It seems best to leave it an open question. Ironically, the value of Matthew’s story for the evidence for the resurrection has nothing to do with the guard at all or with his intention of refuting the allegation that the disciples had stolen the body. The conspiracy theory has been universally rejected on moral and psychological grounds, so that the guard story as such is really quite superfluous. Guard or no guard, no critic today believes that the disciples could have robbed the tomb and faked the resurrection. Rather the real value of Matthew’s story is the incidental — and for that reason all the more reliable — information that Jewish polemic never denied that the tomb was empty, but instead tried to explain it away. Thus the early opponents of the Christians themselves bear witness to the fact of the empty tomb.[\[137\]](#)

The impression one might get from this statement is that Craig believes the guards at the tomb story to be genuine. However, the fact that he leaves it an open question means that he is actually not sure of its validity. Although in this case he doesn’t deny the account of the guards outright, he acknowledges that there are “reasons” to doubt its authenticity and suggests that we cannot know for sure, casting serious doubt on the integrity of God’s Word. If eyewitness Matthew said guards were there, can it be left an “open question” for those who believe in the trustworthiness, let alone, inerrancy of Scripture? Alarming, Craig is clearly inconsistent on this issue. In his summary on his own website “Reasonable Faith”[\[138\]](#) regarding the guards: He says two self-contradictory things about the guards: (1) On one

hand he places in the summary top of his own website: “a reconstruction of the history of tradition lying behind Jewish-Christian polemic makes the fictitiousness of the guard unlikely.” (2) On the other hand, he places at the bottom of his own website regarding the tomb article the already cited statement from his 1984 *NTS* article: “It seems best to leave it an open question. Ironically, the value of Matthew’s story for the evidence for the resurrection has nothing to do with the guard at all or with his intention of refuting the allegation that the disciples had stolen the body.” So, here’s the problem for Craig’s reasoning: *He both defends and attacks the guard at the tomb story all in one package. He can say he believes it but he does not believe it.* Since when is equivocation like this “reasonable faith”? Would not apologetic opponents of the Gospel point this out and destroy such inconsistency? One cannot have it both ways. This inconsistency needs to be noted.

His genre hermeneutic is both historical affirmation and denial all at the same time. So is Licona, so Bock, so is Blomberg, etc. of this NT group cited in this article. They all would say that they affirm inerrancy, and yet have statements that are inconsistent with such a belief at the same time by their replies and use of genre issues. Genre is now used as a proverbial “loophole” to negate inerrancy. While many of these evangelicals apparently sign statements where they teach that affirm inerrancy, at least on paper, yet many of their statements cited in this article place that affirmation in doubt. They play both sides. They cannot have it both ways.

Finally, the most recent example of those who adopt historical-critical ideologies among evangelicals is Michael R. Licona in his work, *The Resurrection of Jesus A New Historiographical Approach*.^[139] Licona’s work exhibits many commendable items. For instance, it presents a strong stance on the historical basis for Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead. One can be encouraged that in light of historical criticism’s attack on the miraculous since Spinoza and the Enlightenment, Licona has maintained the historical, orthodox position of the church.

Yet, like Robert Gundry before him in 1983, Licona in 2010 uses genre issues in historical criticism to negate portions of Scripture that have always been considered historical by the orthodox Christian church from the earliest times. He has stirred up a hornets’ nest of controversy that parallels that of the Gundry/ETS circumstances that resulted in the ICBI documents of 1978 and 1982.

Being influenced by historical criticism, Licona has accepted a consensus that has emerged among critically-trained historical-critical scholars that the Gospels are a form of ancient *bios*.^[140] He

echoes the thinking of Charles Talbert and British theologian Richard Burridge who popularized this view.^[141] The implication of *bios* is that since ancient biography (*bios*) was not always accurate but erred at times or should not be accepted as always indicating literal events, the gospels would exhibit a similar characteristic. Yet, this assertion that the gospels being a form of ancient *bios* is fraught with dangers for historical matters surrounding the Gospels since it can lead readily to de-emphasizing the Gospels as historical documents.

For example, this opinion of the gospels as *bios* has recently created a storm of controversy with Michael Licona using *bios* as a means of dehistoricizing parts of the Gospel (i.e. Matthew 27:51-53 with the resurrection of the saints after Jesus crucifixion). Licona argued “*Bioi* offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material and **inventing speeches . . . and they often included legend**. Because *bios* was a flexible genre, **it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins.**”^[142]

Licona asserts that Matthew 27:51-53, with especially its mention of the resurrection of saints after Jesus death, should not be considered historical. Instead, it is figurative as genre. While admittedly Licona’s work defends Jesus’ bodily resurrection ably in his work, Licona outright dismisses the historicity of this passage in Matthew 27 under the assumption of genre hermeneutic known as apocalyptic or eschatological Jewish texts and under an operating assumption of the Gospels as *bioi* wherein the latter genre is not always understood as indicating historical events. In doing so, he effectively undermines His strong defense of Jesus’ resurrection. Licona labels it a “strange little text”^[143] and terms it “special effects” that have no historical basis.^[144] His apparent concern also rests with only Matthew as mentioning the event. He concludes that “Jewish eschatological texts and thought in mind” as “most plausible” in explaining it.”^[145] He concludes that “It seems best to regard this difficult text in Matthew a poetic device added to communicate that the Son of God had died and that impending judgment awaited Israel.”^[146]

This conclusion, however, is subjective, arbitrary, and hermeneutically quite unnecessary. Nothing demands such a conclusion in the context or supports such a conclusion unless one believes that historical-critical principles such as Licona follows derive a benefit here. If the events in Matthew 27:51-53 are held that way, nothing—absolutely nothing— stops critics from applying the same kind of logic to Jesus’ resurrection. Licona’s logic here is self-defeating and undermines his work on defending the resurrection. Several grammatico-historical (as opposed to historical-critical) arguments

prevail against Licona. Many have already been mentioned. So I will add only a few. First, Licona appears to take other events in immediate context in this passage as historical (Jesus crying out, veil of temple split, earthquake, the centurion crying out). Merely because he finds the resurrection of the saints as “strange” is rather subjective. His idea of “What were they [the resurrected saints] doing between Friday afternoon and early Sunday morning?” shows that an acute subjectivity reigns in Licona’s hermeneutical scheme.

Second, strategically, no literary/genre signals exist to the readers that Matthew has switched from historical narration of the events surrounding the crucifixion. The passage flows both before and after as a telling of the events with no abrupt disjuncture. How would Matthew’s readers have recognized that the events, before and after, were historical in time-space but not the immediate passage? How would Matthew’s readers have been able to distinguish the genre change from historical narrative to what Licona term’s “symbolic” based in eschatological Jewish texts. It is highly dubious that Matthew 27:51-53 or Revelation should be associated with Jewish Apocalyptic literature. While Revelation may share some highly superficial characteristics, such as symbolism, it does not share the dualism, pessimism, determinism, pseudonymity or rewritten history transformed into prophecy that characterized such Jewish literature (see Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic*, 1972). Licona’s decision for such a genre linkage has no substantial reason. It is arbitrary. Finally, since as Licona argues most of our historical knowledge is fragmentary, should not the passage be given the benefit as history. Nothing in the context precludes its history and nothing in the context negates its history, except a subjective bias that the story is “strange.” This is a subjective interpretation of what something means “to me” (i.e. Licona).

William Lane Craig echoed a similar statement to Michael Licona regarding the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:51-53. In a Youtube video of Craig debating in 2007 at the University of Sheffield, in the United Kingdom against James Crossley on the bodily resurrection of Jesus, Craig sets forth the idea that admitting to legendary elements in the gospels (i.e. the resurrection of the saints) “does nothing to undermine the remaining testimony of the gospels to things like the crucifixion of Jesus, the empty tomb, the resurrection appearances” (citing Dale Allison as his authority for this statement). When asked directly by a questioner in the audience if he believes in the story of the resurrection of the saints in Matthew 27:51-53, “I not sure what to think.” He also says “it could be part of the apocalyptic imagery of Matthew which isn’t meant to be taken in a literal way. That this would

be part of the typical sort of apocalyptic symbolism to show the earth shattering nature of the resurrection and need not to be taken historically literally.” He goes on to conclude, “this is not attached to a resurrection narrative. This story about the Old Testament saints is attached to the crucifixion narrative. So that if you try to say that because Matthew has this unhistorical element in his crucifixion account, that therefore the whole account is worthless, you would be led to deny the crucifixion of Jesus which is one indisputable fact that everyone recognizes about the historical Jesus. So it really doesn’t have any implications for the historicity of the burial story, the empty tomb story or the appearance accounts. It’s connected to the crucifixion narrative.” Notice that his adoption of historical criticism drives him toward allowing for non-historicity in narrative accounts in the Gospels.^[147] The key question for Craig must be if they made up stories of saints’ resurrection what would stop them from making up stories about Jesus’ resurrection? One cannot have it both ways, i.e. one story is historical but the other may be made up fiction due to apocalyptic imagery.

CONCLUSION TO HAGNER’S PRINCIPLES

Church history testifies against Hagner’s principles as being profitable for orthodox Christianity as well as evangelicals as a whole. Such principles are not “excellent” but disastrous for the inerrancy and inspiration of the Scripture. When adopted by evangelical scholarship, such principles lead to a denigration of Scripture. No compelling reason exists for their adoption. Rather, they seem to be driven largely by a desire motivated to gain some form of acceptance by critical scholarship.

In 2007, Andreas Köstenberger edited a work entitled, *Quo Vadis Evangelicalism?* The work consisted of a highly selected choice of Presidential addresses of Evangelical Theological Society scholars who, in the history of the Society, favored the move in the Society toward historical critical ideologies. No presidential addresses that warned against historical-critical ideologies were allowed. The work related that ETS has been “polarized” into two camps, one represented by Eta Linnemann and Norman Geisler who warned against historical-critical ideologies and that of Darrell Bock and others who heartily embrace “the judicious use of a historical-critical approach.”^[148] The book was extremely prejudicial toward one side, hardly objective. Köstenberger never stated what a “judicious” use of historical criticism was or whose version would be accepted. He did note, however, that the pendulum [at ETS] seems to have swung toward the side of the latter [“judicious use” group].^[149] It actually constituted a personal vanity toward praising a direction that the editor apparently embraced. He concluded his preface by noting “Speaking personally, reading and digesting these presidential addresses—spanning

a half-century and delivered by some of evangelicalism's most distinguished leaders—has given me, a third-generation scholar in the ETS, a much fuller and deeper appreciation for the history of the evangelical movement and my place within it.”[\[150\]](#) He concluded with “In my judgment the present volume offers great hope for the future of a movement whose best days, by God's grace and abundant mercy, may yet lie ahead.”[\[151\]](#)

One writer of this present article had a rather aged church history professor during his days at Talbot Seminary who issued a warning that he has not forgotten to this day. He would say that church history teaches consistently that by the third generation of any Christian group, the original intent of the organization was lost (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, etc.) and the loss in these organizations is always away from a steadfast trust the Word of God. What is noticed here is that Köstenberger admits that ETS is now in its third generation. It is now open to many of Hagner's principles in historical criticism. The new third generation is in charge.

Long ago, Harold Lindsell, the scorn of much of these younger scholars today, said this about his own day:

Anyone who thinks the historical-critical method is neutral is misinformed. Since its presuppositions are unacceptable to the evangelical mind this method cannot be used by the evangelical as it stands. The very use by the evangelical of this term, historical-critical method, is a mistake when it comes to describing its own approach to Scripture. The only way he can use it is to invest it with a different meaning. But this can only confuse the uninformed. Moreover, it is not fair to those scholars who use it in the correct way with presuppositions which are different from those of the evangelical. It appears to me that modern evangelical scholars (and I may be guilty of this myself) have played fast and loose with the term because they wanted acceptance by academia. They seem too often to desire to be members of the club which is nothing more than practicing an inclusiveness that undercuts the normativity of the evangelical theological position. This may be done, and often is, under the illusion that by this method the opponents of biblical inerrancy can be one over to the evangelical viewpoint. But practical experience suggests that rarely does this happen and the cost of such an approach is too expensive, for it gives credence and lends respectability to a method which is the deadly enemy of theological orthodoxy.[\[152\]](#)

Church history stands as a monumental testimony against this third generation of ETS evangelicals who somehow have thought that they are somehow special, endowed with exceptional abilities, and able to overcome historical criticism's negativity that no one else in church history has been able to accomplish.

Notes:

[1] A brief edition of this article originally appeared in *the Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics*, 6/1 (April 2013) 179-205. This article is an expansion of it.

[2] <http://blog.bakeracademic.com/don-hagners-ten-guidelines-for-evangelical-scholarship/> and was accessed by the authors of this article April 16, 2013.

[3] Please also read Norman L. Geisler and F. David Farnell, "The Erosion of Inerrancy Among New Testament Scholars" at <http://normangeisler.net/articles/Bible/Inspiration-Inerrancy/Blomberg/DenialOfMiracleStory.htm> on Dr. Geisler's personal website (normangeisler.net).

[4] Also available at <http://bastionbooks.com/>

[5] See Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2002), vol. 1, chap. 12.

[6] Altamonte Springs, FL Advantage Inspirational Books, 2005.

[7] See Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991, chap.5)

[8] John D. Hannah, *Inerrancy and the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); Norman L. Geisler, *Biblical Inerrancy: the Historical Evidence* (available at www.BastionBooks.com. 2013) and the venerable historical-grammatical way of interpreting it (see ICBI Hermeneutics Articles and Commentary, 2013 (available at www.BastionBooks.com. 2013).

[9] Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) 4.

[10] Hagner, *The New Testament A Historical and Theological Introduction*, 4.

[11] *Ibid.* 5.

[12] *Ibid.* 5.

[13] *Ibid.* 7.

[14] Ibid. 7.

[15] cp. Martin Hengel, “Eye-witness Memory and the Writing of the Gospels: Form Criticism, Community Tradition and the Authority of the Authors,” in *The Written Gospel*. Eds. Markus Bockmuehl and Donald Hagner. Cambridge: University Press, 2005) 70-96.

[16] Hengel, “Eye-witness Memory”, 94. n. 100.

[17] Hagner, *The New Testament A Historical and Theological Introduction*, 10.

[18] Hagner, *The New Testament*, 10.

[19] Hagner, *The New Testament*, 10 and also page 10 footnote 17.

[20] Hagner, *The New Testament*, 9.

[21] Ibid 9.

[22] Ibid 63.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid. 61.

[25] Ibid. 65.

[26] Ibid. 83-104.

[27] Ibid. 97.

[28] Ibid. 98.

[29] Ibid. 429.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid. 431. See I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 84.

[34] Hagner, *New Testament Introduction*, 432.

[35] Ibid. 428.

[36] Ibid. 429.

[37] Ibid 585-642.

[38] Ibid. 675.

[39] Ibid. 714.

[40] Ibid. 761.

- [41] Hagner, Introduction, 64-65;
- [42] Hagner, 35.
- [43] Hagner, Introduction, 97.
- [44] Hagner, 115.
- [45] Hagner 119.
- [46] Hagner, 163.
- [47] Hagner, 194.
- [48] Hagner, 429.
- [49] Hagner, 431.
- [50] Hagner, 586.
- [51] Hagner, 615.
- [52] Hagner, 432.
- [53] Hagner, 672.
- [54] Hagner, 689.
- [55] Hagner, 708.
- [56] Hagner, 714.
- [57] Hagner, 728.
- [58] Hagner, 761.
- [59] J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1936) 65.
- [60] <http://blog.bakeracademic.com/don-hagners-ten-guidelines-for-evangelical-scholarship/> accessed on April 16, 2013.
- [61] Carl F. H. Henry, *Jesus of Nazareth, Savior and Lord* (London: Tyndale, 1970 (1966), 9.
- [62] George Eldon Ladd, *NT and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 141, 168-169.
- [63] Ladd, *NT and Criticism*, 10.
- [64] Ladd offers two examples: Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and Arndt, Gingrich, Baur and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*].”Ladd, *NT and Criticism*, 11.
- [65] George E. Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” *Interpretation* XXV (1971), 47.

[66] Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” 47. In a hotly debated book, Harold Lindsell in the mid-1970s detailed the problems facing Fuller, the Southern Baptist Convention and other Christian institutions due to the encroachment of historical criticism from European influence. See Harold Lindsell, “The Strange Case of Fuller Theological Seminary,” *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 106-121. Marsden’s book also covers this period in *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

[67] Ladd, “The Search for Perspective, 49 cp. Ladd’s citing of this admission by Ernst Käsemann may be found in the latter’s, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London: SCM, 1964), 54-62.

[68] An example of one of Ladd’s students is the late Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount, A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 23 promoted an exegesis “that . . . makes use of the literary critical tools including text, source, form, tradition, redaction, and structural criticism” and goes on to assert “for many to whom the Scriptures are vital the use of these critical tools has historically been more ‘destructive’ than ‘constructive.’ But one need not discard the tool because of its abuse.”

[69] Mark Noll conducted a personal poll/survey among evangelicals and has, as a result, described Ladd as “the most widely influential figure on the current generation of evangelical Bible scholars.” Ladd was “most influential” among scholars in the Institute for Biblical Research and was placed just behind John Calvin as “most influential” among scholars in the Evangelical Theological Society. See Noll, 97, 101, 112-114 [note especially p. 112 for this quote], 116, 121, 159-163, 211-226. Moreover, Marsden described Noll’s book, *Between Faith and Criticism*, as making “a major contribution toward understanding twentieth-century evangelical scholarship.” See George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 250 fn. 9.

Since Noll marked out Ladd as the outstanding figure influencing the recent paradigm-shift in twentieth-century evangelical scholarship toward favoring historical-critical methods and since Marsden promotes Noll’s book as making “a major contribution toward understanding twentieth-century evangelical scholarship,” this paper uses Ladd as the outstanding paradigmatic example, as well as typical representative, of this drift among evangelicals toward historical-critical ideologies that favor literary dependency hypotheses.

- [70] For further historical details, see F. David Farnell, “The Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism, in *The Jesus Crisis*, 85-131.
- [71] George E. Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” *Interpretation* XXV (1971) 51.
- [72] Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” 47.
- [73] Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).
- [74] Francis A. Schaeffer, *No Final Conflict*, p. XXXX
- [75] Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 23.
- [76] Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 81; 204.
- [77] Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance*, 283.
- [78] Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance*, 297
- [79] For a more detailed history on this period, see Chapter 1-3 detailing the developmental, historical details surrounding the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 17-42.
- [80] *Christianity Today*, “Taking a Stand on Scripture (December 30, 1977), 25.
- [81] Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).
- [82] Donald W. Dayton, “‘The Battle for the Bible’: Renewing the Inerrancy Debate,” *Christian Century* (November 10, 1976), 976.
- [83] Donald W. Dayton, “The Church in the World, The ‘Battle for the Bible’ Rages On,” *Theology Today* (January 1, 1980), 79.
- [84] Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979). Rogers and McKim relied heavily upon the work of Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).
- [85] Rogers and McKim, “Introduction,” xxiii.
- [86] Rogers and McKim, 289-298.
- [87] Rogers and McKim, xxii.
- [88] Rogers and McKim, xxii.
- [89] Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*. Revised and Expanded Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

- [90] John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).
- [91] George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 [1987]).
- [92] “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” *JETS* 21/4 (December 1978) 289-296 and “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics,” *JETS* 25/4 (December 1982) 397-401.
- [93] Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).
- [94] Gundry, *Matthew*, 34-35.
- [95] Gundry, *Matthew*, 31.
- [96] James Barr, “Foreward to the American Edition,” in *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), vi.
- [97] Jack Rogers, *Confessions of A Conservative Evangelical* (Philadelphia: Westminster 1974).
- [98] Barr, “Foreward to the American Editon,” in *Fundamentalism*, iv.
- [99] Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 1.
- [100] James Barr, “Preface,” in *Beyond Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), vii.
- [101] Alan F. Johnson, “Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice,” *JETS*26/1 (March 1983) 3-15. See also, Carl F. H. Henry, “The Uses and Abuses of Historical Criticism,” vol. IV: God Who Speaks and Shows, in *God Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1979) 385-404.
- [102] Alan F. Johnson, “Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice,” *JETS*26/1 (March 1983) 3-15. See also, Carl F. H. Henry, “The Uses and Abuses of Historical Criticism,” vol. IV: God Who Speaks and Shows, in *God Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1979) 385-404.
- [103] Craig L. Blomberg, “New Testament miracles and Higher Criticism: Climbing Up the Slippery Slope,” *JETS* 27/4 (December 1984) 436.
- [104] Moisés Silva, “Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed? Evangelical Theology and Biblical Scholarship” *JETS* 41/1 (March 1998) 3-16 (quote from p. 4).
- [105] Silva, “Can Two Walk Together,” 8.
- [106] Silva, “Can Two Walk Together,” 10.

[107] See also Norman L. Geisler, Ed. *Biblical Inerrancy An Analysis of its Philosophical Roots* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981). The book gives the philosophical background to ideas that lead inevitably to a denial of inerrancy and result in a supposition of errancy regarding Scripture. It is available at <http://bastionbooks.com>.

[108] See the back cover page of the work where some called it “a blockbuster” and “the best up-to-date analysis in print of the dangerous drift of evangelical scholarship into negative higher criticism”—Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis, The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998).

[109] Osborne’s article constitutes a criticism of not only Geisler but *The Jesus Crisis*, Grant Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,” *JETS* 42/2 (June 1999) 193-210.

[110] Darrell L. Bock, “Review of *The Jesus Crisis*,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157 (April-June 2000) 232.

[111] Bock, “Review of *The Jesus Crisis*,” 236.

[112] Osborne, *Historical Criticism and the Evangelical*,” 209.

[113] Craig Blomberg, “Where Should Twenty-First Century Scholarship Be Heading?,” in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11.2 (2001): 172. This article was repeated as “The past, present

[114] Craig Blomberg, “Where Should Twenty-First Century Scholarship Be Heading?,” 172.

[115] See <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2008/03/26/interview-with-craig-blomberg/> accessed on April 18, 2013.

[116] Craig L. Blomberg, “The Globalization of Biblical Interpretation: A Test Case John 3-4,” *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 5 (1995), 1-15.

[117] Blomberg, “The Globalization of Biblical Interpretation,” 1.

[118] Blomberg, “The Globalization of Biblical Interpretation,” 1

[119] Blomberg, “The Globalization of Biblical Interpretation,” 2; Cp. Craig L. Blomberg, “The Implications of Globalization for Biblical Understanding,” in *Globalization*. Eds. Frazer Evans, Robert A. Evans, and David A. Roozen (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993) 213-28; 241-45.

[120] Bart D. Ehrman, “A Historical Assault on Faith,” in *Jesus Interrupted* (New York: Harper One, 2009), 4-6

[121] Ehrman, “A Historical Assault on Faith,” *Jesus Interrupted*, 15.

[122] See Ehrman, “Preface,” in *Jesus Interrupted*, x-xii.

[123] Bart D. Ehrman, *Forged and Counterforgery The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013) and *Forged Writing in the Name of God—Why the Bible’s Authors are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: Harper One, 2011).

[124] Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, 205.

[125] Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 283.

[126] Daniel Wallace, ““Who’s Afraid of the Holy Spirit? The Uneasy Conscience of a non-Charismatic Evangelical,” in M. James Sawyer and Daniel B. Wallace (Dallas, TX: Biblical Studies, 2005), 8.

[127] Daniel B. Wallace, “The Gospel according to Bart, A Review of Bart D. Ehrman’s Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why (Bible Studies Foundation, 2006 Bible.org) <http://bible.org/article/gospel-according-bart>. Note: this quote is from the full version of Wallace’s review.

[128] Daniel B. Wallace, “An Apologia for a Broad View of Ipsissima Vox,” Presented at the 51st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 18, 1999, 1 (also note p. 1 ft. 2).

[129] Wallace, “An Apologia,” 10

[130] Wallace, “An Apologia,” 12.

[131] Wallace, “An Apologia,” 19.

[132] Wallace, “An Apologia,” 15.

[133] <http://danielbwallace.com/2012/03/18/the-problem-with-protestant-ecclesiology/> (accessed on 5/10/2013).

[134] Wallace sights a work by Dungan that strongly influenced his belief in an ecclesiastical hierarchy. See David Laird Dungan, *Constantine’s Bible Politics and the Making of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). Dungan’s work highlights Eusebius’ record (*Ecclesiastical History*) of the influence of ancient bishops in canon formation. Dungan, however, records the formation of canon prior to the onslaught of Romanism as well as Greek Orthodoxy.

[135] <http://danielbwallace.com/2012/03/18/the-problem-with-protestant-ecclesiology/> (accessed on 5/10/2013).

[136] Transcribed from youtube video of Ankerberg interview of Craig on May 25, 2010. Accessed and transcribed on June 22, 2013 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8UMb7NlxkU>). This interview was subsequently taken down by Ankerberg.

[137] William L. Craig, "The Guard at the Tomb" *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 273-81 (quote from page 80).

[138] <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-guard-at-the-tomb> (accessed on June 26, 2013).

[139] Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus, A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010).

[140] Bock also accepted this genre classification, see Darrell L. Bock, "Precision and Accuracy: Making Distinctions in the Cultural Context," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012) 368.

[141] See Charles H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel? The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*. Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004).

[142] See Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 34.

[143] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 548.

[144] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 552.

[145] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 552.

[146] Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 553.

[147] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SNuhjRZZI4> (accessed on September 30, 2013).

[148] Andreas Köstenberger, *Quo Vadis Evangelicalism?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 18.

[149] Köstenberger, *Quo Vadis Evangelicalism?*, 18.

[150] Köstenberger, 26.

[151] Köstenberger, 26.

[152] Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 283.