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Protective Strategies and the Prestige of the "Academic"

A Religious Studies and Practice Theory Redescription of Evangelical Inerrantist Scholarship

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Abstract

This article examines how Evangelical Christian inerrantist scholars theorize their biblical scholarship and its relation to the broader academy, highlighting (1) their self-representation as true academics, and (2) the ways they modulate historical methods to prefer interpretive options that keep the Bible inerrant. Using these characteristics of inerrantist theorizing, the article redescribes their scholarship in terms of the religious studies rubrics of "protective strategies" and "privileging" insider claims. It then exploits this redescription to explore various characteristics of inerrantist religiosity from a Practice Theory vantage point, noting especially inerrantist religiosity's highly intellectualized nature as well as features of its fields of discourse production and consumption, and their participants, that differentiate them from broader academic fields focused on the Bible. Overall the article thus provides a detailed positive account of inerrantist scholarship and introduces scholars to the utility of this data set for studying contemporary religiosity and religious "protectionism."

Keywords

inerrantist scholarship – inerrancy – protective strategies – practice theory

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It seems to me that the resistance of many intellectuals to sociological analysis, which is always suspected of crude reductionism, and which is found particularly odious when applied to their own universe, is rooted in a sort of ill-placed (spiritualist) point of honor which impedes them from accepting the realist representation of human action which is the first condition for scientific knowledge of the social world. More precisely, it is grounded in an entirely inadequate idea of their own dignity as "subjects," which makes them see scientific analysis of practices as an attack on their "freedom" or their "disinterestedness."

<div style="text-align:right">PIERRE BOURDIEU (1998: viii-ix)</div>

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Introduction

This article analyzes Evangelical Christian[1] inerrantist scholarship and argues for the fruitfulness of redescribing it as a rich and varied analytical opportunity for scholars who study modern religion. As I will discuss below, those classified in this article as inerrantists are a diverse subset of Evangelical Christians who consider their Bible to be completely accurate and without error in all its actual claims.[2] In many ways my project takes up the suggestion of religious

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1   The term "Evangelical" remains contested among scholars. For the purposes of this article, by Evangelical I simply mean what Mark Noll contends is a "something" that exists and the people he includes within this category (2001; 2004: 3–5, 142–61). Noll has in mind "the less separatistic and more educationally ambitious descendants of the fundamentalists of the early twentieth century along with their allies in the older churches of British origin … and the newer American denominations (Holiness, Pentecostal, and Restorationist)" (Noll 2004: 3). I use this definition simply to inform the reader of the scope of my inquiry, not to take a position on the legitimacy of the term "Evangelical" and how it should be used.

2   Though there are inerrantists who are not Evangelical Christians, my article focuses on Evangelical inerrantist scholars – especially since inerrancy rose to prominence in the

studies scholars who urge us to reconsider our colleagues who religiously approach the study of religion, or religious texts in this case, as a new class of religious "informants" for scholars of religion. Russell McCutcheon's arguments along these lines are instructive. He has urged such analysis of scholars who represent religion as unique, autonomous, beyond the scrutiny of the academy, and/or necessarily approached only within the insider frameworks and claims of religious actors. According to McCutcheon, these scholars repeat the religious claims of the people they study, taking their claims as adequate explanation. Such scholars thus contribute more to the (re)production of religious discourse and claims than to the academic study – for example, description, redescription, and explanation – of religious claims and the people who make them. These scholars are thus more properly, to use McCutcheon's terminology, "data" for scholars of religion, since they reinscribe and naturalize the very ideologies, claims, and practices they are supposed to analyze (McCutcheon 1997; 2001: 1–39, 57–71, 125–52). I will argue for the fruitfulness of similarly analyzing Evangelical inerrantist scholars. Our study of and engagement with inerrantist scholars can thus go much further than the mundane and dismissive claim that they engage in illegitimate academic work driven by theological commitments.

    In keeping with this framework, identifying inerrantists' work as religious and thus an analytical opportunity for a scholar of religion does not involve labeling them – or any scholar with religious commitments who pursues work oriented by those commitments – as inherently unscholarly in all their work. The identification specifies the kind of field or discursive context within which their claims operate. It thus helps one differentiate how and to what extent inerrantists' work operates in what we may preliminarily term religious fields versus non-religious academic fields with different interests, (sometimes tacit) rules for engagement, and loci of authorization and legitimacy.[3]

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twentieth century particularly within Evangelical (and Fundamentalist) Christian discourses (see n. 5 below). For a collection of articles by Roman Catholic scholars about inerrancy and Roman Catholicism, see Hahn and Scott 2010.

3   In contrast to some trends in the Humanities, I consider "religion" to be a legitimate analytical category and am thus comfortable talking about, for example, "religious fields." I follow scholars who defend the use of religion as a category and theorize its ontology socially in terms of practices: for instance, Stowers 2008; Schilbrack 2010; 2012; 2013. See Stowers' definition: "Religion consists of variously linked social practices (involving arrangements of entities at sites) that carry understandings involving the existence and activity of gods, ancestors, and various normally unseen beings, and that shade off into other anthropomorphic interpretations of the world" (2008: 442).

The heart of this article is identification and analysis of certain characteristics of inerrantist discourse. To offer a brief road map, it will start with two largely descriptive sections and then move to two interrelated redescriptive and analytical sections. I will first provide a brief overview of inerrancy's varied landscape. Following this orientation I will identify two characteristic ways that producers of inerrantist discourse situate their products in relation to broader non-inerrantist scholarship: They energetically represent their work as sophisticated and superior academically legitimate scholarship, *and* they methodologically enshrine within their discourses a preference for interpretive options that uphold the Bible's inerrancy. I then redescribe these characteristics of inerrantist discourse in terms of "protective strategies" and the privileging of insider claims, rubrics used more broadly by scholars of religion. In the final section of the article I extend this analysis and redescription by exploring implications for our conceptualizing of inerrantist religiosity that are suggested by a social orientation of Practice Theory, which will deepen our understanding of inerrantist religiosity through urging a sort of ethnography of inerrantists.

The Varied Landscape of Inerrancy

This article works with an etic definition of inerrantist and inerrancy to organize differing definitions given by those I will classify as inerrantists. My definition thus will not always or completely coincide with the nuances of the particular emic theological views of those discussed. I use the designation "inerrantist" for that subset of Evangelical Christians who consider their Bible to be without error in a historical sense in all its *actual* claims. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI) provides a widely adopted Evangelical articulation of such historically characterized inerrancy, with its first definition appearing in Summary Statement 4: "Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives."[4] This notion of historically characterized inerrancy is the posited

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4   See also the definition given in Article XII, which includes inerrancy's coverage also of "[biblical] assertions in the fields of history and science." For the CSBI, see http://library. dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf (accessed 4/29/2012). There remains much debate among inerrantists as to what conceptions of inerrancy are within the bounds of the CSBI. On this, see Allert 2007: 159–72; Sexton 2009.

shared or analogous feature that determines inclusion within the category of inerrantist for this article. Those so categorized may thus differ among themselves in significant ways, even in their very conceptions of inerrancy.

Anything beyond superficial examination reveals variety and often complex disagreement among inerrantists about inerrancy from the 1960s to the present.[5] Notable similarities, nevertheless, exist within this diversity. Common among publications of this time is the argument that inerrancy applies only to the *correctly* interpreted meaning of passages in the Bible. Accordingly, an emphasis on the importance of attending to communicative conventions and idioms appears throughout defenses and explications of inerrancy. For example, usage of "phenomenological language" (e.g. the sun rises), round or imprecise numbers, imprecise descriptions, and non-comprehensive accounts of events do not signal an error in the Bible.[6] Though inerrantists insist on the Bible's accuracy when it *actually* addresses historical and scientific matters, they also frequently claim that "the Bible is not a textbook" for history or science, and thus readers should not assume that biblical writings always speak to such topics (e.g. Henry 1979: 205). Relatedly, inerrantist publications stress that the Bible must be judged by "its own" standards for truth, as opposed to foisting upon it "anachronistic" or "alien" expectations for how it is true, such as seeking modern technical precision at all times. The CSBI, Article XIII, exemplifies many of these claims in relation to each other:

> We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We furthermore

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5   Many inerrantist publications discuss this diversity, though often from normative standpoints arguing for which views of inerrancy are within certain bounds of acceptability: see, for example, Feinberg 1983; Sexton 2009; Geisler and Roach 2011. I chose the 1960s as a *terminus post quem* because various social, political, institutional, and theological changes and circumstances among Evangelicals (and Fundamentalists) raised inerrancy to greater prominence within their discourses and self-identification projects around this time. Intra-Evangelical and Fundamentalist contestations over institutional authority and delineating legitimate theological boundaries were significant factors in these changes. From the 1960s onwards the kinds of qualifications and definitions of inerrancy that I will discuss below became more prevalent. For discussions of both the Evangelical and Fundamentalist contexts leading into these changes and controversies *and* the place of inerrancy within them, see Marsden 1982; 1995 (esp. pp. 112–14, 170–71, 188–219, 224–31, 277–92); Hart 1999; Noll 2004.

6   See, for instance, Henry 1979: 166–67, 176, 187, 201–207; Feinberg 1983: 19, 23, 27–28; Ferguson 1988: 60, 63–64; Grudem 1992: 32–33, 51–53. See also CSBI, Article XIII and Exposition: Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Interpretation.

deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spellings, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the common inerrantist concern with appropriate standards for truth when it comes to defining (legitimate) inerrancy, a notable disagreement about how to theorize truth exists among inerrantists.[7] The second half of the twentieth century saw a significant increase in the number of inerrantist scholars using more broadly recognized historical-critical methods for studying the Bible.[8] This resulted in much debate among inerrantists, many of whom had inherited a suspicion, or even stance of outright rejection, of prevalent historical-critical methods. As various inerrantists grappled with how to view the broader stream of interpretive options for biblical writings, especially whether or not these options upheld the Bible's inerrancy, the debate became organized around two different conceptions of truth.

On the one hand, some inerrantists advocate an "intentionality" or "willful deception" standard for adjudicating truthfulness: The Bible only properly errs or communicates untruth if the author willfully deceives (e.g. Gundry 1982: 623–40). In this sense the Bible can potentially contain and even communicate so-called inaccuracies, but they do not constitute inerrancy-challenging errors as long as the author did not intend to mislead readers. One can explore the growing interest in genre and literary approaches among many inerrantists alongside such intentionality framing of truth. The logic of these "genre inerrantists" works as follows: The genre of biblical writings, especially some traditionally labeled as history, is more properly theological-history – a kind of history writing with literary conventions recognizable by ancient audiences. Thus literary artistry, theological emphasis and exaggeration, and deliberate alterations of detail to make a point do not constitute inerrancy-invalidating

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7   For brief outlines of the disagreement I discuss here, see Feinberg 1983: 25–27; Allert 2007: 163–65.

8   For discussions of the history of Evangelical and inerrantist biblical scholarship, see Marsden 1995; Hart 1999; and especially Noll 2004. John Yeo's study of biblical scholarship at Westminster Theological Seminary illustrates both this increasing use of historical-critical methods among Evangelical scholars and the contestations over them (Yeo 2010); it should be noted that Yeo's normative interests are conspicuous in this study, especially in his valorizing and almost hagiographic depictions of earlier "anti-critical" scholars at Westminster.

errors – since the authors of those writings were not *just* trying to recount "what really happened," and their audiences knew and accepted these conventions.[9] On the other hand, some inerrantists advocate a "correspondence" theorization of truth in relation to inerrancy: The Bible's truthfulness entails correspondence between anything affirmed and the way things "really are" (e.g. Geisler 1980; Feinberg 1983: 26–27). Inerrantists following this approach reject conceptions of inerrancy that allow for any affirmed errors, deliberate alterations of detail for theological purposes, or seemingly historical writing with little historical-referential content (e.g. Lindsell 1979: 296–300; Thomas 1998). Predictably, correspondence-truth inerrantists reject the kinds of approaches to inerrancy advocated by genre inerrantists.[10] The fallout in the Evangelical Theological Society over Robert Gundry's genre inerrantist commentary on Matthew illustrates these differences within the landscape of inerrancy.[11] Genre approaches to inerrancy are thus a site of contestation, with many inerrantists rejecting them and others continuing to debate about their

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9   Robert H. Gundry's 1982 Matthew commentary remains one of the better-known thoroughgoing examples of this approach (Gundry 1982; see esp. the "Theological Postscript," pp. 623–40). It treats Matthew as "midrash" with extensive and intentional altering-recasting of sources and historical details for theological purposes. For other examples of such "genre inerrantist" approaches, see Silva 1988; Long 1996; Longman 1996.

10   Compare, for example, the positive estimation of such genre-inerrancy analyses of the numbers in Chronicles relative to Samuel-Kings by Raymond Dillard (1988: 157–59) with the rejection of that kind of approach by Gleason Archer (1980: 60–61). In using the category of "genre inerrantist," I do not mean to imply that correspondence truth inerrantists oppose analysis of biblical texts in terms of their genres. See, for example, the correspondence truth inerrantist statement, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (CSBH), which rejects willful deception approaches to truth (e.g. Article VI) but also affirms that "awareness of the literary categories ... of the various parts of Scripture is essential for proper exegesis" (Article XIII; http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_2.pdf [accessed 1/25/2013]; of note is the fact that the CSBH was not signed by as many inerrantists as was the CSBI). The salient point is that genre inerrantists employ a broader array of historical methods (1) often, but not always, within more intentionality approaches to truth when it comes to questions of errors in the Bible; and (2) relatively less often for the purpose of simply defending inerrancy. For similar points about the rise of genre-focused methods among some inerrantist scholars and a corresponding decrease in the apologetic character of their biblical scholarship, see Yeo 2010: 133–34, 218–19, 223–25, 242, 279–89.

11   See n. 9 for brief comments about Gundry's commentary. Gundry was forced to resign by a vote of 116 to 41. For overviews of the Gundry controversy in relation to the landscape of inerrancy, though by authors more sympathetic to Gundry, see Noll 2004: 167–69; Allert 165–71.

appropriate uses, thus further highlighting the varied topography of inerran-cy.[12]

Recent inerrantist publications show the continuation of these ranges of claims about inerrancy. G.K. Beale's *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* includes and endorses the CSBI in an appendix with only minor suggested ad-justments (Beale 2008: 267–79). Eschewing the claim that modern definitions of error differ from ancient ones (Beale 2008: 14), he construes inerrancy in relation to the correctly interpreted meaning of the text and purpose of its claims.[13] John Frame, in his recent *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, explains how inerrancy does not involve exhaustive and technical precision but applies only to the actual claims of biblical writings (Frame 2010: 171–76). L. Russ Bush also delineates inerrancy in terms of proper interpretation of the texts in ac-cordance with their conventions. "The Bible is not a textbook on math or sci-ence" nor a "textbook on ancient history." Bush continues, "When it speaks of the physical world it most often uses popular, visually descriptive terms, or it may use commonly understood figures of speech. Precise numbers are not al-ways given" (Bush 2007: 22–26). Similarly, the inerrantist John Oswalt states:

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12   I do not mean to imply that genre versus correspondence inerrancy is the only way to parse inerrantists. For example, my category of genre inerrancy overlaps with Gabriel Fackre's category of "Intentional Inerrancy," but would also include some of those he terms "Trajectory Inerrantists" (Fackre 1989: 122–24). Also, there is substantial overlap between Noll's category of "critical-anti-critics" (2004: 156–58) and those I tentatively label as correspondence inerrantists, while some of those whom Noll designates as "believing critics" (2004: 158–60) overlap with my category of genre inerrantists (note that Noll emphasizes that "believing critics" often engage in "critical anti-criticism" [2004: 158, 159]). With genre versus correspondence inerrancy I choose one way of categorizing iner-rantists that both is relevant to later parts of my description and analysis *and* highlights the contested landscape of inerrancy. Also, this is not to deny that contestation also takes place among inerrantists who are within the same category. For an overview of other ways (some of which overlap with genre inerrancy) that self-identified inerrantist scholars have qualified inerrancy so as to allow for the Bible containing kinds of inaccuracies (e.g. biblical authors infallibly reproducing errant claims of their fallible sources), though a critical overview by an inerrantist who argues against these particular qualifications, see Henry 1979: 175–76, 179–93.

13   For example, Beale criticizes arguments that the cosmologies in the Bible, especially Genesis 1 and other creation passages, are untenable because of their outdated and scien-tifically inaccurate views. Instead one must understand the biblical depictions in terms of phenomenological language, figurative speech, and theological (not necessarily scien-tific) portrayals of the cosmos as God's temple (Beale 2008: 161–218).

> To argue for the veracity of the Old Testament reports is not to close off discussion about the exact nature of those reports. Issues of poetic description versus prose accounts must be taken into consideration. The ways in which an ancient Semite handles data must not be confused with the ways in which an ultra-modern thinker does. (Oswalt 2009: 16)[14]

Darrell Bock's chapter in an inerrancy-defending book (Hoffmeier and Magary 2012) argues that differing levels of precision explain many *alleged* errors in and discrepancies between the canonical Gospels without compromising their historical accuracy on any intended points (Bock 2012). Recent publications also illustrate positions throughout the varied landscape of inerrancy, from those somewhat akin to genre inerrancy (e.g. Blomberg 2012; Kofoed 2012) to correspondence-truth iterations of inerrancy (e.g. Thomas 2002; Patterson 2007: 72–74; Geisler and Roach 2011), with occupants of each position criticizing occupants of the other. Inerrantists thus exhibit a striking similarity in their concern with affirming the Bible's total truthfulness, though they theorize the nature of truth and inerrancy in a variety of ways, often in polemics against each other.

Inerrantist Theorizing of Their Relationship with "the Academy"

In this section I focus on several interrelated characteristics of inerrantist discourse, particularly inerrantist theorizing about the scholarly nature of their work and the shape of legitimate interpretive methods for grappling with their Bible. Whether or not inerrantists consider a biblical writing to carry meanings beyond that of the original historical context, most insist on the inerrancy of the historical or original contextual meaning of biblical passages. Thus a proper method of interpreting the Bible and ascertaining its inerrant claims is historical study to determine biblical passages' meanings in their original historical, linguistic, and literary contexts, often termed by inerrantists "grammatical-historical exegesis."[15] Inerrantists thus situate their projects within the

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14   Oswalt, however, also argues that compared to broader ancient West Asian sources, "biblical narratives … are in a different category altogether. If they do not conform to all the canons of modern history writing, they are still much closer to what characterizes that genre than they are to anything in the ancient world" (2009: 15).

15   See CSBI: Summary Statement 4, Articles XII and XVIII, and Exposition: Infallibility, Inerrancy, Interpretation. See also, for example, Kaiser 1980: 118–22; Feinberg 1983; Packer 1992: 345, 349–50; Thomas 2002; Walton 2002. Some inerrantists hold that inerrancy has to do with full-canonical divinely intended meanings of biblical passages as opposed to dis-

arena of historical investigation. Accordingly, they commonly emphasize that proper academic-historical study of the Bible upholds inerrancy. Far from rejecting historical-criticism, inerrantists represent themselves as practicing true, honest, and legitimate historical scholarship.[16] As the inerrantist Richard Averbeck explains, inerrantists "are not anticritical; that is, depending on how you define critical," but "'critical' in the proper sense of the term" (2012: 155; see also Carson 1983: 349–50; Long 1996: 360–61). Inerrantists theorize the legitimate historical-investigative nature of their work in a variety of interrelated ways. Of note, they commonly contrast (true) inerrantist historical scholarship with the (pseudo-) scholarship of non-inerrantists and, furthermore, often deploy the rhetoric of science, criticism, or the legitimate-academic in their representations of this contrast.

In particular, inerrantists represent themselves as standing in opposition to the "negative," "rationalistic," "autonomous," "abused," "radical," "skeptical," "arrogant," "impersonalistic," "modernist," "prejudiced," and "aribitrary," antisupernatural (so-called) scholarship of the non-inerrantist "critics."[17] Those who

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crete historical meanings of passages on their own, since they deny that a proper historical meaning exists apart from the full-canonical divine meaning. However, even these inerrantists are still concerned to refute claims that historical readings of passages could reveal errors in the Bible (e.g. Scott 2009a: 168–74; 2009b; Poythress 2012a; 2012b).

16   For example, Cook 1968; Payne 1980; Johnson 1983; McCall 2012. There is debate among inerrantists about whether to label their own methods as "historical-critical." Some inerrantists reject "historical criticism" as inherently opposed to legitimate study of the Bible due to its antisupernaturalism (e.g. Lindsell 1979: 275–302; Thomas and Farnell 1998). These inerrantists tend to stress that they simply read the Bible historically or "grammatically-historically" (e.g. Thomas 1998; 2002). Other inerrantists prefer to label their methods as proper historical criticism; proper due to use of appropriate assumptions, presuppositions, and modifications. For a glimpse of this debate, see Henry 1979: 387–88, 392–402.

17   For examples of these ubiquitous characterizations of non-inerrantist approaches to the Bible, see, for example, Henry 1979: 173–75, 184, 193, 206–209, 385–403; Payne 1980; Johnson 1983: 7–14; Bush 2007: 37–42, 46–47; Poythress 2012b. A recent essay by David Garner (2012) strikingly illustrates such inerrantist contrastive and delegitimizing labeling. In the space of six pages (2012: 132–35, 159–60) Garner characterizes broader scholars in all of the following ways: as exhibiting "drunken narcissism" (132); "autonomous" (132); "syncretizing" (133 n. 10); as practicing "blind (and desperate) self-adulation" (134); "condescending" (134), as having "artificial humility" (135) and "academic arrogance" (135); as "supplanting the authoritative clarity of Scripture with hermeneutical craft" (135); as possessing "arrogance of the highest order" (135), including "arrogant commitments to biblical *im*perspicuity [that] vitiate Christian vitality" (135; emphasis original); as "brashly reject[ing] Scripture's authority" (159); and as promoting "reader-corrupted ingenuity" (159), "autonomous freedom" (159), and "false humility" (160).

deny inerrancy thus practice illegitimate scholarship, especially because the "assumption" that the Bible errs determines their investigations. See, for example, the first "objectionable feature" of "radical criticism" – that is, non-inerrancy – listed by Alan Johnson: *Historical Skepticism*: The unjustified assumption is that the Biblical text is errant until proved right rather than the opposite" (Johnson 1983: 10; emphasis original).[18] For inerrantists, critics are particularly unacademic since none has proven the existence of an error in the Bible and thus substantiated the assumption of biblical errancy (e.g. Archer 1980: 60–62; Bush 2007: 29; Frame 2010: 184, 190). On the contrary, inerrantists explain that the progress of scholarship continually vindicates inerrancy in the face of alleged errors (e.g. Cook 1968: 173; Archer 2001; Bush 2007: 40–41; Frame 2010: 184). As the inerrantist J.I. Packer claims:

> We have now reached a point in technical evangelical scholarship at which the possibility of an entirely harmonious exegesis of the whole Bible has been shown in such conclusive detail that the century-old liberal assertion that this position cannot be held with intellectual integrity may safely be dismissed as refuted (1982: 412).

At the root of what differentiates valid inerrantist scholarship from invalid inerrancy-denying scholarship is the failure of critics to approach the Bible "on its own terms," accepting its claims about God in relation to humanity and its own supernatural-inspiration and inerrancy (e.g. Van Til 1967: 78–90; Payne 1980: 87–95; Johnson 1983: 8; Poythress 2012b: 24). Critics thus fail to study the Bible in accordance with its divine nature and, as such, fall short of their own scientific ideals of prioritizing the data: If the Bible is supernaturally inspired and inerrant, it is not appropriate to use unqualified methods and approaches designed to study merely human phenomena that are thus not of supernatural origin and could be in error (e.g. Poythress 1986: 241, 241 n.1, 255–57; Long 1996: 310–11, 358–67, 370–71). Inerrantists, in contrast, approach the Bible "on its own terms," as the very Word of God. They accordingly justify or at least situate inerrancy with their own supernatural explanation: The inerrancy of the Bible stems from its nature as the inspired word of their God, who does not lie and whose character defines truth.[19] Inerrancy is thus a supernaturally determined characteristic of the Bible. It is part of the very nature of the Bible and, furthermore, accords with the Bible's own claims about itself (e.g. Gaffin 1964: 230–32;

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18   See also Henry 1979: 173–74, 185, 190–91, 401; Payne 1980: 89–90; Oswalt 2009: 16–17.

19   This explanation is ubiquitous; see, for example, Young 1968: 103–104, 118–19; Burk 2007: 80–82; Tipton 2010; Poythress 2012b; Thompson 2012.

Grudem 1992; Beale 2011). The Bible's supernatural nature and self-witness to its inerrancy thus define legitimate historical study as approaching the Bible "on its own terms," as God's inspired and inerrant word.

J. Barton Payne spells out this position: "Legitimate, honest criticism takes the text on its own terms first" (Payne 1980: 89). How does one ascertain what it looks like to approach the Bible "on its own terms" and thus engage in "legitimate, honest criticism"? Payne answers:

> It would appear that proper biblical criticism can be conducted only on the basis of the testimony of competent witnesses – as is the procedure in any other historical discipline ... Accepting, then, the principle of "testimony of competent witnesses," we find that God Himself, through Christ (John 1:18), becomes the only authority who can really tell us about His own writing. (1980: 94)

Payne then spells out what God says about the Bible: "What, then, was the teaching of Christ and his apostles? Simply that what Scripture says, God says. Scripture therefore cannot be broken; it cannot be made subject to negative criticism" (Payne 1980: 95). For Payne, approaching the Bible *as God's inerrant Word*, and appropriately adjusting one's interpretive and analytical methods, is simply to practice legitimate, honest, and scientific study of the Bible:

> A truly open-minded scientist ... must be willing to operate entirely within whatever methods are appropriate to the object of criticism; otherwise his conclusions will inevitably go wrong. The alternative method [to approaching the Bible as "critics" who do not presume its inspired nature and inerrancy], which is both self-consistent and also scientifically congruous to its subject matter, has been forthrightly defined by [Gerhard] Maier: "The correlation or counterpart to revelation is not critique but obedience." (Payne 1980: 95)

Payne thus illustrates a common meaning of approaching the Bible "on its own terms" within inerrantist discourse. He also illustrates common ways inerrantists contrast the nature of their scholarship with non-inerrantists through recourse to the rhetoric of what counts as legitimate scientific, academic, and critical scholarship.

Corresponding to inerrantist insistence on studying the Bible on its own terms, inerrantists explain that appropriate study of the Bible *as inerrant* should affect the specifics of interpretation. Their theorizing takes various forms. Some of their discussions are oriented around how properly to relate

the Bible's so-called teachings about itself[20] to the "phenomena" of biblical writings (i.e. the details of the text) when it comes to interpretation. The issue here revolves around how, on the one hand, inerrantists consider some passages in the Bible to "teach" that the Bible is inerrant, but, on the other hand, various passages in the Bible do not appear to behave inerrantly (i.e. the "phenomena" of the Bible). Inerrantists accordingly articulate, in varying ways, the necessity of prioritizing or "sympathetically" attending to the Bible's claims about itself when it comes to interpreting the seemingly inerrancy-challenging phenomena of the Bible.[21] Other inerrantists treat the relationship of inerrancy to interpretation in terms of "the analogy of faith" or "Scripture interpreting Scripture," such that proper interpretation involves presuming that all passages cohere and never contradict each other (e.g. Sproul 1980: 127; Johnson 1988: 69–70, 73–76, 78–80; Packer 1992: 350; Walton 2002: 67–68; Gaffin 2006: 8–9). In these and other ways inerrantist literature articulates ideas of limits or restrictions imposed by the authority and inerrancy of the Bible upon valid interpretation.[22]

These various ways inerrantists theorize valid interpretation all have a specific historical-methodological correlate: Proper historical description of biblical texts' meanings ("exegesis") cannot produce interpretations involving an error in the Bible; whether errors in historical-factual-scientific reference, deceiving the reader, or contradictions between biblical passages. James Scott explicates this interpretive-methodological correlate, though more directly than some other inerrantists: "Thus, if any interpretation of any passage of Scripture is inconsistent with its being infallible and inerrant, according to

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20   Many inerrantist publications focus on biblical passages that supposedly establish what "the Bible teaches about itself"; see, for example, Ferguson 1988; Grudem 1992. Classic passages for such inerrantist interpretive activity include Num. 23:19; Pss. 12:7; 18:30; Matt. 5:17–18; John 10:34–35; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 3:15–16.

21   For example, Gaffin 1964; Van Til 1967: 26, 40, 78–90; Cook 1968: 162–63; Carson 1983: 344; Frame 2010: 177–82. Debate about properly configuring the relation between "deductive" (i.e. starting with the Bible's supposed claims about itself) and "inductive" (i.e. working from the "phenomena") approaches to formulating a "doctrine of Scripture" are related to this issue; see, for example, Van Til 1967: 26, 40, 78–90; Henry 1979: 171–74; Payne 1980: 95; Carson 1983: 343–45, 355–58; 1986: 23–25.

22   See, for example, Payne 1980: 90–93; Sproul 1980: 127. The CSBI articulates the underlying principle concisely: "We affirm that canonical Scripture should always be interpreted on the basis that it is infallible and inerrant" (Exposition: Infallibility, Inerrancy, and Interpretation). See also Richard Schultz's comments: "One of the primary threats today to a traditional understanding of biblical inspiration and inerrancy is the unrestricted employment of historical-critical tools by evangelical biblical scholars" (Schultz 2004: 150).

God's perfect standard of truth, then that interpretation must be rejected as contrary to the nature of Scripture" (Scott 2009b: 247; see also Poythress 1986: 241 n. 1). All biblical writings and their "teachings" are thus considered most-relevant contextual evidence, indeed sharing a common essence as God's word. Lack-of-error is an overriding standard for assessing plausibility of inter-pretive options: If a possible interpretation involves an error in the Bible, it must be wrong. Inerrantists thus modulate their historical methodologies for determining relevant evidence and assessing plausible meanings of biblical writings to fit what they take to be the Bible's supernatural-inspired and iner-rant nature. The modulation amounts to preferring interpretive and analytical options that keep the Bible inerrant,[23] even if that means "trusting God" and suspending judgment about seemingly insoluble or un-harmonizable "prob-lem passages."[24]

Genre inerrantists also theorize such inerrancy-dictated regulations on his-torical methodology, though they tend to be both more circumspect in articu-lating these modulations and highly critical of inerrantists whom they think too quickly allow theological commitments to short-circuit careful historical readings of biblical passages (e.g. Walton 2002). For example, Moisés Silva indi-cates that "the doctrine of inerrancy" has a "general" hermeneutical correlate of "preclud[ing] any interpretation that suggests that God lies or errs" (Silva 1988: 74; see also Silva 1994: 262–63, 266). D. A. Carson stipulates that the anal-ogy of faith sets an "outer limit" on valid interpretation of biblical passages – that is, no errors or actual, demonstrable contradictions with other passages – though he emphasizes that it should be "used cautiously" and not "as the determining device" for biblical interpretation (Carson 1992: 92; see also Car-son 2006: 15).

Genre inerrantist discussions of the possibility of forgeries or "pseudepigra-pha" in the Bible also illustrate their modifications of historical methods. As Craig Blomberg explains, in theory it is "*methodologically* consistent with evan-gelical convictions [i.e. inerrancy in this context]" (Blomberg 2012: 352; em-phasis original) to argue that (1) there was a recognized convention in the ancient Mediterranean of writing in someone else's name without the intent or result of actually deceiving one's audience, (2) the practice was not deemed

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23   For several more examples of writers who prefer inerrancy-upholding interpretive
      options and sometimes even theorize such preferences in terms of, say, giving the Bible
      the benefit of the doubt in view of its inspiration and self-claims, see Henry 1979: 173–74,
      190–91, 401–404; Barrick 2008: 16–18; Oswalt 2009: 16–17.
24   Various iterations and qualifications of this claim are common, see Cook 1968: 172–74;
      Carson 1983: 344; Moreland 1986: 81–82, 84; Beale 2007b: 31; Frame 2010: 181, 184, 190.

deceptive or problematic, and (3) some writings in the Bible are examples of such non-deceptive "pseudonymity" (2012: 351–53).[25] For Blomberg this is to be contrasted with the possibility of

> an unknown Christian of the second or third generation of Christianity [wanting] to foist his letter off on an unsuspecting church audience as truly apostolic and inspired. Without legitimate credentials to gain such respect, the author deliberately sets out to deceive his readers by doing his best to imitate the style and contents of a genuinely Pauline epistle. (Blomberg 2012: 352)

Such a deceptive situation involves "an author's motives and methods that [do] not seem at all ethically congruent with an evangelical Christian mindset and must be rejected as incompatible with inerrancy" (Blomberg 2012: 352). This inerrancy-modulated analysis leaves three salient historical possibilities: (1) that a biblical writing was in fact written by its claimed author, (2) that a biblical writing is an example of "pseudonymity" that was not deceptive or intended to be deceptive, or (3) that a biblical writing is an example of deliberately deceptive "pseudonymity." Of note, however, is that Blomberg's inerrancy-refraction of historical methods precludes the third option for assessing biblical writings, at least for inerrantists. This, of course, represents a significant restriction of analytical possibilities, particularly since many scholars consider us to have numerous examples of ancient Mediterranean writings, especially purportedly revelatory or "religious" writings, that are iterations of the option that Blomberg's inerrancy methodology rejects. This kind of genre inerrantist approach to the possibility of forgeries in their Bible thus aligns with the CSBI's own inerrancy-demanded methodological strictures: "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship" (Article XVIII).

Genre inerrantists may thus activate inerrancy modulations of interpretive methods at a different level of historical analysis. For another example, they may be fine with biblical authors tendentiously altering their sources or "theologically" spinning their narratives. Genre inerrantists then, however, refract their claims about genre accordingly: For example, authors did not "intend" for the audience to think that things "really happened" the way they describe

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25 Blomberg also writes, "*Whether or not this is what actually happened*, such a hypothesis is thoroughly consistent with a high view of Scripture and an inerrant Bible" (2012: 352; emphasis original).

matters *and* the audience would "accept" this convention (e.g. Long 1996). However, such a genre inerrantist approach precludes, for example, the option that an author both did deliberately embellish, shape, ideologically slant, or make up the account *and also* did "intend" for the audience to accept the telling as an accurate version of "what really happened," precisely as part of why the audience should accept the ideology or theology of the narrative. As with this case and others, genre inerrantists constrain analytical possibilities for the biblical text with the consideration of keeping the Bible from their understanding of what would constitute an error. Thus the Bible and inerrancy-modulated methods for analyzing it are set apart from broader historical phenomena and methods for studying them (e.g. Long 1996: 310–11, 361).

Many inerrantists are aware that their theorizing of the Bible's inspired and inerrant nature, as well as their associated modifications of historical methods, leave them open to the critique that their work is not properly academic or historical since they have stacked the methodological deck in favor of inerrancy and effectively made their positions beyond critique. Such inerrantist scholars thus further articulate the academic rigor and legitimacy of their practices through epistemological and other philosophical or theoretical claims. Deploying variants of traditional skeptical arguments, inerrantist scholars often explain that the "anti-supernatural" and "rationalistic" positions of critics rely on "autonomous" kinds of reason and "presuppositions" that lack grounding (in God) and thus lack validity themselves.[26] Inerrantists also routinely invoke Thomas Kuhn's work and the associated idea of "paradigm shifts" to relativize the empirical ideals and falsification standards of critical scholars and, accordingly, to represent inerrantist approaches as, at the least, another legitimate kind of "paradigm" (e.g. Moreland 1986: 82–85; Poythress 1996: 437–84, 503–31). Relatedly, some inerrantists also criticize the notion that their positions even need to be falsifiable by arguing that processes of cognition are too complex for that model (e.g. Moreland 1986). Others uphold the academic legitimacy of their supernatural explanations of inerrancy by drawing upon certain twentieth-century approaches to religion that construed it as a unique, ineffable, and transcendent phenomenon, properly studied by accepting its uniqueness (e.g. Johnson 1983: 8; Yamauchi 1984: 177, 180, 185–88). Some

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26   This and other kinds of presuppositional critiques are ubiquitous, though variations exist among inerrantists. For examples from each decade covered by this article, see Gaffin 1964: 236–38; Van Til 1967; Henry 1979: 193, 255, 387–402; Lindsell 1979: 282–88, 299–301; Geisler 1981; Farnell 1998; Bush 2007: 47–53; Frame 2010: 15–43; Poythress 2012b. See, however, Silva's cautions about too quickly dismissing the disagreeable biblical scholarship of non-inerrantists on the basis of their "presuppositions" (1986: 124, 130–32).

inerrantists similarly seek to justify their supernatural explanations through claims about religious experience (e.g. Helm 1992: 312–15). Inerrantist publications feature blends of these arguments for why they can (1) presume the inerrancy of the Bible, (2) modulate interpretive methods to make their position unfalsifiable, and (3) assert the uniqueness of their supernatural object of study. They thus position their work as academic and historical study through demonstrating mastery of the realms of epistemology, underlying assumptions and presuppositions, and theory. They represent command of these areas as decisive for any notion of valid or sophisticated scholarship and routinely sketch non-inerrantist scholars as outdated "modernists" (or other labels) who are ignorant of or deficient in these areas. Inerrantists thus vigorously represent their work as superior historical scholarship on the Bible that is supported by sophisticated philosophical, epistemological, and theory-of-religion foundations that certify their credibility.

A Religious Studies Redescription of Inerrantist Discourse as an Example of Protectionism

I suggest that by aligning the above characteristics of inerrantist discourse with certain broader research on religion we can identify the underlying inerrantist commitment to *privileging* the claims of the Bible and thus redescribe their scholarship in terms of "protective strategies." Such privileging takes place at the level of presuming the accuracy of the Bible's claims, but it also takes place in the way inerrantists construe the ideologies (or "theology") within the Bible as normative, as well as the way they promote the explanatory priority of its writings' claims. For example, if the Pentateuch presumes Mosaic authorship or origins, then, for inerrantists, legitimate biblical scholarship will privilege that claim in analysis and historically explain it as, in some substantial way, a Mosaic product (e.g. Block 2001; Averbeck 2012: 152–58; Merrill 2012). If Jesus, as represented in the canonical Gospels, and various New Testament writings claim that the entire book of Isaiah goes back to the eighth century prophet, then valid scholarship on Isaiah will uphold its Isaianic "authenticity" and unity of authorship (e.g. Beale 2008: 123–59). If biblical texts claim that the Israelites exterminated many Canaanites because God commanded it due to, among other things, Canaanite "idolatry" and immorality, then not only did the Israelites exterminate many Canaanites, but they were also justified in doing so because God commanded it due to the threat of Canaanite "idolatry" and their "debased" religion (e.g. Copan 2008: 24–27; Craig n.d.). As we have seen from its Article XVIII, the CSBI makes such privileging

logic concerning matters of authorship and "teachings" explicit. If a biblical writing's genre implies that it is reporting (its theological interpretation of) historical events, then the events happened and denying they happened "distorts a correct understanding" of the text and does not "pay due hermeneutical respect to the conscious genre signals by biblical writers" (e.g. Beale 2006: 305; 2007b: 21). Finally, as outlined above, inerrantists explain that if the Bible claims to be the supernaturally inspired and inerrant word of God, then such claims are to be privileged in historical analysis, even at the level of modulating interpretive methods to fit the Bible's supernatural and inerrant nature.

Juxtaposing this privileging characteristic of inerrantist scholarship with broader scholarship on religion can aid in redescription. Numerous scholars of religion have represented the study of religion as the study of something unique and ineffable. For them it requires special rules and methods for study because religious people and texts claim that their religion and experiences are unique, transcendent, and ineffable. In this approach religion is something that cannot be studied by normal human tools and methods; it resides beyond such study. Such scholars thus claim that in order to study religion and religious experience "on its own terms" and to respect their informants, we must presume the uniqueness of religion and the necessity of special methods for studying it. After all, "insiders" are the experts on their religion, while scholars remain "outsiders." Accordingly, scholars must privilege insider religious claims in their scholarship on such people and their religious practices.[27] Others, however, disagree and point out the inherently unacademic character of such approaches: An approach that privileges informants' and texts' claims collapses the distinction between description and explanation, engaging in what have been termed "protective strategies."

Though not the only scholar of religion to focus on these matters, Wayne Proudfoot offered the now classic analysis. In particular he distinguished between "descriptive reduction" and "explanatory reduction," explicating how failure to delineate between them is the essence of "protective strategies" that privilege religious claims and seal them off from academic analysis:

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27 See Martin and McCutcheon 2012 for an accessible selection including scholars who argue this way about "religious experience." For extended discussions and criticisms of such types of scholarship on religion and religious experience, see Proudfoot 1985: 190–227; McCutcheon 1997; Sharf 1998; Bagger 1999. For critical interaction with the work of Sharf (and also McCutcheon) on these points, though by a scholar still opposed to privileging approaches, see Bush 2012.

> *Descriptive reduction* is the failure to identify an emotion, practice, or experience under the description by which the subject identifies it. This is indeed unacceptable. To describe an experience in nonreligious terms when the subject himself describes it in religious terms is to misidentify the experience, or to attend to another experience altogether. (Proudfoot 1985: 196; emphasis original)

By contrast,

> *Explanatory reduction* consists in offering an explanation of an experience in terms that are not those of the subject and that might not meet with his approval. This is perfectly justifiable and is, in fact, normal procedure. The explanandum is set in a new context, whether that be one of covering laws and initial conditions, narrative structure, or some other explanatory model. The terms of explanation need not be familiar or acceptable to the subject. Historians offer explanations of past events by employing such concepts as socialization, ideology, means of production, and feudal economy. Seldom can these concepts be ascribed to the people whose behavior is the object of the historian's study. But that poses no problem. The explanation stands or falls according to how well it can account for all the available evidence. (Proudfoot 1985: 197; emphasis original)

Proudfoot then explains how scholars who reinscribe religious claims thus adopt a fundamentally un-academic stance and engage in "protective strategies":

> Failure to distinguish between these two kinds of reduction leads to the claim that any account of religious emotions, practices, or experience must be restricted to the perspective of the subject and must employ terms, beliefs, and judgments that would meet with his approval. This claim derives its plausibility from examples of descriptive reduction but is then extended to preclude explanatory reduction. When so extended, it becomes a protective strategy. The subject's identifying description becomes normative for the purposes of explanation, and inquiry is blocked to insure that the subject's own explanation of his experience is not contested ... Many of the warnings against reductionism in the study of religion conflate descriptive and explanatory reduction. (Proudfoot 1985: 197–98)

Such protective strategies that borrow scholarly capital from the charge of "re-ductionism" are forms of religious apologetic through which scholars shield the religious people and practices they study from standard kinds of academic analysis by analytically privileging the religious claims of the people and data in question (Proudfoot 1985: xi–xix, 199–209).

Protective strategy approaches thus reinscribe the claims of religious infor-mants or texts, not to mention the (often unarticulated) assumptions about religion held by scholars using such approaches, in purportedly academic analysis of the religious people, practices, and texts to be studied. As spelled out by Proudfoot, this kind of anti-(explanatory)-"reductionism" methodologi-cally excludes analysis involving social, historical, anthropological, scientific, and similar models for examining actions, interactions, practices, and artifacts in the world.[28] Standard academic methodologies do not analytically privilege self-claims for other fields of inquiry. For example, linguists do not assume that speakers' folk notions about how languages work provide the exclusive way to study how languages work. Neither do political scientists and historians meth-odologically commit to studying politics and politicians "on their own terms," if that means being constrained by politicians' claims and narratives when it comes to analyzing their historical and political situations; their opponents; how economic, social, and demographic conditions came about in relation to their and their opponents' policies; and so on. There is a recognized difference between "reductionism" in description, which is problematic, versus "reduc-tionism" in explanation, which is standard in academic analysis. Denying or obscuring this difference in the service of prohibiting explanatory reduction, however, is a hallmark of what we often term "apologetics." To focus on com-mon rhetoric related to these issues, one must specify carefully what is meant with calls to approach data "on its own terms," to "take it seriously," to "respect" it, or to study it "sympathetically." When the significance of such terminology relates to the imperative for detailed and accurate description of how those being described understand themselves and what they are doing (i.e. emic de-scriptions), these calls articulate a foundational aspect of scholarly practices. When, however, the significance of such terminology involves stipulating

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28   For other discussions of protective strategies and their anti-academic nature, see Bagger
       1999; Martin 2013. For discussions that similarly problematize privileging and autono-
       mous approaches to religion and religious experience, see McCutcheon 1997; 2001;
       Stowers 2007: 12–22. For such points about scholarship on religious texts, see Lincoln 2012.
       The long running debate about "reductionism" in religious studies is directly relevant.
       For another recent advocate of (explanatory) reductionism in religious studies, see
       Slingerland 2008.

kinds of analysis and explanation that do not transgress emic conceptions, these calls eliminate the most basic scaffolding scholars can use to construct and test analytical and explanatory hypotheses.

To refocus on inerrantists, we can redescribe inerrantists' own theorizing of how to approach their Bible as protective strategies that privilege their understandings of biblical claims. They commit themselves methodologically to collapsing the distinction between description and explanation; between, on the one hand, describing biblical claims and embedded ideologies and, on the other, explaining biblical claims and ideologies in ways that do not methodologically commit to reinscribing the biblical claims in the analysis. Their protective strategies appear in a variety of iterations. For example, and as discussed above, if they consider a biblical passage's 'genre signals' to indicate that it is reporting things that actually happened, then inerrantists advocate privileging such genre signals and both interpreting the rest of the data accordingly and rejecting hypotheses that involve questioning the historicity of the biblical account. They construe any such questioning as failure to understand the biblical text's genres and claims correctly, thus illustrating a lack of distinction between description and analysis/explanation (e.g. Beale 2006: 305; 2007b: 21).

On a more general level, and as also discussed above, inerrantists consider several parts of the Bible to "teach" its inerrancy. They privilege these claims in their description of other biblical passages' meanings by using interpretive methods that prefer options that keep the text inerrant. In this case inerrantist protective strategies inhibit not only non-privileging analyses of biblical texts (e.g. of authorship and date), but also simple description of the texts' meanings if those descriptions cut across privileging the claims of other parts of the Bible (i.e. a descriptive option that would involve an actual contradiction between two biblical passages). This means that inerrantists' descriptions of biblical texts' meanings are a kind of inerrancy-modulated explanation, since the way inerrantists understand some self-claims by the Bible become the framework for valid description of other parts. Inerrantist theorizing about the legitimacy of this general level (what I have redescribed as) protective strategy highlights another iteration of their privileging: They validate privileging the Bible's "teachings" about "its" inerrancy through theorizations about its essential unity, such that it cannot contradict itself. In this way they privilege "the Bible's claims about itself," construing them as specifying the Bible's nature and thus the appropriate parameters for approaching it "on its own terms."

Inerrantist theorization of the Bible's supernatural and God-inspired nature, and thus the necessity of recourse to supernatural considerations in legitimate biblical scholarship, are other facets of inerrantist protectionism that privileges biblical claims. For example, Alan Johnson's and Edwin Yamauchi's

respective combinations of anti-reductionism rhetoric, ideas about religion as unique or transcendent, and common inerrantist polemical labels for method-ologically-naturalist approaches to the Bible coalesce as a protective strategy that privileges claims about the Bible's divine nature in order to shield it from historical, social, and other kinds of standard explanatory-reductionist analy-sis that would approach biblical writings like other human writings.[29] Johnson writes about "the inadequacy of the enlightenment view of history, which ex-cluded the supernatural, to handle the nature of Biblical documents that are so evidently filled with references to transcendence. This is the problem of anti-supernaturalism, which is rooted in the arbitrary exclusion of God from histo-ry" (Johnson 1983: 8). In Johnson's logic the Bible's "references to transcendence," among other things, indicate its (self-claims to a) divine "nature" and thus the necessity of approaching it as such. Yamauchi draws upon precisely the ap-proaches to religion and religious experience that have been redescribed by Proudfoot and others as protective strategies:

> Against such analyses [i.e. analyses that use only standard methodo-logically naturalistic kinds of historical, social, and anthropological ap-proaches] Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade have protested that religion is irreducible inasmuch as the "numinous" and the "sacred" are unique cat-egories. But the epistemology of a sociology that focuses only on "the inter-subjective, the recurrent, and the relational" [i.e. in this context, things that empirically-oriented methods can analyze] rules out *ipso facto* "the existential, the unique, the absolute." (Yamauchi 1984: 180, emphasis original)

Yamauchi continues:

> It is an irony that while Biblical scholars in the 1970s were discovering new tools of sociological analysis, which often function to explain away religious phenomena in a reductionistic manner, many of the leaders in the sociology of religion have at the same time been advocating a "realist" approach to religion – that is, one that respects the reality of religion instead of reducing it to nonreligious components. (1984: 188)

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29   The words "*methodologically* naturalistic" describe an approach that operates naturalisti-cally for the purposes of investigation and analysis, but without presuming the actual non-existence of any metaphysical realities or entities.

Johnson's and Yamauchi's configurations of the situation are of a piece with broader inerrantist discourse that objects to (1) separations between faith and history or theology and history when it comes to studying the Bible (e.g. Silva 1986: 132–33; Burk 2007: 85–88; McCall 2012: 40–54) and (2) approaches to the Bible that treat it like other human writings (e.g. Gaffin 1964: 234; Poythress 1986: 241, 256–58; Bush 2007: 46; Frame 2010: 18, 181; Tipton 2010: 199).

These related ways to assert the Bible's unique and divine nature exemplify inerrantist protectionism. They serve to theorize the inappropriateness of analytical methods that do not presume the Bible's inerrant divine nature. Accordingly, they theorize the necessity of supernaturally augmenting or modifying standard academic methods for studying people, practices, and artifacts in the world. It should be noted that inerrantists do not simply aim to theorize the necessity of approaching the Bible with openness to supernatural explanatory options in general. Part of their discourse does trade in the scholarly capital of such broader religious studies research that advocates acceptance of the "numinous," "transcendent," or supernatural in explanation (much of which has been redescribed in terms of protective strategies). As the above examination clarifies, however, inerrantists ultimately advocate *their own* supernatural explanatory framework: The Bible is inspired by their God and is thus characterized by, among other things, their God's inerrant nature. In keeping with the article's redescriptive framework, this too constitutes an inerrantist protective strategy that privileges (what they understand to be) their Bible's own supernatural claims.

Inerrantists thus situate their scholarship as valid and legitimate scholarship precisely in view of their approach to the Bible *as inerrant* and *as divine*; and they position the legitimacy of their scholarship against the illegitimacy of non-inerrantist scholarship, whose work they delegitimize for its failure to approach the Bible *as inerrant* and *as divine*.[30] Within inerrantist discourse these protective strategies explain and justify their modulations of historical methodology, which are, again, also properly redescribed as protective strategies that privilege inerrantist representations of the Bible's claims. While many biblical scholars, for various reasons, continue to privilege biblical claims in their

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30   This representation of the landscape of scholarship also provides the discursive material for many in-house inerrantist polemics: that is, a common (though varied) way within inerrantist scholarship of dismissing or marginalizing the work of other self-professed inerrantist (or broader Evangelical) scholars is to explain how their work fails to approach the Bible through appropriate(ly modulated) methods or in ways that uphold its inspiration and inerrancy (e.g. Geisler 1983; Beale 2007a: 14, 20–21, 24–25; 2007b: 16, 21–22, 25–27; Tipton 2010).

scholarship, inerrantists set themselves apart with their own specific theorizing of a deliberate and thoroughgoing analytical privileging for everything they construe as a claim in the biblical text.

Practice Theory and Implications for Understanding Inerrantist Religiosity

To review, the landscape of inerrancy has a diverse topography, whose occupants take up different, often contesting, positions. A rich and varied self-theorizing discourse permeates this landscape, and it boasts at least two demonstrable characteristics when it comes to theorization about its relationship to broader academic study. First, inerrantist theorizing vigorously represents its projects as historical/academic study, buttressed by specialized epistemological and theory-of-religion frameworks. Second, it simultaneously explicates inerrancy-modulated historical methods for analyzing the Bible, which it likewise positions as entirely valid historical scholarship. Turning to redescription, especially by juxtaposing these aspects of inerrantist discourse with research in the field of religious studies, we can redescribe such aspects as protective strategies that privilege (inerrantist understandings of) the Bible's claims. These protective strategies serve to block analysis of the Bible through ordinary historical, social, anthropological, and scientific academic methods should they yield findings about the Bible that transgress how inerrantists understand the Bible's claims – especially that the Bible is inerrant.

The preceding description and redescription have reframed inerrantist discourse in terms of the broader religious studies rubrics of protective strategies and privileging, thus contributing to religious studies research on "protectionism." I suggest that we can also capitalize upon the above analysis to extend the article's redescription and discuss some implications for how to understand inerrantist religiosity that are highlighted by a Practice Theory vantage point. Practice Theory provides a fruitful theoretical optic for my purposes, focalizing in particular the importance of attending to differences in kinds of practices.[31] As academics who habitually engage in specialized intellectual practices, we tend to take them for granted. We thus easily overlook both that our practices are not necessarily the default or "natural" types of actions in the world and

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31   I use Practice Theory as a working framework. For helpful articulations of Practice Theory, see Schatzki 1996; 2002; Swartz 1997; Rouse 2007. For criticisms of problematic uses of different kinds of theory, including Practice Theory, and for suggestions about how to make use of theory more empirically oriented and criticizable, see Boyer 2012.

that our intellectualizing activities are precisely practices with their own social locations, social and economic conditions of possibility, and associated interests (e.g. Bourdieu 1990: 94–105). It thus makes sense to analyze the activities of academic discourse producers – in the case of this article, inerrantist discourse producers[32] – in terms of their associated interests,[33] their competitive fields of discourse production and consumption, the tacitly accepted rules for participating in such fields, the (mis)recognized loci of authorization and legitimacy, the social locations of those involved, the expectations and even knowledge competencies of producers and consumers of their discourse, and the distribution of different kinds of capital relative to the different positions in the field(s).[34] Academics and our practices do not exist in a vacuum outside of the competitive social arena and its various conditions of possibility.

For the first of these Practice-Theory-highlighted implications, I would argue that the preceding description and redescription of inerrantist discourse indicate that this is a highly intellectualized religiosity, characterized by specialized discursive practices that operate within an (or several overlapping) inerrantist field(s) of discourse production and consumption. While this may seem obvious at first glance, Practice Theory encourages us to dwell for a moment on the kinds of practices inerrantists engage in: discursive actions and associated specialized intellectual practices. This matters particularly for asking questions about the "genre" or constitutive practices of inerrantist religiosity. There is, for example, a difference between the non-discursive action of drinking a glass of wine and the discursive action of taking a position about the meaning of drinking a glass of wine.[35] Though people can engage in both

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32   To be clear, such analysis could (and should) be directed at all discourse producers and scholars, myself certainly not excluded.

33   Though Practice Theorists tend to emphasize the fundamentally "interested" and strategic nature of our practices (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; 1998: 75–91), this should not be confused with the idea that we are reflectively aware of all our interests, especially since people generally misrecognize the interests and competitive dynamics of their social arenas (e.g. Bourdieu 1998: 75–76, 79–83, 86–91; 1990: 106–119). By analyzing inerrantists in terms of their "interests," I am thus not implying negative evaluations of, for example, their sincerity. I am simply trying to focus on the material and symbolic interests bound up with their practices.

34   For Bourdieu's theorization of fields, competitive position takings within them, and associated issues of symbolic and other kinds of capital, see Bourdieu 1993: 29–211.

35   On discursive actions versus non-discursive actions, see Schatzki 2002: 76–77. Daniel Ullucci has theorized the relevance of such categories, as well as broader Practice Theory rubrics such as competitive fields and symbolic capital, for analyzing religiosity (2012: 3–30).

kinds of actions in relation to drinking wine, we can still differentiate between them and parse the significance of each kind of action.

The same distinction operates within the realm of religious practices. Not all kinds of religious activity involve specialized intellectual practices, even if they do involve less systematized or less deliberately maintained beliefs about gods and other matters.[36] It is thus significant to note that the inerrantist religious practices examined above are specialized discursive actions. This finding can orient relevant sociological expectations: Only certain kinds of people in certain kinds of social and economic settings will have both the ability and the interests to participate in such practices (e.g. Bourdieu 1990: 94–105). To the extent that inerrantist religiosity involves recognizing and participating in specialized discursive practices (i.e. in this case, producing and consuming inerrantist discourse about the Bible), this directs the analyst to focus on how inerrantists on the whole are willing and able to allocate the kinds of capital necessary for establishing and maintaining the requisite institutional conditions and infrastructure for these practices. Attention to the kinds of practices in which inerrantists engage can thus yield much information about the who and where (socially speaking) of inerrantist religiosity. Inerrantist religiosity thus revolves around specialized intellectual practices within inerrantist fields, and, accordingly, its participants have the requisite types of interests and skills for these practices.[37]

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36   See for example Stowers' theorization of "the religion of everyday social exchange," which does not revolve around specialized interpretive and other intellectual practices, versus "the religion of the literate cultural producer, together with people who clustered around more entrepreneurial versions of this specialist" – in relation to ancient Mediterranean sacrifice (Stowers 2011: 41). See also Barrett and Keil 1996; Barrett 1999; Slone 2004 for recent cognitive science work on "theological (in)correctness" in religious cognition.

37   We can also analyze the inerrantist discourse producers in question as (to stick with Practice Theory terminology) cultural producers (e.g. Bourdieu 1993) who actively create and maintain the interests and fields associated with inerrancy-upholding discursive practices. In other words, these inerrantist scholars are not simply responding to an indubitable need for inerrancy to be articulated, theorized, and defended. They create, maintain, and reinscribe these interests by, among other things, intellectualizing and theorizing about the Bible and (true) Christianity in ways that configure inerrancy as necessary for any proper approach to the Bible and Christian piety. Further studies could productively redescribe, for example, the already well-documented rise to prominence of inerrancy within Evangelical and Fundamentalist discourses of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g. Marsden 1982; 1995; Weber 1982; Hart 1999; Noll 2004) from this perspective. They could also pursue this redescriptive angle by examining more popular-level publications and presentations about the Bible and inerrancy among Evangelicals (e.g. Lindsell 1976; Nichols and Brandt 2009; Mohler 2010); the culture-producing work these presenta-

Given how inerrantist religiosity comprises specialized discursive practices that operate in inerrantist fields of discourse production and consumption, an examination of the characteristics of these fields is in order. This leads to my second implication: My analysis highlights that inerrantist fields greatly value the prestige of historical study and the notionally "academic," especially when it comes to positioning their discourse relative to non-inerrantist scholarly discourse. Such academic accoutrements are loci of authorization and legitimacy within inerrantist fields. Demonstrations of historical and other kinds of academic mastery in relation to the Bible are thus the means of participating in and also establishing and maintaining one's position in these fields. At the same time, participants in these fields only recognize production characterized by protective strategies that privilege biblical claims and obscure the difference between descriptive and explanatory reduction – at least when it comes to analyzing aspects of the Bible and history that could potentially problematize inerrancy. These apologetic rules and interests of inerrantist fields thus distinguish them from broader academic-historical fields about the Bible that *do not* recognize such protective strategies. In this way we can delineate between inerrantist and broader academic fields of scholarly production and consumption about the Bible.

Noting the prestigious and authorizing significance of the notionally academic within inerrantist fields permits identification of a related and expected set of practices in these intellectualizing fields: claims of "disinterest." Inerrantists often, at least implicitly, situate themselves as those who care not for academic prestige and recognition, but instead stand for the truth even though it brings ridicule. They accordingly contrast themselves with non-inerrantists (especially former inerrantists who have relinquished their inerrantist commitments), whom they portray as adopting non-inerrantist positions because of the allure of academic recognition, the desire to be "accepted" in non-inerrantist institutions, the "thrill of intellectual innovation" and associated recognition in scholarly achievement, and other "sociological elements" (Payne 1980: 108; Carson 1983: 348–49, 353; Grudem 2000: 16–23; Beale 2009).[38] One can fruitfully analyze these claims as inerrantist attempts to establish their (to use redescriptive terminology) disinterest – a common way participants com-

tions do to intellectualize inerrancy as part of Evangelical piety; and the extent to which scholarly inerrantist publications serve to validate and demonstrate the ostensibly academic, biblical, and theological backing of these more popular articulations.

38   Schultz, in the context of discussing Evangelical scholars, their growing engagement with broader scholars, and their use of historical-critical methods, states: "But may we never yield to the temptation to sell our soul for a mess of academic respectability" (2004: 170).

pete within a field for symbolic capital by representing their opponents as the ones who take positions for various interests (e.g. money, fame), whereas they simply take their positions for the sake of the truth or some other non-social reason.[39] Such claims of disinterest remain the intellectual practices of inerrantists competing for symbolic and other kinds of capital through participating in inerrantist fields of discourse production and consumption.

Third (and continuing to focus on characteristics of inerrantist fields), though participants in inerrantist fields value academic legitimacy, I suggest that consumers in these fields lack the requisite training, knowledge, or interest to critically assess the relevant sources and issues for the topics in question. This would seem to be a characteristic of fields that value academic legitimacy but also methodologically enshrine a privileging of biblical claims and thus an apologetic preference for analytical options that keep the Bible inerrant – fields which thus preclude scholarship on the biblical data that could seriously challenge basic inerrantist positions about their Bible. People who do not share inerrantist privileging commitments and who have academic competence in the relevant primary and secondary sources will not find inerrancy-modulated historical analysis persuasive, and thus are not likely to be participants in inerrantist fields of scholarly production and consumption. Conversely, those who do participate and have advanced academic training in the relevant sources (i.e. many inerrantist scholars) likely already share inerrantist privileging commitments and thus lack interest in (and theoretically preclude the option of) critically assessing their inerrantist positions. Also, those who participate in inerrantist fields and do not have advanced academic training (i.e. most inerrantist pastors, teachers, and theologically interested "lay people" among inerrantists) lack the knowledge competence to assess treatments of the sources and issues in inerrancy-defending scholarship. These categories of consumers would seem to be the only ones who would participate within inerrantist fields and, in keeping with a core-authorizing locus, recognize its products as academic.

My suggested implications for how we can conceive of inerrantist religiosity from a Practice Theory optic are based upon my description and redescription of a limited selection of inerrantist discourse: inerrantist theorizing of both inerrancy and their scholarship's relation to the broader academy. These implications are preliminary and encourage examination of other areas of inerrantist discourse for testing, nuancing, and further exploring my suggestions. In

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39   For discussions of claiming "disinterest" in fields of intellectual production and consumption and competition for symbolic capital, see Bourdieu 1993; 1998: 77, 85–88; Swartz 1997: 66–94.

this article I have both argued for the utility of redescribing inerrantist scholarship as an opportunity for the study of modern religiosity and advanced a specific redescription of inerrantist discourse as a form of religious protectionism. In doing so I have sought to highlight the potential fruitfulness of further capitalizing upon this rich and varied data set for deepening our understanding of inerrantist scholarship, inerrantists, and contemporary religion.

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