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THE ISSUE OF INERRANCY IN FUNDAMENTALISM
FROM THE 1900s TO THE PRESENT

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HISTORY OF FUNDAMENTALISM

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**THESIS**

At the turn of the twentieth century, those involved in the Protestant movement, later identified as Fundamentalism, were actively engaged in the defense of the inerrancy of the Word of God in the original manuscripts against liberal theologians who believed the Bible contained falsities. Liberal theologians believed the Bible contained truth but was not entirely without error.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, some fundamentalists have also begun to fight over the inerrancy of one particular translation—the King James Bible— with the same intensity and energy of their fore-fathers at the previous turn of the century.

The purpose of this paper is to familiarize the reader with the original fight that began in the 1900s and the transition that has occurred in the some camps of the fundamentalist movement in the present age.

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INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the twentieth century, those involved in the Protestant movement, later identified as Fundamentalism, were actively engaged in the defense of the inerrancy of the Word of God in the original manuscripts against liberal theologians who believed the Bible contained falsities. Liberal theologians believed the Bible contained truth but was not entirely without error. This was especially prevalent in Germany where liberals like Rudolf Karl Bultmann\(^1\) denied the supernatural and the truthfulness of Scripture in cases where it presents narratives that cannot be explained by science. Narratives like the creation of Adam from the dust of the earth or the virgin conception of the Son of God are examples of Scriptural accounts that liberals challenge as fictitious or mythological. Higher criticism, with origins also in Europe, attacked the credibility of Scripture with various theories denying the traditional orthodox understanding of authorship. One example was the JEPD theory or Documentary Hypothesis advanced by Julius Wellhausen which denied the traditional understanding that Moses authored the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua.\(^2\)

Fundamentalists, from various mainline denominations, like R.A. Torrey, C.I. Scofield, A.C. Dixon, W.B. Riley, J. Gresham Machen, J. Frank Norris, John R. Rice and countless other pastors and professors, fought against attacks on the authority and truthfulness of the Bible. According to Dr. David O. Beale, of Bob Jones University, these fundamentalists did not agree on every interpretation of the Bible, especially in the area of eschatology, but they did unite on the “Bible alone, without question, as the divinely and verbally inspired, inerrant, and


authoritative Word of God.” Dr. P.D. Feinberg gives significant credit to “Princeton theologians Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, and B.B. Warfield as modern formulators and defenders of the full inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture.”

It is nearly impossible to overemphasize the importance a fundamentalist places on the authority and reliability of the Bible. For over one hundred years fundamentalists have held the inerrancy of the Bible as a supremely important fundamental of the faith once delivered by the Lord Jesus and His Apostles. However, it appears that at the turn of the century, some fundamentalists also began to fight over the inerrancy of one particular translation—the King James Bible—with the same intensity and energy as their forefathers at the previous turn of the century. Dr. William W. Combs, of Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, writes “today there are those who teach that one Bible, the KJV, has no errors. Certainly, no one is arguing, or has apparently every argued, that any other English translation is without error.” But today fundamentalist professors, preachers, and papers like the Sword of the Lord are more concerned with defending the preeminence of the KJV Bible than the inerrancy of the original manuscripts. The Sword of the Lord Publishers website, first Article of Faith identifies the “KJV Bible” as inerrant or without error. This suggests the translators were perfect in the selection of every English word. The fight has changed and the preeminent fundamentalists of the twentieth century would not agree with some of the fundamentalists of the twenty-first century concerning what is

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and is not inerrant. The purpose of this paper is to familiarize the reader with the original fight that began in the 1900s and the transition that has occurred in some camps of the fundamentalist movement in the present age.

**HISTORY**

When a fight breaks out, someone always wants to know who threw the first punch or why they were fighting. Over one hundred years ago, German scholars threw the first punch with assaults on the authority and accuracy of the truth of the Bible. Man’s growing knowledge of science greatly affected European scholars before American scholars in part because of the American Civil War and the ocean between the continents. Eventually, these same challenges to the Word of God crossed the Atlantic, and American fundamentalists began to defend the assaults on the Biblical accounts of: the creation of Adam and Eve, the Genesis account of the flood, the authorship of the Pentateuch, the virgin birth, the miracles of the Bible, the bodily resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) caused an acute religious controversy over the question of biblical infallibility. In *Who’s Who in Christian History*, N. V. Hope writes: [men like Robert] “Ingersoll became an ardent exponent of the doctrine of evolution. He began attacking orthodox Christian beliefs and defending agnosticism in public lectures. One of his lectures was on what he called ‘Some Mistakes of Moses.’ Known for his oratorical gifts, exemplary private life, and noble character, he was an effective champion of agnosticism.”⁷ These agnostics made theologians, who subscribed to the truth of the Bible, look ridiculous and unintelligent; so faith in the supernatural and the inerrancy of the Bible waned until liberal scholars argued against the supernatural and thus the inerrancy of the Bible.

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Essentially anytime Scripture conflicted with science—science won—and what the Bible taught was considered an error. When the human mind could not conceive of how one man, like Moses, could have preserved the history of creation and mankind so perfectly, man-made theories had to be constructed to present a “reasonable” theory behind authorship. Liberals and Fundamentalists divided over the interpretation and understanding of verses like 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. Fundamentalists believed that God the Holy Spirit gave supernatural understanding and direction to prophets like Moses who wrote “as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (1:21). In so much as divine inspiration is clearly a supernatural event, which cannot be explained by modern (twentieth century) science, it was rejected by liberal theologians who deferred to the authority of science. Therefore, alternative theories were constructed which denied the verbal inspiration of the Bible and thus its inerrancy and authority.

Liberals and Fundamentalists were divided over what a Christian should believe when the Bible presented something that could not be explained by science or how man understands his world. The Fundamentalist pastor or professor told his pupil that the Bible was inerrant. By inerrant, the Fundamentalist did not mean that man understood how the supernatural operated, but that the Bible could be trusted to present only truth as a divinely authored book. Early Fundamentalists were careful to limit this inspiration and inerrancy to the original autographs (manuscripts). Dr. James M. Gray, Dean of Moody Bible Institute, communicated the majority opinion in his article for The Fundamentals, titled, “The Inspiration of the Bible—Definition, Extent and Proof.” One cannot fully understand the inerrancy position with fundamentalism without examining The Fundamentals.

**The Fundamentals**

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In the same year that the Scofield Reference Bible was introduced to the Christian community, Lyman Stewart, a wealthy layman, funded the publication of the famous *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to Truth*. The Fundamentals were a set of twelve books, edited by R.A. Torrey and A.C. Dixon, each containing about 125 pages of articles written by the most conservative, orthodox scholars from America, Canada, and Great Britain. They were men like James M. Gray, W. H. Griffith Thomas, J. Orr, A. C. Gaebelein, B. B. Warfield, C. I. Scofield, H. C. G. Moule, A. T. Pierson, C. R. Erdman, and others.\(^9\) From 1910-1915, these volumes were written, published, and three million copies\(^10\) were distributed at no cost to many pastors, evangelists, missionaries, professors, Sunday school superintendents, etc. at a cost of around three hundred thousand dollars.\(^11\) A thorough examination of the articles contained in *The Fundamentals* that addressed the issues of inspiration, inerrancy, and higher criticism will provide the best understanding of issues in the first half of the twentieth century. A survey of the number of articles addressing the Word of God and the content of these articles reveals how committed orthodoxy was to ensuring faith in the inerrancy of the Bible was not lost among as many as could be converted to the cause of fundamentalism. According to Dr. George Marsden “perhaps one third of the articles defended Scripture, typically with an attack on the foibles of higher criticism.”\(^12\) He believed that the articles in *The Fundamentals* focused on the “crucial issue” of the “authority of God in Scripture in relation to the authority of modern science, particularly science in the form of higher criticism of Scripture itself.”\(^13\)


\(^10\)Ibid.

\(^11\)Beale, 40.


\(^13\)Marsden, 120.
Men like William Caven, of Toronto, Canada, author of *The Fundamentals*’ article, “The Testimony of Christ to the Old Testament” believed that Christ’s statements of affirmation of the Old Testament were statements establishing the inerrancy of the Old Testament and directly contradicted claims that the authorship of many Old Testament books could not be established. Caven writes:

> If our Lord does not name the writers of the books of the Old Testament in detail, it may at least be said that no word of His calls in question the genuineness of any book, and that he distinctly assigns several parts of Scripture to the writers whose names they pass under. The Law is ascribed to Moses; David’s name is connected with the Psalms; the prophecies of Isaiah are attributed to Isaiah, and the prophecies of Daniel to Daniel.  

Fundamentalists interpret the words of Jesus literally. If Jesus said Moses was the author of the law, then Fundamentalists adamantly rejected theories of multiple authorship taught by men like Julius Wellhausen and others.

> The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was a hotbed issue that was extensively debated in sermons and articles. Was Moses the author of the Pentateuch or not? Dr. George Wright articulates the conflict in the introduction of “The Mosaic Authorship of the Pentateuch.” He writes,

> During the last quarter of a century an influential school of critics has deluged the world with articles and volumes attempting to prove that the Pentateuch did not originate during the time of Moses, and that most of the laws attributed to him did not come into existence until several centuries after his death, and many of them not until the time of Ezekiel. By these critics the patriarchs are relegated to the realm of myth or dim legend and the history of the Pentateuch generally is discredited.

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Fundamentalists were concerned that, once authorship was questioned, there would be no end to the questioning of the authority of the Bible.

If the liberal denial of the inerrancy of the Bible had remained in Europe, fundamentalists may not have been as passionate about their defense of the Bible. However, the liberal theological influence of Germany crossed the Atlantic and American pastors and university professors began to call into question every aspect of the Bible. Beale presents an example of this when Union Theological Seminary professor Arthur McGiffert suggested that John the Baptist “probably never even knew about Jesus at all, and that his ‘Behold the Lamb of God,’ recorded in the Gospel of John was not historical. McGiffert further claimed that the disciples did not regard Jesus as deity; that Paul did not write the Pastoral Epistles,” and the same was true for Peter and John. McGiffert was not alone; professors influenced students; students became pastors; and men like Associate Pastor Harry Emerson Fosdick, (1878-1969), challenged the inerrancy of the Bible in sermons like “Shall the Fundamentalist Win?” Fosdick challenged the inerrancy of the Bible and Christ’s virgin birth as not essential to orthodox Christianity.

Gray’s article on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible is a thorough defense of the fundamentalist’s position on what was and was not inspired and therefore inerrant. He writes:

Let it be stated further in this definitional connection, that the record for whose inspiration we contend is the original record—the autographs or parchments of Moses, David, Daniel, Matthew, Paul or Peter, as the case may be, and not any particular translation or translations of them whatever. There is no translation absolutely without error, nor could there be, considering the infirmities of human copyists, unless God were pleased to perform a perpetual miracle to secure it.

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17 Beale, 148.
18 Beale, 154.
Furthermore, fundamentalists were in agreement that inspiration and inerrancy did not apply to the author’s entire life, but only those times when he was moved by the Holy Spirit. Gray clarifies this point quite succinctly; he continues, “however fallible and errant they [men like Moses, David, Matthew, John, and Paul] may have been as men compassed with infirmity like ourselves, such fallibility or errancy was never under any circumstances communicated to their sacred writings.”⁰⁰ Fundamentalists were exceptionally careful to communicate that inerrancy only applied to the original parchments.

Dr. George S. Bishop, in “The Testimony of Scriptures to Themselves,” articulates the position clearly with this sentence: “We take the ground that on the original parchment—the membrane—every sentence, word, line, mark, point, pen-stroke jot, title was put there by God.”⁰¹ Gray asked that when a discrepancy is identified in the Bible, who could say it belonged “to the original parchments. We are not contending for an inerrant translation.”⁰² Interestingly, this same view of inerrancy has been adopted by conservative Evangelicals, whereas, some twenty-first century Fundamentalists are not clear in what is and is not inerrant. One Evangelical, Feinberg, in Walter Elwell’s Evangelical Dictionary, defines inerrancy as: “the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true.”⁰³

In a very similar manner, Norman Geisler and William Nix, leading Evangelical defenders of the inerrancy of the Bible, quote from the Fundamentalists who first defended the

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⁰⁰ Gray, 2:11.
⁰² Gray, 2:92.
⁰³ Feinberg, 156.
inerrancy of the original autographs in their work *A General Introduction to the Bible*. They write:

Not every copy of Scripture is inerrant, according to Hodge and Warfield; they say, for example, “We do not assert that the common text, but only that the original autographic text, was inspired. In view of all the facts known to us,” they write, “we affirm that a candid inspection of all the ascertained phenomena of the original text of Scripture will leave unmodified the ancient faith of the Church. In all their real affirmations these books are without error.”

Geisler and Nix continue to rely upon the articulation of the inerrancy of the Bible first developed by Fundamentalists like Hodge, Warfield, and Machen in their explanation of inspiration, inerrancy, and the authority of the Bible. They continue:

Their position is consistent with the basic orthodox teaching about Scripture that had been held from the first century onward. It is also the position espoused by J. Gresham Machen and others into the present setting. In fact, the position of Hodge and Warfield is essentially the same as that held by leading evangelicals in November 1978 as defined by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy.

Twenty-first century Evangelicals agree with twentieth century Fundamentalists in their understanding of inspiration and inerrancy.

A survey of the Fundamentalist position on inerrancy would not be complete without knowing what John R. Rice, national Fundamentalist evangelist, author, and publisher of the famous fundamentalist paper *The Sword of the Lord* believed about inerrancy. For fifty years, Rice served as the editor of the *Sword of the Lord* which grew to be the largest weekly Fundamentalist publication in America. Rice also authored over 200 books and booklets on Fundamentalist causes and issues like the verbal, plenary inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. In his book, *Our God Breathed Book—the Bible*, Rice communicated a strict view of inerrancy.

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25Geisler and Nix, 155.
According to Rice, the Bible is “absolutely correct when it speaks on matters of history or geography.”  

Rice did not believe inerrancy applied to any one translation. He continues, “The original autographs of the Scriptures were infallibly correct.” Thus Rice rejected all higher criticism of the Bible.  

Rice must have been influenced by men like older fundamental Evangelists like R.A. Torrey who articulated a similar position.  

Fundamentalists were not blind to the difficulties and issues the liberals addressed with particular Scriptures. In Torrey’s work, *Difficulties in the Bible*, he affirms the fundamental position on inerrancy as he addressed difficult texts. Torrey writes:

> All the difficulties found in the Bible can be included under ten general headings: *The text from which our English Bible was translated*. No one, as far as I know, holds that the English translation of the Bible is absolutely infallible and inerrant. The doctrine held by many is that the Scriptures as originally given were absolutely infallible and inerrant, and that our English translation is a *substantially accurate* rendering of the Scriptures as originally given. We do not possess the original manuscripts of the Bible. These original manuscripts were copied many times with great care and exactness, but naturally some errors crept into the copies that were made. We now possess so many good copies that by comparing one with another, we can tell with great precision just what the original text was. Indeed, for all practical purposes the original text is now settled. But when our Authorized Version was made, some of the best manuscripts were not within reach of the translators, and the science of textual criticism was not so well understood as it is today.

These men were not opposed to thorough study and examination of the Word of God from a scientific perspective provided that study did not deny God’s supernatural ability to lead men to write exactly what He wished to be written without error.

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27 Rice, 88.

28 Geisler and Nix, 171.

Fundamentalist theologian Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer also limited inerrancy to original writings making the point that inspiration, and thus inerrancy, does not extend to “any transcriptions or translations.”\(^3^0\) Even the early defenders of the King James Bible, like Edward F. Hills, ultimately would admit that the Authorized Version (also known as the AV or King James Version) is “not absolutely perfect, but it is trustworthy” in the *King James Defended*, 4\(^{th}\) Edition.\(^3^1\) It appears that one would be historically correct in stating that the vast majority of Fundamentalists from the 1900s to the 1970s believed that inerrancy was limited to just the original manuscripts. Dr. Michael D. Sproul writes, in *God’s Word Preserved*, “ascribing inerrancy to either the English translation of 1611 and/or any of its revisions or to Scriverner’s 1894 Greek text or to any TR previous to Scriverner is an unknown position for any mainstream Evangelical or Fundamentalist leader who lived before 1950.”\(^3^2\) However, in the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, Fundamentalists have significantly divided over the issue of what exactly is inerrant—the originals, particular families of Hebrew and Greek texts, and/or one particular translation.

**FIGHTING WITHIN FUNDAMENTALISM**

In 1979, John R. Rice may have been one of the first Fundamentalists to confront the suggestion, from KJV-only Fundamentalists, that the AV was inerrant. One can only wonder if Rice could imagine the degree to which Fundamentalists would fight with each other over the inerrancy of one particular translation over other Bibles and the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. In the *Sword of the Lord*, Rice writes:


There are people who fanatically insist that the King James Version was perfectly translated with no errors; if there is a single error in the translation we have no trustworthy Bible. They say God is obligated to have such a perfectly translated Bible, which is exactly true to every word of the originals autographs. They are wrong, foolishly and perhaps ignorantly wrong, and they are often guilty of railing and unchristian talk and foolish and slanderous statements.33

Rice is right. People are dividing fundamentalists into two camps: those who insist that the KJV is without error and those who hold to a historic Fundamentalist position limiting inerrancy to the original manuscripts. Prolific writer and leader of the extreme KJV-only movement within Fundamentalism, Peter Ruckman, from Pensacola, Florida represents the farthest side of the divide with an absolute belief in the inerrancy of the King James Bible as superior to the originals. Ruckman believes “not one apostate Fundamentalist in America or Europe, in the last fifty years, has ever dared to publish his ‘reasons’ for saying the AV text is a ‘better’ text than a pile of lost manuscripts.”34 Ruckman should not be viewed as an anomaly in twenty-first century fundamentalism. As one of the few Fundamentalist papers still in print, The Sword of the Lord, has departed from its founder’s position and adopted a statement of faith that presents the KJV Bible as inerrant. In the following statement, the reader should take note of the conjunction linking the Hebrew, Greek and KJV as all inspired:

We believe the Bible, the Scriptures of the Old Testament and the New Testament, preserved for us in the Masoretic text (Old Testament) Textus Receptus (New Testament) and in the King James Bible, is verbally and plenarily inspired of God. It is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, and altogether authentic, accurate and authoritative Word of God, therefore the supreme and final authority in all things (II Tim. 3:16-17; II Peter 1:21; Rev. 22:18-19).35


Fundamentalist pastor of First Baptist Church, of Hammond, Indiana, and founder of
fundamentalist college, Hyles-Anderson, Jack Hyles also departed from the historic position.
Initially, Hyles must have limited inerrancy to the original manuscripts because he corrected
translation issues in his sermons and commentaries. For example in, *Let’s Study the Revelation*,
published in 1967, Hyles makes statements like: “The word ‘seats’ is better translated ‘thrones’;
[and] the best translators call them ‘living creatures’.” The purpose of this paper is not to
examine whether Hyles was correct but only to illustrate how in 1967 Hyles must have limited
inerrancy to only the autographs because he felt the need to correct the King James Bible.
However, Hyles changed his position. In 1993, Hyles published *Enemies of Soul Winning*; in it
Hyles writes, “I have a conviction as deep as my soul that every English-speaking person who
has ever been born again was born of incorruptible seed; that is, the King James Bible.”

Hyles clarifies how this relates to translations and inerrancy with this statement: “This means that the
New King James Bible is not precious seed because it is incorruptible.” Without regard to the
theology of these statements, one thing is clear: Hyles believed that the same Bible he was
correcting in 1967 is now incorruptible. He leaves his reader wondering why the KJV is
necessary for salvation if it is not a perfectly preserved translation of the Bible—essentially
inerrant.

**Fundamental Bible Colleges**

Hyles’ protégé and successor at First Baptist, Pastor Jack Schaap is another example of
how Fundamentalists have divided on this issue. From his pulpit and website, Schaap attacks the

38 Ibid.
extreme KJV-only position, while simultaneously describing the KJV as perfect. His church’s 
website presents his position:

We fundamentalists strongly believe in divine inspiration, meaning God gave the very 
words of Scripture, we become confused when that word inspired is used by these 
ignorant or deceptive teachers when applied to the KJV. I believe the KJV was not given 
by inspiration. It was given by hard work and diligent labor, and I believe that work was 
providentially superintended by God and that the KJV is the preserved Word of God, as 
the Scriptures promised that God would preserve His words. The same God who could 
speak His words to man can also preserve His words through man. The power of God’s 
preservation is equal to His power of inspiration. The power and perfection are equal, but 
the method is different. 39

Schaap does not qualify his position in two ways. First, he does not clarify that God gave words 
in the original manuscripts; instead, he uses “words of Scripture” leaving his reader to wonder 
where he stands on that issue. Second, Schaap does not refer to the KJV as a translation which is 
not perfect. Instead, Schaap suggests that inspiration and preservation are different, but equal in 
power and perfect—thus inerrancy can be applied to a particular translation. In this case, the 
King James Bible (KJV). One struggles at understanding how significantly different Schaap’s 
position is from Ruckman’s position. Schaap is not only the pastor of one of the largest 
fundamental churches in America; he is also the chancellor of Hyles-Anderson Bible College 
and President of Fundamental Baptist Missions International; therefore, he serves as a fair 
representation of a survey of fundamentalism at the turn of the present century.

Pastor Paul Chappell of Lancaster Baptist Church, Lancaster, CA, and President of West 
Coast Bible College is similar to Schaap and presents his position in a book titled, What is a 
Biblical Fundamentalist? Chappell writes about the importance of the inerrancy of Scripture. 
Chappell teaches that the Word of God is “pure (perfect) and without error and God has 
preserved His Word for us today.” Chappell’s fundamental ministries’ websites clearly articulate

the exclusive use of the KJV. Moreover, like Schaap, Chappell does not further clarify what is perfect or has been preserved with specific reference to one version of the King James Bible or families of Hebrew/Greek manuscripts. The reader is left to draw his own conclusion.

Fundamentalists’ colleges like Pensacola Christian College, in Florida, Hyles Anderson, in Indiana, West Coast Bible College, in California, and Bob Jones University in South Carolina, Liberty University, in VA, and Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri are divided over the issue of inerrancy. A survey of each school’s online doctrinal statements makes it exceptionally easy to demonstrate the two camps in Fundamentalism. West Coast Baptist College states:

We believe the Bible to be the revealed Word of God, fully and verbally inspired of God. We believe the Scriptures to be the inerrant, infallible Word of God, as found within the 66 books from Genesis to Revelation. We believe God not only inspired every word, but has preserved them through the ages. We believe the King James Version is the preserved Word of God for the English-speaking people and is the only acceptable translation to be used in this college by faculty or students.

Bob Jones University also uses the King James Bible, but the careful reader will observe a slight difference in the statements which is dividing fundamentalism into smaller, fragmented groups.

Although Bob Jones University does not hold to a King James Only position, we continue to hold the widely-used King James Version as the campus standard in the classroom and in the chapel pulpit. The position of the University on the translation issue has not changed since the founding of the school in 1927. We believe in the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible in the original manuscripts, and we believe that God has supernaturally preserved every one of His inspired words for us today. However, from the Founder to the present administration, we have never taken the position that there can be only one good translation in the English language.
The first three (and others) hold to an inerrancy in the King James Bible; whereas, the latter three limit inerrancy to the original manuscripts. Certainly these six are not the only or most prominent or influential seminaries in fundamentalism, but only serve to illustrate the divide over inerrancy among fundamental colleges. This author is not aware of any significant\textsuperscript{43} fundamental seminary that endorses any position other than the historic fundamentalist position on biblical inerrancy.

**TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FUNDAMENTALISM**

Dr. Michael D. Sproul addresses the question of inerrancy in his work *God’s Work Preserved*. Sproul points to the fact that C.I. Scofield selected the Authorized Version because of its “literary beauty and remarkable general accuracy.”\textsuperscript{44} Scofield believed the AV or KJV was the result of the “best textual scholarship.”\textsuperscript{45} Furthermore, Sproul points to the marginal notes in the Scofield Bible as another example of how twentieth century Fundamentalists did not believe any translation was inerrant; therefore, Sproul believes twenty-first century Fundamentalists should not adopt the untenable position of declaring one translation as inerrant.\textsuperscript{46}

Although KJV-only Fundamentalists would most likely be opposed to identifying John MacArthur as a Fundamentalist, his affirmation of historical premillenial, Fundamentalist beliefs makes him every bit as much of a Fundamentalist as J. Grechen Machen or John R. Rice. Furthermore, the significance of his influence makes it most appropriate to determine what other twenty-first century Fundamentalists believe about inerrancy. MacArthur communicates his

\textsuperscript{43}Significant seminaries are not accredited by any outside regional or national association and produce scholarly works that are used by other seminaries and/or published by outside agencies that access the value of the work as worthy of the attention of the larger orthodox community.


\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.

position in the theology section of his own study Bible, which is available only in the NKJV. In it, MacArthur communicates that the Word of God is verbally inspired and “absolutely inerrant in the original documents.” Moreover, MacArthur indicates that he believes human authors “recorded God’s Word to man without error in the whole or in the part.”

Interestingly, it appears that conservative Evangelical scholars and theologians have adopted the historic Fundamentalist position on inerrancy. The recently published English Standard Version Study Bible contains an article on inerrancy approved by Evangelical editors J.I. Packer and Wayne Grudem and written by Dr. Erik Thoennes of Talbot Theological University, Biola University which could have been approved for inclusion in the The Fundamentals one hundred years ago. Thoennes writes:

> The doctrine of inerrancy means that the Bible is entirely truthful and reliable in all that it affirms in its original manuscripts. Another way of saying that is that the Bible does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. Because God is the ultimate author of the Bible, and because God is always perfectly truthful, it follows that his Word is completely truthful.

Thoennes goes on to use the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, Article XIII, to communicate what these Evangelicals believe Christians should understand about the issue of inerrancy. The Chicago Statement was comprised primarily by those who are identified or identify themselves primarily as Evangelicals; therefore, it is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a review of the list of names of those involved in the statement and what is

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48 Ibid.


articulated in the articles only serves to reinforce that the early fundamental position on inerrancy has been adopted by and then further clarified by twenty-first century conservative Evangelicals who are to a great degree in line with historical Fundamentalism. Article ten is an example of a position in which Fundamentalists would divide over:

We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant.51

Ruckman and those who hold to the KJV as equal in perfection to the original autographs would adamantly oppose Article ten of the Chicago Statement. Dr. Thomas Strouse, of Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary, is another example of a Fundamentalist who would disagree with the historic Fundamentalist position. In The Lord God Hath Spoken, he writes, “The KJV is the Word of God in English language. It has no errors in it because it carefully reflects the original language texts to the closest to the autographs.”52 Whereas, others, like Dr. William W. Combs, of Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, would “hold that only the autographs of Scripture are inerrant and that copies and translations of Scripture are inerrant insofar as they are true to the inerrant autographs. Thus any translation or version of Scripture in any language is the Word of God if it accurately reproduces what is in the original manuscripts.”53

FUNDAMENTAL FELLOWSHIPS


The controversy over how inerrancy relates to English Bibles and the original texts has prompted some fellowships to articulate their position in resolutions and other statements. In 1995, the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International determined that the controversy on the preservation and inerrancy of the KJV was significant enough to articulate the fellowship’s position in a resolution. It states: “In light of the considerable discussion among Fundamentalists about the issue of manuscripts and textual theories, no particular belief about the best textual theory should be elevated to the place of becoming a core Fundamentalist belief.”\(^54\) The resolution goes on to affirm the necessity of comparing translations to Greek and Hebrew. Moreover, “since no translation can genuinely claim what only may be said of the original, inspired writings, any attempt to make one particular English translation the only acceptable translation of Fundamentalism must be rejected.”\(^55\) In 2008, the fellowship again articulated another similar statement emphasizing the importance of inspiration being limited to the original manuscripts. This serves as a clear illustration of the twenty-first century divide that exists in Fundamentalism; these Fundamentalists believe something radically different from the KJV-only Fundamentalists, yet they also describe themselves as Fundamentalists. Six years later, these same Fundamentalists passed another resolution condemning “Schismatic ‘Brethren’” who insist on making one’s stand on the inerrancy of texts and translations a point of contention and division. The resolution instructs those in the fellowship to mark and reject those who are schismatic and refuse to repent.\(^56\)

**CONCLUSION**


\(^55\)Ibid., [http://www.fbfi.org/content/view/34/22/](http://www.fbfi.org/content/view/34/22/) (accessed December 12, 2008).

\(^56\)Ibid., [http://www.fbfi.org/content/view/73/22/](http://www.fbfi.org/content/view/73/22/) (accessed December 12, 2008).
One hundred years ago, Fundamental preachers and pastors were marking and refusing to fellowship with those who were denying the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the original autographs. Presently, Fundamentalists, have turned inward to fight with those who are also fundamental in their doctrine. Within fundamentalism, a minority position, led by Peter Ruckman, teaches that because the KJV was inspired, it is thus inerrant because of the inspiration. Then another group, perhaps a bit larger and more influential, includes Fundamentalists like Chappell and Schaap, their colleges and associated churches, applies inspiration to the autographs but still teach that God has perfectly preserved the KJV. Finally, the largest and probably most influential camp rejects any translation as inerrant but continues to hold to a need to be fundamental in doctrine. Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Bob Jones University, Detroit Theological Seminary, Maranatha Baptist Bible Seminary, International Baptist College, the Fundamental Baptist Bible Fellowship, the Liberty Baptist Fellowship and others continue to hold to the historic fundamental position of limiting inerrancy only to what is verbally inspired. The final group rejects any suggestion that a translation is inerrant as an untenable position.

Now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is difficult to measure the degree of energy and resources that are being devoted to fighting among Christian men who identify themselves as Fundamentalists or identify with the historic fundamentals of the faith over the issue of inerrancy in an English Bible. However, it is significant and perhaps equal to what a united group of Fundamentalists used to defeat liberalism. It certainly appears that more energy is going into proving or disapproving fellow Fundamentalist as correct or incorrect, with regard to what is and is not inerrant, than fighting with the liberals over the inspiration and inerrancy of the manuscripts.
Three decades after John R. Rice wrote about the divide he saw on the horizon of Fundamentalism, articles, essays, and papers are still being written; books are being published; and sermons proclaim the inerrancy of one particular translation or the ridiculousness of such a position. One hundred years ago, Protestant Fundamentalists united to prove that the Word of God was inspired and inerrant; today Baptist Fundamentalists are as divided as one can possibly imagine over the inerrancy of one particular English translation. One can only wonder what the forefathers of Fundamentalism would say to a fragmented fundamental movement that expends more energy fighting with each other than liberalism. Yet all of the camps seem to hold to the same conviction that this fight is just as necessary as the fight against higher criticism, modernism, and apostasy. Fundamentalist Jack Schaap said it like this:

Once again, we are aiming our guns at each other rather than at the enemy. We are contending with the brethren rather than contending for the faith. We are hiding in our ignorance and bludgeoning one another rather than rolling up our sleeves and doing our homework and keeping watch over our preserved text. While we are sleeping theologically, the enemy is sowing his tares; and while we hurl insults and defamatory statements at each other, lies and corruption and confusion are marching onto the pages of our beloved KJV.  

Schaap’s statement is exceptionally fascinating. While he is concerned about the fragmentation within Fundamentalism, he is more concerned about the preservation of the KJV. As long as Fundamentalists remain adamant about the importance of the King James Bible, the fighting will continue well into the next one hundred years.

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57 Jack Schaap in an article mailed to fundamental churches all over America.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


