

Inerrancy, Infallibility, and Scripture in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*

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Jack Rogers' dissertation on the doctrine of Scripture in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) created a controversy. His conclusion that the WCF did not teach inerrancy was particularly upsetting to Presbyterian evangelicals.¹ He stated his conclusion as follows:

The question of the errancy or inerrancy of the Scripture is one which is strange to the Westminster Divines....To contend that the Westminster Confession teaches the inerrancy of the Scripture because it does not assert that there are errors in the Scripture is to impose a modern problem on a pre-scientific statement....Thus in an ahistorical manner, the Westminster Confession is still drawn into a controversy to which its authors were not a party. Certainly the Westminster Divines believed, and the Confession states, that the Bible is true and infallible. But to equate these terms with the modern concept of inerrancy is to impose upon the Westminster Confession criteria for proof and apologetic implications which had no place in their thinking.²

While Rogers is correct that the authors of the confession did not have a notion of inerrancy determined by a reaction to twentieth-century liberalism, as defined, for example, by the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*,³ the evidence below shows that the authors of the confession believed that there were no errors in the Bible.

WTJ 54:2 (Fall 1992) p. 350

The first argument that the authors of the confession believed in the inerrancy of the Bible is the seventeenth-century dictionary definition of *infallible*. This word is used twice in chap. 1 of the confession, in the phrases "assurance of the infallible truth" (1.5) and "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture itself" (1.9). Rogers discussed infallibility when he considered sect. 9, but failed to define the term.⁴

For the seventeenth-century definition of infallibility, we will turn first to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This source shows that *infallible* and *inerrant* were synonymous in the seventeenth century. The definition of *infallibility* reads: "1. The quality or fact of being infallible or exempt from liability to err." The references include the following examples: "1611 Bible *Transl. Pref.* 8 Men...priuiledged with the priuiledge of infallibilitie. 1624 Gataker *Transsubst.* 110 The Pope setting in his Chaire,...may yet e...

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