

# Would a God of Clarity Have Written the Bible?

Phil Stilwell

Independent Scholar

This paper examines whether the doctrinal diversity of Christianity is compatible with the hypothesis that the Bible is authored by an omniscient and omnipotent God intending clarity. It surveys denominational disunity, hermeneutical variance, and doctrinal evolution, and integrates deductive and Bayesian models to show that the evidence favors human authorship over divine clarity-aim authorship. Counterarguments appealing to perspicuity, pedagogy, free will, and divine complexity are addressed and found inadequate. The conclusion is that doctrinal ambiguity in the Bible undermines its plausibility as the clear revelation of a God of wisdom and power.

## **Opening Narrative: Stakes and Expectations**

High-stakes communication normally favors clarity. Imagine a parent who knows death is imminent and wishes to guide children on essentials of identity, intentions, and rules. Such a parent would anticipate confusion and remove ambiguity. Constitutions, scientific protocols, and medical guidelines adopt the same logic of maximizing clarity when consequences are high. By parity of reasoning, if an omniscient God intended to direct humanity in matters of salvation and conduct, we would expect a text clearer than these human exemplars. The central question is whether the Bible displays such clarity or instead produces enduring disagreement across centuries (cf. (Dennett, 2006; Mackie, 1982)).

### **Doctrinal Diversity as Evidence**

Christianity today is marked by denominational fragmentation. The World Christian Database estimates over 40,000 distinct denominations ((World Christian Database, n.d.)). Baptism divides on mode (immersion, pouring, sprinkling), timing (infant vs. believer), and theological meaning (regenerative vs. symbolic). Soteriology is contested between Calvinist predestination and Arminian free-will theologies ((Oppy, 2013)). The Eucharist divides Roman Catholic transubstantiation, Lutheran consubstantiation, and Baptist memorial views. Hell is understood by some as eternal torment, by others as annihilation, and by still others as temporary purgation ((Pew Research Center, 2021)). Gender roles, Sabbath observance, and charismatic gifts all fracture communities. Surveys by (Pew Research Center, 2025) confirm divergence even within denominations. Such disunity on central doctrines would be anomalous if divine authorship aimed at convergence.

### **Hermeneutical Mechanics of Divergence**

Several structural features drive this diversity. The Bible's polygenre character—law, poetry, apocalyptic—encourages divergent hermeneutics. Translation choices in Koine Greek (e.g., *pistis* as “faith” or “faithfulness”), in Hebrew (*ruach* as “spirit,” “breath,” or “wind”), and in Aramaic yield interpretive forks. Historical distance prompts anachronism: ancient slavery texts get read in light of modern abolition. Canonical plurality requires harmonization of competing voices: Paul vs. James on justification, Synoptics vs. John on Christology. Protestantism emphasizes individual interpretation, while Catholicism centralizes authority ((Catholic Church, 1965)). (Smith, 2011) calls this *pervasive interpretive pluralism*. A divine clarity-aim would likely anticipate these ambiguities with precise definitions and redundancy; their absence suggests human authorship.

### Integrated Logical Core

The argument may be captured deductively and probabilistically:

$G \rightarrow U$       If God authored with clarity aim, essentials would be unequivocal.      (1)

$\neg U$               Essentials are not unequivocal; diversity obtains.              (2)

$\therefore \neg G$               Therefore, God did not so author.              (3)

$\frac{\Pr(E | H_1)}{\Pr(E | H_2)} < 1$ ,      so evidence  $E$  favors human-authorship hypothesis  $H_2$ .      (4)

*Note.*  $H_1$ : divine authorship with clarity aim;  $H_2$ : human authorship under ordinary variance;  $E$ : doctrinal disunity. The deductive and Bayesian frames complement one another: one demonstrates logical incompatibility, the other shows comparative probability ((Feldman & Warfield, 2010)).

### Addressing Theological Responses

**Perspicuity.** Advocates argue that essentials remain clear ((Pettegrew, 2004)). Yet debates about which doctrines are “essential”—baptism, Eucharist, justification—show the category itself is contested, undermining the claim. This tension is highlighted in evangelical documents such as the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy ((International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978)), which presuppose clarity and unity yet have themselves generated debate over interpretation.

**Magisterial Relocation.** Catholic appeals ((Catholic Church, 1965)) assign clarity to ecclesial authority. This can generate unity within a communion, but the clarity stems

from institutional decree, not the text's self-evidence.

**Pedagogy/Journey.** Some theologians suggest diversity cultivates humility. But if eternal destiny hinges on doctrines, ambiguity seems a perilous teaching tool.

**Freedom/Autonomy.** Another line holds that excessive clarity would diminish free faith. Yet legal and scientific clarity coexists with freedom; clarity enables responsible assent or dissent ((Plantinga, 2000)).

### Helpful Analogies

*Instruction Manual.* A manual for a medical ventilator must eliminate ambiguity lest lives be lost. If technicians, using the same manual, assemble divergent machines, competence is doubted. Similarly, a divine manual for salvation should not yield mutually exclusive doctrines.

*Legal Code.* Laws are drafted to secure consistency. Courts struggle when codes are vague, leading to precedent and amendment. A divine lawgiver could bypass such pitfalls, yet biblical ambiguity sustains rival judgments on salvation and conduct ((Wolterstorff, 1995)).

*Recipe Book.* Culinary instructions written by a master chef specify exact measures so dishes converge. A recipe stating "add some spice" without specification produces chaos. Biblical vagueness on core doctrines functions like such recipes, producing disparate "meals of faith."

### Doctrinal Evolution and Timelessness

Over time, biblical interpretation adapts to cultural shifts. Nineteenth-century Christians defended slavery from Scripture; today most repudiate it ((International Council

on Biblical Inerrancy, 1978)). Views of demon possession once guided medicine; now they rarely do. Women barred from pulpits now lead in many churches. A divine author could have written doctrines to transcend cultural flux, yet biblical interpretation mirrors human context. (Vanhoozer, 1998; Zagzebski, 2012) observe that complexity need not entail contradiction; the observed evolution supports human origin.

### **Comparative Assessment**

$H_1$  predicts convergence;  $H_2$  predicts plurality. Evidence  $E$  coheres with  $H_2$ . Auxiliary defenses of  $H_1$ —perspicuity narrowed, clarity relocated, or ambiguity spiritualized—dilute falsifiability ((Feldman & Warfield, 2010; Plantinga, 2000; Wolterstorff, 1995)). The analogies reinforce: competent authorship of a manual, code, or recipe secures convergent outcomes; biblical authorship yields fragmentation, suggesting human not divine drafting.

### **Conclusion**

The Christian textual tradition, far from displaying divine clarity, mirrors the interpretive churn of human literature. Persistent disunity undermines the claim that an omniscient God intended the Bible to secure doctrinal unity. This conclusion does not disprove all theistic hypotheses but directly challenges the clarity-aiming authorship model. For seekers, the implication is sobering: if God exists and values clear communication, the Bible does not exemplify it. Philosophically, the case illustrates how doctrinal diversity functions as negative evidence, weighting the Bayesian balance toward human authorship. Future inquiry should probe how auxiliary theological claims (e.g., divine pedagogy, freedom) alter testability, but the baseline evidence favors ordinary human explanation.

Returning to Protestant claims of perspicuity ((Pettegrew, 2004)), we find that even well-intentioned assertions of clarity collapse under the sheer scale of interpretive diversity. The final balance of evidence, therefore, undermines the perspicuity thesis and reinforces the human-authorship model ((Dennett, 2006; Oppy, 2013)).

## Appendix A

### Expanded Formalization

P1 (Clarity Expectation):  $H_1$  predicts high probability of convergence  $U$  ((Swinburne, 2004)). *If God authored for clarity, essentials converge.*

P2 (Human Variability):  $H_2$  predicts high probability of diversity  $E$  ((Smith, 2011)). *Human texts diverge.*

P3 (Observation):  $E$  obtains. *We observe doctrinal diversity.*

P4 (Auxiliary Penalty): Adjustments to  $H_1$  weaken specificity ((Feldman & Warfield, 2010)). *Shifting the goalposts reduces testability.*

D1: From P1–P2,  $\Pr(E \mid H_1) \ll \Pr(E \mid H_2)$ . *God-aiming clarity predicts unity; humans predict diversity.*

D2: From P3,  $E$  favors  $H_2$ :  $\frac{\Pr(E \mid H_1)}{\Pr(E \mid H_2)} < 1$ . *Observation matches human baseline.*

D3: From P4, auxiliaries protecting  $H_1$  decrease predictive crispness. *Redefining clarity or narrowing essentials makes  $H_1$  harder to test.*

D4: Deductive core:  $G \rightarrow U$ ,  $\neg U \Rightarrow \neg G$  ((Mackie, 1982)). *If clarity was expected but absent, divine clarity-aim authorship is disconfirmed.*

## Appendix B

\*

### References

- Catholic Church. (1965). Dei verbum [dogmatic constitution on divine revelation]. In *The basic sixteen documents of vatican council ii* (pp. 117–134). Pauline Books & Media.  
[https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)
- Dennett, D. C. (2006). *Breaking the spell: Religion as a natural phenomenon*. Viking.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjnrwxt>
- Feldman, R., & Warfield, T. A. (Eds.). (2010). *Disagreement*. Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199226078.001.0001>
- International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. (1978). The chicago statement on biblical inerrancy. [https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_1.pdf](https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf)
- Mackie, J. L. (1982). *The miracle of theism: Arguments for and against the existence of god*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/019824682X.001.0001>
- Oppy, G. (2013). *The best argument against god*. Palgrave Macmillan.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137344557>
- Pettegrew, L. (2004). The perspicuity of scripture. *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 15(2), 217–235. <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj15d.pdf>
- Pew Research Center. (2021). Views on the afterlife.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/11/23/views-on-the-afterlife/>
- Pew Research Center. (2025). Religious identity in the u.s. <https://www.pewresearch.org/>
- Plantinga, A. (2000). *Warranted christian belief*. Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/0195131932.001.0001>

Smith, C. (2011). *The bible made impossible: Why biblicism is not a truly evangelical reading of scripture*. Brazos Press.

<https://www.bakerpublishinggroup.com/books/the-bible-made-impossible/331140>

Swinburne, R. (2004). *The existence of god* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199271689.001.0001>

Vanhoozer, K. J. (1998). *Is there a meaning in this text?* Zondervan.

<https://zondervanacademic.com/products/is-there-a-meaning-in-this-text>

Wolterstorff, N. (1995). *Divine discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that god speaks*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609055>

World Christian Database. (n.d.). Quick facts. <https://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/>

Zagzebski, L. T. (2012). *Epistemic authority: A theory of trust, authority, and autonomy in belief*. Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199936472.001.0001>

**1) Language Domains — Symbols & Meanings**

**Hypothesis space**

- $H_1$ : Divine-authorship-with-clarity — the Bible was authored (or decisively inspired) by an omniscient, omnipotent agent intending sufficient clarity on core propositions to yield substantial convergence among sincere readers.
- $H_2$ : Human-authorship — the Bible is a human cultural product subject to ordinary interpretive variability over time.

**Evidence & states**

- $E$ : pervasive, persistent doctrinal diversity among sincere, informed readers on core issues (baptism, salvation, Eucharist, hell, women's ordination, Sabbath, gifts, eschatology, creation views).
- $U$ : substantial doctrinal unity (high convergence on essentials).

**Predicates / functions**

- Aim( $H_1$ , Clarity):  $H_1$  includes an explicit clarity-aim on essentials.
- Feat( $H_1$ ): texts engineered for clarity (redundancy, definitions, resolution of ambiguities, anticipation of pitfalls).
- Aux<sub>i</sub>: auxiliary modifiers to  $H_1$  (e.g., narrowing "essentials"/perspicuity; relocating clarity to Magisterium; "journey/pedagogy" model).

**Bayesian terms**

- $P(\cdot)$ : credence;  $P(E | H)$ : likelihood;  $\gg$  reads "much greater than".

---

**2) Core Axioms / Premises**

**P1 (Clarity-aim under  $H_1$ ):** Aim( $H_1$ , Clarity)  $\wedge$  Feat( $H_1$ )  $\Rightarrow P(U | H_1)$  is high and  $P(E | H_1)$  is low, ceteris paribus.

**P2 (Ordinary variability under  $H_2$ ):** Human, polyvocal, historically layered texts predict interpretive pluralism; thus  $P(E | H_2)$  is high and  $P(U | H_2)$  is low without coordination.

**P3 (Observed state):**  $E$  obtains (extensive, persistent doctrinal diversity on core questions among sincere, informed readers).

**P4 (Auxiliary flexibility):** Introducing Aux<sub>i</sub> to preserve  $H_1$  (e.g., redefining "essentials," relocating clarity to institution, or re-construing clarity as pedagogy) reduces  $H_1$ 's predictive specificity for  $U$  vs.  $E$ .

**P5 (Likelihood asymmetry):** If  $P(E | H_1) \ll P(E | H_2)$  and  $E$  obtains, then the likelihood ratio  $\frac{P(E|H_1)}{P(E|H_2)} < 1$ .

---

**3) Immediate Derivations**

**D1 (Asymmetric prediction):** From P1–P2,  $P(E | H_1) < P(E | H_2)$ .

**D2 (Empirical plug-in):** From P3 and D1,  $E$  favors  $H_2$  over  $H_1$  at the level of likelihoods.

**D3 (Auxiliary penalty):** From P4, conditioning  $H_1$  on Aux<sub>i</sub> weakens its prior constraint set, decreasing its explanatory sharpness relative to  $H_2$ .

**D4 (Bayes sketch):** Given non-extreme priors,  
 $\frac{P(H_1|E)}{P(H_2|E)} = \frac{P(E|H_1) \cdot P(H_1)}{P(E|H_2) \cdot P(H_2)} < \frac{P(H_1)}{P(H_2)}$   
 Thus  $E$  shifts credence away from  $H_1$ .

---

**4) Fitch-Style Proof Goals**

**Goal A (Expectational contrast):** Show  $P(E | H_1) < P(E | H_2)$ .

- Assume  $H_1$ . By P1, Aim( $H_1$ , Clarity)  $\wedge$  Feat( $H_1$ )  $\Rightarrow P(U | H_1)$  high  $\Rightarrow P(E | H_1)$  low.
- Assume  $H_2$ . By P2, human textual properties  $\Rightarrow P(E | H_2)$  high.
- Therefore,  $P(E | H_1) < P(E | H_2)$ . (D1)

**Goal B (Evidential update):** From  $E$ , prefer  $H_2$  over  $H_1$  ceteris paribus.

- From P3, observe  $E$ .
- From Goal A and Bayes (P5),  $\frac{P(H_1|E)}{P(H_2|E)} < \frac{P(H_1)}{P(H_2)}$ . (D4)
- Hence  $E$  is evidence against  $H_1$  relative to  $H_2$ . (Goal B)

**Goal C (Role of auxiliaries):**

- Suppose  $H_1' = H_1 \wedge \text{Aux}_i$  (perspicuity-narrowing; magisterial relocation; journey-model).
- By P4,  $H_1'$  fits  $E$  better only by relaxing original clarity predictions, thereby losing predictive bite; comparative advantage remains with  $H_2$  absent independent support for Aux<sub>i</sub>. (D3)

---

**5) Compact Sequent Summary**

- Aim( $H_1$ , Clarity)  $\Rightarrow P(E | H_1)$  low; human-authorship  $\Rightarrow P(E | H_2)$  high. (P1–P2)
- $E$  (pervasive diversity) obtains. (P3)
- Therefore  $P(E | H_1) < P(E | H_2)$  and  $E$  favors  $H_2$  over  $H_1$ . (D1–D2, D4)
- Adding Aux<sub>i</sub> to  $H_1$  preserves fit but weakens prediction, leaving  $H_2$  comparatively stronger unless Aux<sub>i</sub> gains independent warrant. (D3)

---

**6) Objection Modules (as Auxiliary Schemas)**

**Module Aux<sub>Perisp</sub> (Perspicuity-narrowing):**

- Claim: "Only 'essentials' are clear; diversity is peripheral."
- Formal move: Replace  $U$  with  $U_{\min}$  (a shrinking set).
- Effect: Raises  $P(E | H_1)$  by excluding much of  $E$  from the target domain; but this redefinition is contested and reduces testability.

**Module Aux<sub>Mag</sub> (Magisterial relocation):**

- Claim: Clarity resides in an authoritative interpreter rather than in the text.
- Formal move: Condition  $U$  on an institution  $M: U \equiv U(M)$ .
- Effect: Shifts burden from text to institution; mitigates  $E$  internally but alters the content of  $H_1$ .

**Module Aux<sub>Ped</sub> (Pedagogical journey):**

- Claim: Diversity is intended for growth; propositional convergence is not the aim.
- Formal move: Replace Aim( $H_1$ , Clarity) with Aim( $H_1$ , Formation).
- Effect: Explains  $E$  but abandons original clarity-prediction; trade-off in explanatory focus.

---

**7) Plain-English Gloss (One sentence)**

Given that deep, long-running doctrinal disagreement on core issues is far more expected on a human-authorship model than on a divine-authorship-with-clarity model, the observed diversity is evidentially weighty against  $H_1$  and in favor of  $H_2$ , unless one weakens  $H_1$ 's clarity aim via auxiliaries that themselves require independent support.

**Figure B1**  
 Extended Symbolic Logic Formulation.