

The Clarity Design Burden

Omniscience, Communicative Competence, and the Low Cost of Doctrinal Precision

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Revised August 2026

Central claim

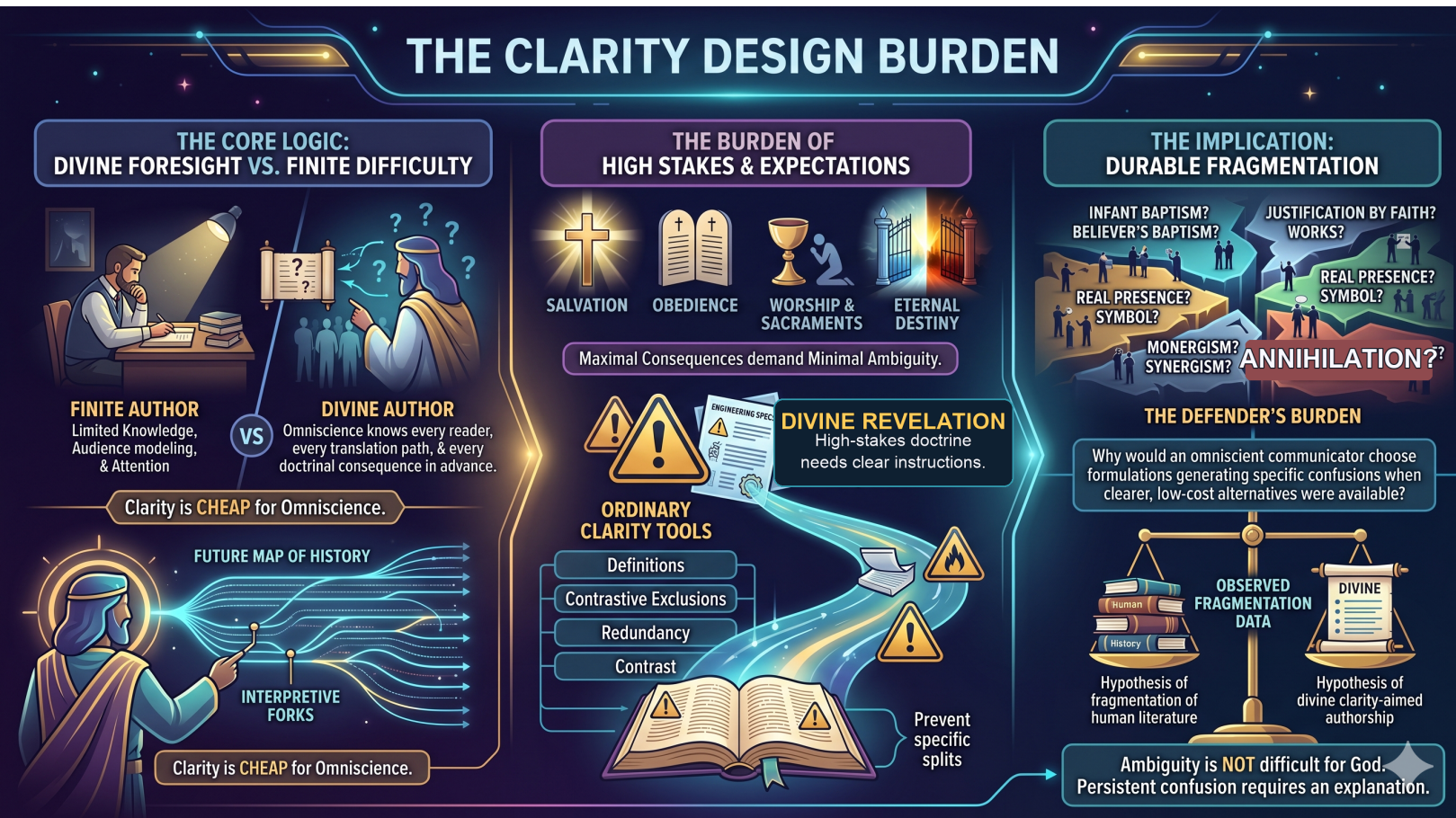
Appeals to linguistic difficulty do not excuse durable ambiguity under a Christian clarity-aim God-concept. Omniscience supplies perfect foresight; definitions, repetition, examples, and explicit exclusions can block many forks cheaply without coercing allegiance. Their absence makes human religious production predict the fragmentation better. The pressure falls on that specified model, not every Christianity or inspiration theory.

Preview:

Target model	Low-cost implication	Public datum	Rational result
An omniscient, competent deity aims at broad uptake of essential doctrine through Scripture.	Foreseeable doctrinal forks can be marked with definitions, repetition, examples, and explicit exclusions.	Sincere, informed communities remain durably divided at high-stakes interpretive forks.	The datum favors human historical religious literature unless the target model is revised or an independently supported offset is supplied.

The conclusion is comparative and conditional. It neither assumes that every disagreement proves textual ambiguity nor denies that a narrower divine aim, ecclesial authority, or a demonstrated countervailing good could change the comparison.

Visual preview:



Left: finite revision limits versus omniscient foresight. Center: high stakes and ordinary clarity tools. Right: durable doctrinal forks and the comparative burden. This conceptual map is not frequency data: it neither attributes all disagreement to textual ambiguity nor independently proves the authorship comparison.

Abstract

When Christians answer doctrinal ambiguity by saying that language is difficult, they often import a finite-author excuse into a model whose alleged communicator is not finite. This paper tests a specified Christian clarity-aim authorship model: an omniscient and communicatively competent deity intends ordinary readers to gain broad understanding of essential doctrine through Scripture, and the relevant doctrines carry high religious stakes. Under that model, the communicator knows every future audience, translation, institutional incentive, and interpretive fork before choosing the wording. Definitions, controlled terms, redundancy, contrastive exclusions, examples, and distributed repetition are therefore available at very low cost.

The argument distinguishes semantic clarity, successful uptake, and community agreement. It does not infer textual failure from disagreement alone. Its datum is the durable recurrence of opposed, textually defended readings at high-stakes forks among sincere and informed interpreters, combined with the absence of decisive textual corrections that an omniscient audience model could have placed at those forks. That pattern is more expected if the writings are historically developing human religious literature than if they are communication designed to secure broad doctrinal uptake. Strong replies can reduce the pressure only by paying an identifiable price: narrowing the intended audience or essentials, relocating authority to Church or tradition, weakening the divine authorship claim, attributing error chiefly to culpable resistance, or identifying an independently supported good that requires this degree of ambiguity.

The result is bounded but polemical. Mystery, genre, pedagogy, and freedom do not provide blank checks. Precision need not flatten literature, force belief, or exhaust divine reality. If a defender keeps omniscient foresight, high stakes, competent communication, and a broad textual clarity aim, then predictable and cheaply preventable doctrinal fragmentation is evidence against the package. One may revise the package or answer the evidence; repeating that communication is difficult answers nothing.

Keywords: divine communication; biblical clarity; perspicuity; doctrinal disagreement; omniscience; revelation; comparative evidence; interpretive pluralism

1 The Excuse Changes With the Author

Human authors routinely fail to make themselves clear. They write inside one language and social setting, underestimate background differences, overlook rival meanings, and discover only after publication that a sentence can be read in ways they never intended. Revision, testing, translation, and editorial review consume time and attention. A human author who says “clarity is difficult” is naming real constraints.

The same sentence does not transfer untouched to every proposed author. A *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, not a generic object smuggled into an argument by the bare word *God*. The target of this paper, C_a , is a familiar Christian clarity-aim model with five commitments:

1. the communicator knows every actual audience, relevant background assumption, translation path, institutional pressure, and future interpretive fork;
2. the communicator has sufficient power to select, preserve, repeat, and clarify wording through the means the theology allows;
3. the communicator is competent at intentional communication;
4. at least some disputed doctrines carry very high stakes within the theology; and
5. the communicator intends ordinary readers, not merely a tiny expert class, to achieve broad understanding of essential doctrine through Scripture.

These commitments generate expectations. Omniscience removes surprise about reception. Sufficient power expands the available design space. Communicative competence links means to intended uptake. High stakes raise the reason for error control. A broad textual aim prevents the defender from treating reliable understanding by a narrow institution as though it fulfilled the same plan.

Table 1: Different standards hidden inside the word *clarity*.

Outcome	Central question	Possible failure	What disagreement shows
Semantic determinacy	Does the utterance have a sufficiently bounded intended content?	The wording leaves live incompatible readings open at the relevant point.	Some evidence, but never proof by itself
Accessible uptake	Can the intended audience recover that content by the supplied means?	Needed background, training, language, or interpretive authority is unavailable.	Stronger evidence when informed readers repeatedly divide
Correct allegiance	Do hearers accept, trust, or obey what they understand?	Resistance, contrary evidence, incentives, or competing commitments block acceptance.	No direct evidence of unclear wording
Community agreement	Do groups converge on one teaching and practice?	Institutions, identity, incentives, and inherited systems sustain rival readings.	A mixed datum requiring causal analysis

The comparator, H , is not the crude claim that religious authors were dishonest or unintelligent. It is the hypothesis that the writings are historically developing human religious literature: culturally situated authors and editors address local concerns through multiple genres; texts are transmitted, collected, translated, and interpreted by institutions; later communities press the resulting corpus into new doctrinal systems. That process can produce wisdom, beauty, moral insight, and profound religious experience. It also makes multivocality, semantic drift, uneven precision, and durable interpretive conflict unsurprising.

The contrast is therefore not “perfect book versus stupid book.” It is designed cross-generational doctrinal uptake under extraordinary communicative resources versus the familiar products of finite literary history. Once the contrast is stated honestly, the usual excuse becomes conspicuously weak. Pointing out that human communication is hard explains H . It does not explain why C_a should leave the same fingerprints.

The governing burden

The stronger the attributed knowledge, power, competence, stakes, and clarity aim, the less explanatory work can be done by generic appeals to linguistic difficulty. Attributes are not decorative honors. They generate expectations about the products attributed to their bearer.

This use of attributes follows a general expectation test developed elsewhere: a claimed agent profile matters only if it constrains what we should expect to observe (Stilwell 2026a). If every communication record can be absorbed without changing confidence, the attributes have ceased to guide inference. That immunization is not reverence. It is a refusal to let the description have evidential consequences.

2 Four Outcomes That Must Not Be Confused

Arguments about scriptural clarity often slide among different standards. A sentence can have a determinate meaning yet be difficult for many readers. Readers can understand it yet reject it. A community can agree because an institution enforces one reading even if the text underdetermines that reading. Conversely, communities can disagree for social or moral reasons even where wording is clear. A serious audit must separate at least four outcomes.

Table 1 blocks the lazy inference “Christians disagree; therefore the text is meaningless.” That inference is invalid. The present claim is narrower and better supported. Across centuries, sincere and informed

communities repeatedly defend opposed interpretations at doctrinal forks, each using the shared canon, while the wording lacks the brief contrastive statements that would decisively eliminate at least one side. When the target model includes perfect foresight of those very forks, the pattern becomes a design datum.

Ordinary philosophy of language clarifies why. Grice emphasizes that cooperative speakers shape contributions around what hearers can use and infer (Grice 1989). Relevance theory likewise treats communication as inferential: hearers combine linguistic signals with context, and communicators anticipate that process (Sperber and Wilson 1995). Wolterstorff's account of divine discourse makes the point directly relevant to theology: speaking is an intentional act mediated through discourse and its conventions (Wolterstorff 1995). These theories differ, but none reduces successful communication to placing words before an audience and blaming the audience for every divergent result.

The relevant success condition is proportional rather than absolute. No plausible clarity model requires every reader to converge, every metaphor to have only one association, or every doctrine to be exhaustively specified. It requires enough accessible error control at central, foreseeable forks that broad uptake is a reasonable expected result. Vanhoozer rightly resists the thought that textual meaning is either mechanically obvious or dissolved into reader invention (Vanhoozer 1998). But interpretive sophistication does not erase the design question. It sharpens it: what textual and institutional resources did the communicator supply so that non-specialists across languages could reliably recover what supposedly matters most?

3 Why the Cost of Precision Is Low

The phrase *low cost* does not mean that every true proposition can be compressed into one perfect sentence. It means that many observed forks could have been made substantially less likely through ordinary changes that consume little textual space and do not sacrifice any identifiable theological good. The argument has four parts: foresight, feasible intervention, retained goods, and stakes.

3.1 Perfect foresight removes the search problem

A human editor may not know which ambiguity matters until a controversy erupts. Under C_a , the communicator already knows the controversy's full history. The communicator knows which term will shift, which metaphor will be literalized, which grammatical construction will carry incompatible doctrines, and which later authority will exploit the uncertainty. The usual cost of discovering the problem is therefore absent.

Audience modeling also reaches beyond the first hearers. If the intended audience is humanity across time, later readers are not accidental strangers to the design. Ancient setting can explain why an ancient author used a local idiom. It cannot, by itself, explain why an omniscient communicator with a global aim selected an idiom while knowing that the supplied canon and institutions would fail to resolve its most consequential later forks.

3.2 The interventions are ordinary

Communication already has an error-control toolkit. Definitions mark a term's intended range. Contrastive exclusions state what a claim does not mean. Repetition places the same content in independent contexts. Examples connect abstract wording to cases. Stable terminology reduces semantic drift. Numbered summaries mark priority. Correction mechanisms tell later readers where authoritative repair can be found.

Shannon and Weaver's mathematical theory concerns signal transmission, not biblical interpretation, and it should not be treated as a probability model of revelation (Shannon and Weaver 1949). Its modest lesson is still useful: redundancy can preserve a signal across noise. The scriptural channel, on standard

Table 2: Low-cost interventions available at predictable interpretive forks.

Tool	What it controls	Illustrative form	Good it leaves intact
Definition	A key term’s intended range	“By <i>X</i> , I mean . . .”	Narrative, poetry, mystery, and refusal
Contrastive exclusion	A foreseeable rival reading	“This does not mean <i>Y</i> .”	Freedom to reject the clarified teaching
Distributed repetition	Loss or distortion in one passage or genre	Restate the point in independent settings	Literary variety and historical particularity
Worked example	Application of an abstract rule	“In a case like <i>Z</i> , do this . . .”	Moral deliberation in unlisted cases
Stable terminology	Drift among related expressions	Mark whether two terms are equivalent	Conceptual depth and later study
Correction route	Persistent future misunderstanding	Identify a publicly testable repair authority or rule	Communal interpretation and development

Christian assumptions, contains predictable noise—linguistic change, manuscript transmission, genre, translation, cultural distance, institutional competition, and motivated interpretation. A communicator who knows the noise in advance can distribute redundancy around high-stakes content.

These forms are illustrative, not proposed additions to a canon and not claims about which doctrinal answer is true. “Baptize infants” and “do not baptize infants” show that a major fork is linguistically expressible. So do statements distinguishing symbol from transformation in the Eucharist, forensic declaration from inward transformation in justification, eventual extinction from unending conscious punishment, or Scripture-only authority from an indispensable teaching office. A few direct exclusions would not settle every neighboring issue. They could still remove vast branches of opposed doctrine.

3.3 Precision does not require literary flattening

The false choice is between a sterile technical manual and a rich but uncontrolled anthology. Human works combine story, poetry, symbol, and explicit framing all the time. A constitution can state governing rules while a culture also tells stories about its ideals. A teacher can let students explore a difficult problem and still state the safety rules without riddles. A doctrine can be bounded without the object of the doctrine being exhausted.

Nor is textual space the obstacle. The canon contains genealogies, ritual measurements, travel sequences, repeated narratives, legal particulars, and extensive letters. Those materials may have theological value; the point is not that they should have been deleted. Their presence shows that the alleged communicator was not confined to a single aphorism. Under omniscient selection, a few strategically placed clarifications are not an unrealistic engineering demand.

3.4 High stakes increase the expected error control

Christian communities often connect doctrine to salvation, worship, sacraments, moral formation, church membership, authority, and final destiny. The argument does not need stance-independent moral facts to convert those commitments into a cosmic duty. It reasons internally and instrumentally. If a theology values truthful teaching, responsible allegiance, avoidance of grave error, and access to salvation, then it supplies its own reasons for reducing preventable confusion. A moral non-realist can consistently say: given those ends, these communicative means are rationally expected.

Internal burden, not moral realism

The paper does not assert a mind-independent moral obligation binding every possible deity. It asks whether the target theology's own valued ends, combined with its attributed resources and aims, make low-cost doctrinal error control expected. The inconsistency is inside the package if those ends are affirmed while their obvious means are dismissed without explanation.

Higher stakes do not prove that maximum explicitness is always best. They do make an unbounded appeal to pedagogy or mystery less credible. A teacher may allow productive struggle. A competent teacher does not hide the dosage, emergency exit, or terms of a life-altering choice merely to make learners humble. Where error is said to have extreme consequences, the defender owes a specific reason why the benefit of this ambiguity outweighs the easily available clarity.

4 The Public Record That Needs Explaining

The relevant datum, D , is not the mere existence of denominations and not a head count of opinions. It is a structured pattern: at consequential doctrinal forks, enduring communities of sincere and informed interpreters defend incompatible readings from the shared writings; they understand the dispute, answer one another, refine their hermeneutics, and still find the textual evidence insufficient to force a stable cross-tradition resolution. Baptism, Eucharist, justification, final punishment, ecclesial authority, gendered office, violence, election, and the nature or extent of inspiration provide familiar examples. Their inclusion here does not declare them equally central. It shows that the boundary between essential and peripheral is itself contested.

Three qualifications keep the datum honest. First, some disagreements arise chiefly from identity, power, incentives, or culpable resistance. Second, different traditions use different canons, authorities, and background theologies. Third, perfect agreement is not the expected result even from a clear message. These facts lower the evidential weight of raw disagreement. They do not erase the particular pattern of textually sustained forks that the communicator allegedly foresaw in full.

The strongest cases have multiple markers:

- both sides can state the opponent's position accurately and point to passages that appear to support their own;
- the disagreement persists among linguistically trained, historically informed, and personally serious interpreters;
- the practical consequences are substantial within the communities concerned;
- a short definition or exclusion could have ruled out at least one reading without forcing acceptance of the remaining one; and
- no agreed public correction channel supplied by the text resolves the fork across the intended audience.

Christian Smith's critique of biblicism presses the empirical difficulty for accounts that expect a single, internally sufficient scriptural system to yield clear doctrine across sincere readers (Smith 2011). Protestant defenders of perspicuity typically respond by restricting the claim to matters necessary for salvation, not every passage or theological conclusion (Pettegrew 2004). That restriction is important, but it is not self-applying. The Westminster Confession says that necessary saving matters are sufficiently clear for learned and unlearned readers to attain an adequate understanding through ordinary means (Westminster Assembly 1647, ch. 1.7). The live question is which matters qualify and whether the observed access matches the announced standard.

The “moving essential” problem appears when a disputed doctrine is called secondary because it is disputed, while perspicuity is defended by saying that essentials are not disputed in the relevant way. That selection can protect the thesis by definition. Yet actual churches make baptismal status, Eucharistic practice, justification, ecclesial authority, sexual conduct, and final judgment conditions of membership, discipline, sacramental access, or warnings about salvation. A clarity defense must specify the essentials independently and then examine the record. It cannot quietly redraw the boundary around whatever fragmentation leaves behind.

The Catholic response is structurally different. *Dei Verbum* places Scripture, tradition, and the Church’s teaching office in a coordinated account rather than claiming that the text functions as an independent doctrinal court (Second Vatican Council 1965, secs. 10–12). That move may answer a text-alone expectation within Catholic theology. It also changes the target. If a protected teaching office is required for reliable uptake, then Scripture by itself was not designed to perform the broad adjudicative role often claimed for it. Further questions arise about the public credentials and clarity of the institution, but those are not textual perspicuity questions.

Disagreement also does not impose an automatic skeptical verdict on participants. The epistemology of disagreement contains serious defenses of continued commitment, including accounts involving higher-order evidence, deference, steadfastness, and the rational significance of one’s total evidence (Feldman and Warfield 2010; Pittard 2019). The present argument does not claim that encountering a rival instantly defeats private belief. It asks what a durable public pattern indicates about a proposed communication design. A believer may retain independent reasons for a doctrine while conceding that the shared text has not produced the predicted broad public uptake.

5 The Comparative Inference

The design burden is comparative. Evidence need not make C_a impossible in order to count against it. It need only be more expected under a live rival. Under H , historical layering, diverse genres, semantic drift, local occasions, canon formation, translation, and institutional competition naturally generate a record in which traditions can build rival systems from the same corpus. Under C_a , the communicator foresees the same process and possesses cheap means of error control. The durable recurrence of high-stakes forks is therefore less expected unless supplementary claims alter the model.

This is an inference to the better of two specified explanations, not a declaration that probabilities can be read directly from denominational counts. The notation $\Pr(D \mid C_a, B)$ means the expectedness of the datum if the clarity-aim model is true, given background information B . The comparison asks whether the observed record looks more like the outcome of omniscient design for broad uptake or the outcome of human literary history.

The inference can be challenged at four locations. A defender may deny that D has been described accurately; deny that the proposed clarifications were genuinely low cost; show that C_a predicts this much disagreement because of an independently supported good; or argue that H predicts an importantly different pattern. These are substantive replies. Merely noting that D is logically compatible with C_a is not. Almost any finite communication record can be made compatible with an unknown omniscient plan. Compatibility without an expectation comparison carries little evidential force.

The argument also avoids a common asymmetry. A defender cannot say that divine intentions are too inaccessible to generate negative expectations, then credit apparent doctrinal successes to brilliant divine design. If the target’s aims and methods are radically inscrutable, both favorable and unfavorable design inferences weaken. If the attributes and stated aims are clear enough to praise textual achievements, they are clear enough to test predictable failures. Mystery cannot be a one-way evidential valve.

The comparative result

Given the specified aim and attributes, cheaply preventable high-stakes fragmentation is less expected under C_a than under H . The datum therefore pressures C_a even if some believers retain independent reasons for Christianity, revelation, or particular doctrines. Evidence can be real without being total.

The companion argument about the broader diversity record develops the empirical comparison beyond the design premise (Stilwell 2026c). The present paper contributes the prior reason that makes that record evidentially sharp: the relevant error controls were not difficult to discover or expensive to deploy for the alleged communicator. It is precisely the mismatch between the attributed resources and the observed product that carries the burden.

6 What the Strongest Replies Preserve—and Revise

A good objection should be stated strongly enough to threaten the conclusion. Each reply below can alter the comparison, but none preserves every original commitment for free.

6.1 Only a small core had to be clear

The defender may say that Scripture aims only to communicate a minimal saving core. Diversity beyond that core is permitted. This response lowers the predicted degree of agreement and can substantially weaken the argument. Its price is a narrower claim about what the text is for. It also needs a noncircular account of the core and evidence that ordinary readers reliably recover it.

If baptism, justification, sacramental participation, ecclesial allegiance, repentance, or final judgment are excluded from the essential core whenever traditions divide over them, the defense becomes too easy. The narrower the core becomes, the less it resembles the doctrinal confidence and boundary-policing of many churches. A minimal aim may be coherent. It should be admitted as a revision, not marketed as a vindication of broad perspicuity.

6.2 Sinful or interested readers resist clear teaching

Motivated reasoning is real. People protect identities, institutions, status, habits, and desired conclusions. A Christian theology may describe some of that resistance as sin. This reply explains why clarity need not produce universal acceptance. It does not yet explain why a resistant reader and a sincere rival can each construct linguistically serious cases from the same passages, or why brief exclusions are absent at the known fork.

The hypothesis becomes informative only when it predicts who will misread what and why. If every losing interpretation is labeled resistance by the winning tradition, reciprocal accusation cancels the public force. Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Reformed Protestants, Anabaptists, Pentecostals, and others can each locate culpability in the others. An explanation that identifies error solely by prior doctrinal membership has not independently explained the distribution.

The strongest version allows mixed causes: textual underdetermination, social formation, incentives, and resistance all contribute. That is plausible. But once textual underdetermination is admitted as a substantial cause, the design burden returns. Omniscient foresight includes knowledge of motivated reasoning; a competent high-stakes design can add more error control where motivation predictably distorts uptake.

6.3 Ambiguity produces humility, inquiry, and community

Interpretive struggle can cultivate patience, intellectual modesty, dialogue, dependence, and communal traditions. Narratives and parables can train perception in ways a list of propositions cannot. This is the most promising countervailing-good reply because it connects ambiguity to recognizable benefits.

The reply needs proportionality and discrimination. Which ambiguities produce the good? Why does this degree and distribution do so better than clearer alternatives? How are harms such as anxiety, exclusion, schism, coercive discipline, or confident error weighed within the theology? Could the same humility be cultivated through difficult but bounded questions while central obligations remain explicit? A generic good available somewhere in the arrangement does not explain every preventable fork.

It also matters that clarity and depth are compatible. A direct boundary can stop a grave misreading while leaving unlimited space for reflection on reasons, implications, application, and mystery. Pedagogy explains designed difficulty only when the difficulty serves the learner rather than defeating the announced learning objective.

6.4 Literary richness requires plural meaning

Scripture contains poetry, narrative, law, wisdom, prophecy, parable, apocalypse, and letters. Rich genres invite layered interpretation. A communicator may reasonably prefer them to a uniform technical code. Agreed. The paper does not demand that Psalms become regulations or parables become dictionary entries.

The issue is whether literary richness requires the absence of small interpretive guardrails at high-stakes forks. A narrative can remain a narrative while another passage clarifies its doctrinal use. A metaphor can keep its resonance while a contrastive statement excludes a catastrophic misreading. A canon with many genres has more opportunities for distributed clarification, not fewer. Richness explains plurality of expression; it does not automatically explain durable incompatibility about allegedly essential content.

6.5 Church, tradition, or Spirit completes the channel

Perhaps the communication system is not text alone. A Church, apostolic tradition, conciliar process, or the Holy Spirit may guide reception. This reply can directly alter the expected record because it adds a correction channel. It must then identify that channel, explain how its authority is publicly recognized, and show that it reliably resolves the relevant forks.

The move is especially important because rival communities claim Spirit-guidance and tradition in incompatible directions. An internal feeling of illumination cannot function as a shared correction protocol when opposed readers report it symmetrically. An institutional office supplies a more visible candidate, but authority disputes then move one level upward. Again, this may be a defensible theology. It is not the same model as Scripture designed for broad doctrinal uptake through ordinary reading.

6.6 Clearer disclosure would coerce belief or allegiance

This objection confuses understanding, belief, and obedience. Clear wording can reveal what a proposition says without making the proposition credible. Strong evidence can make belief rationally difficult to avoid without forcing love, worship, trust, or compliance. People reject well-understood laws, betray known obligations, and resist clearly identified authorities. Clarifying infant baptism or the nature of Eucharistic presence would not compel anyone to join a church.

The clarity–coercion distinction is developed at length elsewhere (Stilwell 2026b). Its application here is direct: the low-cost tools in Table 2 constrain meaning, not the will. Indeed, less ambiguity can improve responsible agency because a person cannot meaningfully accept or reject a proposal whose content is hidden behind rival authoritative readings.

Table 3: Replies to the design burden and their evidential prices.

Reply	What it can explain	What it must show	Commitment revised or added
Minimal essentials	Much peripheral diversity	Independent boundary and reliable uptake of the core	Narrows the clarity aim
Culpable resistance	Rejection despite understanding	Noncircular predictions of who misreads what	Adds a causal account of error
Pedagogy or mystery	Some valuable interpretive difficulty	Proportionality and why clearer routes lose the good	Adds a countervailing aim
Literary richness	Layered and genre-sensitive meaning	Why guardrails would damage the literary good	Limits propositional precision
Church or tradition	A correction channel beyond private reading	Public credentials and reliable adjudication	Relocates interpretive authority
Spirit-guided uptake	Personal or communal illumination	Why incompatible guidance claims persist	Adds a contested reception mechanism
Freedom	Continued refusal of disclosed doctrine	Why semantic precision itself coerces	Confuses uptake with allegiance unless defended
Unknown reasons	Bare logical compatibility with any record	Independent support and a connection to this pattern	Weakens testability and design expectations

6.7 Unknown divine reasons may justify the ambiguity

An unknown reason is always logically possible under a sufficiently powerful hypothesis. That possibility blocks a deductive claim that C_a cannot coexist with D . The present inference is not deductive. To offset comparative evidence, the defender needs more than an unspecified placeholder. The reason must have some independent support, predict this kind of ambiguity, and explain why accessible alternatives would frustrate the relevant good.

Otherwise the reply makes the model evidentially inert. Every communicative defect can be redescribed as secretly optimal, while every success is praised as evidence of competence. A hypothesis protected by unknown reasons at every point of tension can survive any record, but survival purchased through unlimited flexibility is not explanatory victory.

Table 3 is not a scorecard rigged so that revision counts as defeat. Rational theories change when evidence identifies a false auxiliary assumption. The point is accounting honesty. A model that adds an authoritative Church, sharply narrows the essentials, or abandons broad textual uptake may fit D better. It has done so by becoming a different and more qualified claim. That is intellectual progress, provided the cost is stated.

7 What Would Weaken or Defeat the Argument?

The argument is deliberately exposed to correction. Several discoveries would weaken it.

First, a defender could present a principled, independently established list of essential doctrines and show robust cross-cultural agreement among ordinary readers on their content, while locating the famous disputes outside the intended aim. This would reduce the severity of D . The showing must concern content, not merely shared labels such as *grace*, *gospel*, or *church* whose meanings are disputed.

Second, textual analysis could show that the central rival readings are not comparably serious: one side may depend on demonstrable mistranslation, selective quotation, or historically late assumptions decisively excluded by the text. If so, the dispute would reveal more about reception failure than design. Repeating one's preferred exegesis is insufficient; the proposed exclusion must be public enough to explain why competent rivals should converge.

Third, independent evidence for a correction institution could change the channel model. If a publicly identifiable authority were antecedently credible and reliably resolved doctrinal forks, then textual underdetermination might be an intended feature of a larger communication system. That result would undercut a text-alone critique while raising separate questions about institutional accessibility and disagreement.

Fourth, a well-supported account could connect particular ambiguity to a particular indispensable good. It would need to explain why the good requires this ambiguity, why less damaging means are unavailable, and why the distribution tracks the proposed purpose. “Mystery has value” is too general; a successful explanation constrains what we should observe.

Fifth, the defender could revise the inspiration model. Scripture might be treated as a fallible human witness to encounters with the divine, a tradition-forming record, or a set of historically conditioned testimonies that were never intended to encode a single precise system. Such models predict more of D than C_a does. They may preserve religious value while surrendering the strong clarity-aim authorship claim. The paper has no argument against a view it does not target.

These defeat conditions matter because they distinguish criticism from dogma. The comparison is not built on an untouchable skeptical presupposition. It rests on publicly discussable descriptions, tools, and expectations that can be tested against the record. The appropriate response is evidence all the way down: reasons for the target attributes, reasons for the claimed aim, reasons for the classification of disputes, and reasons for any offsetting good. No side earns a foundational exemption merely by naming its starting point a presupposition.

8 Conclusion

Clarity is difficult for finite authors because they are surprised by their readers. They discover ambiguity late, lack time for revision, inherit noisy channels, and cannot see the social systems that will repurpose their words. That explanation fits historically developing human religious literature. It does not transfer to an omniscient communicator merely because the same literature is relabeled divine discourse.

Under the target model, the future controversy is already visible before the sentence is selected. Definitions, repetition, examples, stable terms, and explicit exclusions are available. They do not coerce belief, flatten narrative, exhaust mystery, or eliminate the freedom to refuse. Where doctrines allegedly govern salvation, worship, authority, and final destiny, the theology itself supplies strong instrumental reasons to use those tools.

The observed record is not simply “people disagree.” It is the persistence of sophisticated, sincere, mutually incompatible readings at predictable and consequential forks, often without the short textual guardrails that would exclude at least one branch. That pattern is more ordinary under human literary history than under omniscient design for broad doctrinal uptake. The evidential pressure is comparative, defeasible, and real.

This is an internal design audit, not a disproof of Christianity, every inspiration theory, every ecclesial authority claim, or every privately rational Christian belief. A narrower aim, human-witness model, authoritative institution, or demonstrated countervailing good may change the result. Each move, however, revises or supplements the original claim.

The polemical conclusion is earned: “language is difficult” is not a defense of the strong model but an evasion of the attributes that made it impressive. An omniscient communicator does not stumble into foreseeable doctrinal forks, and a competent high-stakes communicator does not need centuries of conflict to discover a missing definition. Defenders may reduce the aim, relocate authority, or evidence an offset. They may not reasonably praise the design as superhuman and excuse its failures as ordinarily human.

A Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

The argument is comparative rather than deductive in its substantive support. Its final step is valid once the likelihood premise is granted, but premises (1) and (2) remain open to empirical and theological challenge. The ordinary-language reconstruction comes first.

A.1 Ordinary-language reconstruction

1. If the specified Christian clarity-aim model is true, then a feasible package of definitions, repetition, examples, and explicit exclusions would be inexpensive for that communicator to deploy at foreseeable doctrinal forks.
2. If that model is true and the clarity package is inexpensive, durable high-stakes fragmentation among sincere and informed interpreters is less expected under that model than under the human-historical religious-literature model, given the shared background facts.
3. Durable high-stakes doctrinal fragmentation of the relevant kind occurs.
4. When an observed datum is less expected under one model than under a rival, that datum favors the rival over the first model.
5. Therefore, the observed fragmentation favors the human-historical model over the specified Christian clarity-aim model.

This conclusion does not say that C_a is impossible or that H is certainly true. It says that D shifts comparative evidential weight. A person may combine this datum with other evidence and still reach a different total judgment.

A.2 Symbolic reconstruction

Let the symbols mean the following:

- C_a : the specified Christian clarity-aim authorship model;
- H : the human-historical religious-literature model;
- D : durable high-stakes doctrinal fragmentation among sincere and informed interpreters;
- B : shared background facts about the texts, audiences, transmission, and institutions;
- Δ : a feasible package of definitions, repetition, examples, stable terms, and contrastive exclusions;
- $\text{LowCost}_{C_a}(\Delta)$: deploying Δ would be inexpensive under C_a relative to the claimed stakes;
- $\text{Pr}(X | Y)$: the probability, or expectedness, of X given Y ; and
- $H \succ_D C_a$: datum D favors H over C_a .

$$C_a \rightarrow \text{LowCost}_{C_a}(\Delta). \tag{1}$$

Plain-English annotation. If the target model is true, the proposed clarity tools are not difficult for the communicator to discover or use. Omniscience supplies advance knowledge of the forks; sufficient power and competence make a small amount of targeted wording feasible. This is a substantive premise, not a truth of logic. A defender can challenge it by identifying a real cost that the paper has overlooked.

$$[C_a \wedge \text{LowCost}_{C_a}(\Delta)] \rightarrow \Pr(D \mid C_a, B) < \Pr(D \mid H, B). \quad (2)$$

Plain-English annotation. If the clarity-aim model is true and cheap error controls were available, then the observed fragmentation should be less expected on that model than on the human-historical model, once both are compared against the same background facts. The less-than sign means “is less expected than.” This is the argument’s main comparative premise. It can be resisted by showing that the target model independently predicts the fragmentation or that the human model does not.

$$D. \quad (3)$$

Plain-English annotation. The relevant fragmentation occurs. This is not the claim that every disagreement proves unclear wording. It is the narrower historical claim that informed and sincere communities repeatedly sustain incompatible readings at consequential forks that an omniscient communicator would have foreseen. The examples and qualifications in Section 4 supply the support for this premise.

$$[\Pr(D \mid C_a, B) < \Pr(D \mid H, B)] \wedge D \rightarrow H \succ_D C_a. \quad (4)$$

Plain-English annotation. This line states the likelihood bridge. If the actual datum is more expected under H than under C_a , then that datum counts in favor of H over C_a . The symbol $\succ_D$ does not mean “is proven true.” It records the direction of this datum’s evidential support. Other evidence may point in either direction.

$$\therefore H \succ_D C_a. \quad (5)$$

Plain-English annotation. Therefore, the fragmentation datum favors the human-historical model over the specified clarity-aim model. The inference from premises (1)–(4) is valid, but the argument remains defeasible because premises (1)–(3) make substantive claims about cost, expectedness, and the historical record. The conclusion is deliberately bounded: it pressures one model rather than disproving every Christianity or every form of revelation.

A.3 Where disagreement should focus

A productive dispute should identify the contested premise. Rejecting premise (1) requires a cost that precision would impose. Rejecting premise (2) requires a reason that C_a predicts this degree of fragmentation, or that H predicts substantially less. Rejecting premise (3) requires historical and interpretive evidence that the relevant disputes do not have the stated features. Rejecting premise (4) requires abandoning the ordinary comparative rule that evidence favors the model under which it is more expected.

What does not answer the argument is the assertion that C_a remains logically possible. The notation never denies that. Nor does citing an unknown divine reason supply a probability comparison without independent evidence about the reason. The formalization forces the discussion back to the real question: which description of the communicator and the communication process makes the public record less surprising?

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