

Would a God of Clarity Have Written the Bible? — 03

Phil Stilwell
Independent Scholar
ORCID: [0009-0009-3725-8682](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3725-8682)
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Central claim

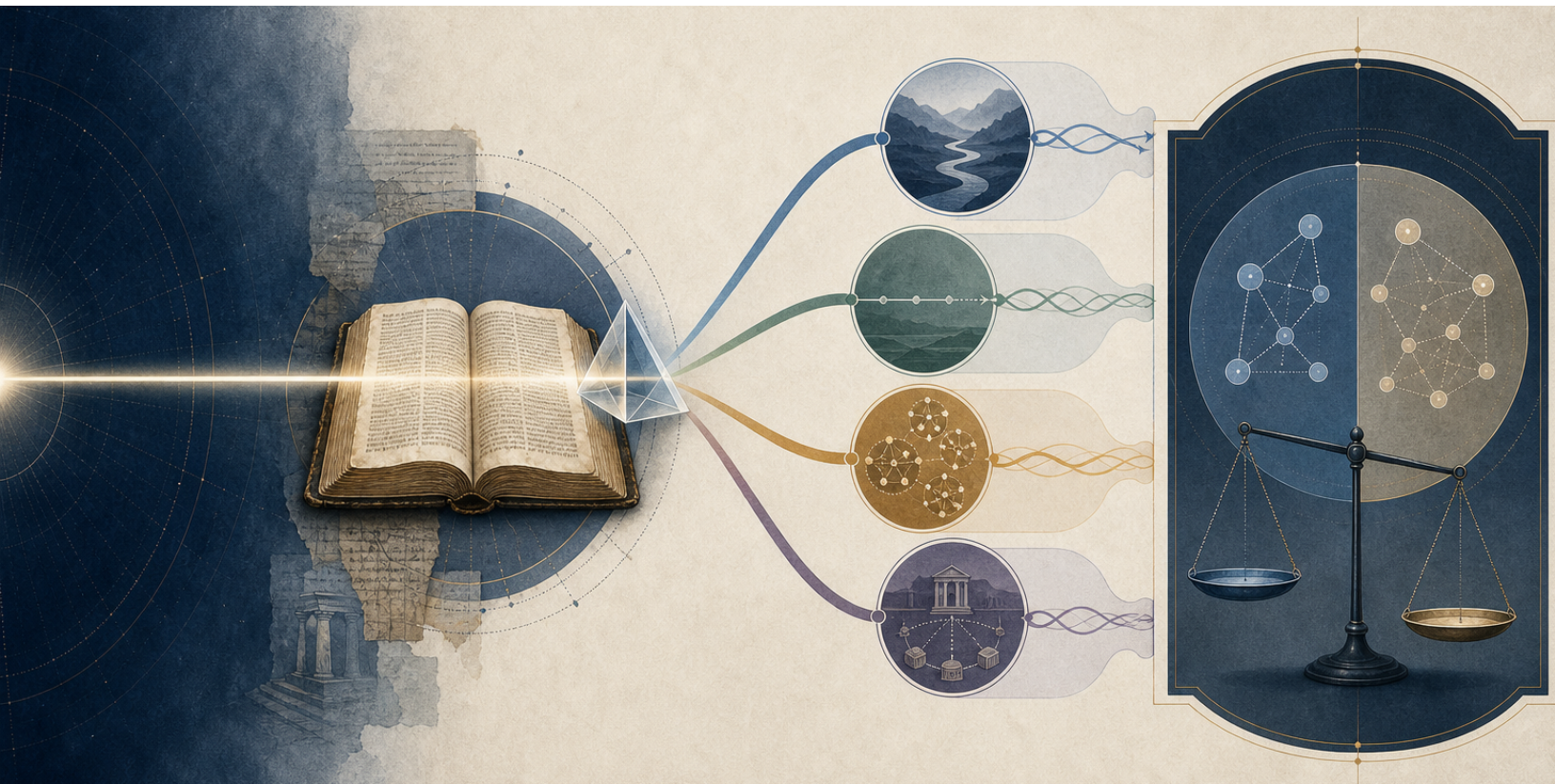
If an all-knowing and all-powerful God authorized the Bible so that sincere Christians would reliably grasp high-stakes doctrine, centuries of incompatible, expert-supported readings should not be the normal result. Yet disputes over baptism, the Eucharist, and interpretive authority persist, follow inherited communities, and extend to how the disputes should be settled—a pattern ordinary historical transmission predicts more readily. This does not disprove God or every form of inspiration; it is serious evidence against a strong Bible-centered clarity claim and reason to lower confidence unless that claim predicts a public difference.

Preview:

Christian claim	Expected difference	Public record	Rational response
God gave Scripture to convey high-stakes teaching clearly.	Sincere, capable readers should converge or share a dependable correction.	Incompatible doctrines persist, cluster by tradition, and include rival correction methods.	Prefer ordinary transmission unless the clarity claim explains the pattern while risking disconfirmation.

The conclusion targets a strong communicative claim. It does not deny every possible deity, every private justification, or the Bible's literary, moral, historical, and devotional value.

Visual preview:



A clarity-directed signal passes through an ancient text and divides into durable interpretive lineages before a comparative judgment is made. The image represents pressure toward ordinary historical transmission, not a proof against God or every account of inspiration.

Abstract

Christians often say that an all-knowing and all-powerful God authorized the Bible to communicate high-stakes truth clearly. That claim creates an expected difference: sincere and capable readers using the ordinary means their traditions commend should achieve substantial agreement, or at least share a dependable way to correct error. The public record does not display that difference. Major traditions give incompatible answers about baptism and the Eucharist; the conflicts persist among informed interpreters; the answers track inherited communities; and Christians disagree about whether Scripture, Church, Tradition, or another authority finally settles the matter. These strands form a cumulative case. Together they are more expected if the Bible developed and functions through ordinary historical and institutional processes than if God secured reliable doctrinal uptake through it. A short expected-difference argument, a symmetry argument, and an every-outcome dilemma make the inference explicit. Replies based on narrow essentials, sinful readers, pedagogy, ecclesial authority, relationship, freedom, private justification, a multiverse, or unknown reasons may preserve logical possibility and explain part of the record. They succeed evidentially only if independently supported and if they still let some outcomes count against the clarity claim. The conclusion is firm but limited: structured Christian disagreement does not disprove God or every form of inspiration, but it gives reflective Christians reason to lower confidence in a strong Bible-centered clarity claim unless a genuine discriminator appears.

Keywords: biblical clarity; perspicuity; doctrinal disagreement; revelation; divine discourse; comparative evidence

1. If God Intended Clarity, What Difference Should We Expect?

This paper is addressed especially to Christians who say that God gave or decisively authorized the Bible so people could reliably know what they must believe and do. The challenge is direct. If a perfect communicator chose this text and knew every future misunderstanding, sincere readers should not remain divided for centuries over doctrines their own churches call central. Yet they do. A claim about divine clarity should therefore explain the pattern rather than treating every disagreement as somebody else's failure.

The argument does not assume that God literally held a pen. God might speak by authorizing human words, work through historically situated authors, or disclose divine presence through a community and its practices. Philosophical accounts of divine discourse and revelation leave all of these possibilities open (Rea, 2018; Swinburne, 2007; Wolterstorff, 1995). What matters is the communicative aim attributed to God. If God chose a human medium while intending reliable doctrinal uptake, then the foreseeable performance of that medium is evidence about the claim.

The target is a strong Bible-centered clarity claim with four parts:

1. An all-knowing and all-powerful God decisively authorizes the Bible as a privileged source of divine teaching.
2. God intends sincere and normally capable readers, using ordinary study and whatever aids God authorizes, to identify a defined set of high-stakes teachings reliably enough for their stakes.
3. God knows the ambiguities, translation paths, cultural assumptions, institutional conflicts, and predictable misreadings that will shape reception.
4. God can provide adequate clarification or correction unless doing so would defeat a weightier aim.

The comparator is ordinary historical-human transmission. On this account, the Bible is a layered anthology produced, edited, canonized, translated, and interpreted through familiar human processes without an overriding divine aim that secures doctrinal convergence. This model does not entail atheism. A God might providentially use fallible texts, inspire them in a limited way, or value aims other than doctrinal clarity. The comparison concerns two communication models, not every possible theology.

The expected-difference argument

1. If the strong clarity claim is true, sincere and capable readers should achieve substantial agreement on pre-specified high-stakes teachings, or share a dependable correction method.
2. The Christian record instead shows durable, expert-supported disagreement on such teachings and on the correction method itself.
3. Therefore the record counts against the strong clarity claim relative to ordinary historical transmission.

The argument is deductively valid as a statement of evidential direction: if the two premises are true, the conclusion follows. The empirical premise is supported inductively, not proved by logic. Nor does the conclusion say that every verse must have one obvious meaning or that every Christian must agree. Communication can use metaphor, narrative, irony, open texture, and contextual inference without failing (Grice, 1989; Sperber & Wilson, 1995). The relevant expectation is proportionate success: the more important the teaching and the more capable the alleged communicator, the harder it is to dismiss predictable, durable conflict as irrelevant.

2. Clarity Is More Than a Possible Reading

A doctrine is not clear merely because a skilled interpreter can find a route to it. Rival skilled interpreters often find routes to incompatible conclusions. Clarity requires enough discrimination for the intended audience to tell which answer the message supports, together with some workable way to correct error when disagreement arises.

Human communicators protect important messages through definitions, repetition, contrastive exclusions, worked examples, and feedback. Information theory does not settle theology, but its treatment of redundancy illustrates a familiar point: a sender can design a message to survive a noisy channel (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Human authors may lack time, knowledge, and opportunities for correction. An all-knowing and all-powerful communicator does not face those limits in the same way.

This does not mean that God would maximize explicitness. Literary depth, interpretive participation, cultural particularity, and difficult moral formation may be valuable. The comparison is narrower. If high-stakes teachings matter and predictable misunderstanding is severe, some reliable discrimination or correction is more expected unless another aim explains why it is withheld.

Protestant defenders of perspicuity have rarely claimed that every passage is equally plain. The Westminster Confession limits its clarity claim to what is necessary for salvation through ordinary means, and contemporary defenders add qualifications about audience, topic, spiritual condition, and interpretive practice (Pettegrew, 2004; Thompson, 2006; Westminster Assembly, 1647). Historical and literary studies likewise show that “clarity” has carried several theological meanings (Callahan, 2001).

Those qualifications may be sound. They also create a duty to specify the claim before reading the result. Which teachings are essential? Who belongs to the intended audience? What counts as an ordinary means? How much convergence should occur, and when? If every disputed doctrine is removed from the target after disagreement appears, and every dissenter is excluded from the audience because of the disagreement, the clarity claim no longer risks being wrong. Christian Smith’s critique of biblicism presses this problem of interpretive pluralism, while Vanhoozer’s richer account of authorial discourse shows why responsible interpretation involves more than decoding isolated sentences (Smith, 2011; Vanhoozer, 1998). Neither point makes the public pattern disappear.

3. The Cumulative Record

The argument should not rest on a sensational denomination count. Administrative divisions do not map neatly onto doctrinal systems, and many churches share relevant beliefs. The better evidence is structured: incompatible answers, durable expert disagreement, inherited clustering, and disagreement about the correction mechanism. Each strand has limits. Together they create the pressure.

3.1 Incompatible outcomes on practices Christians treat as weighty

Baptism is not an aesthetic variation. The Westminster Confession directs that the infants of believers be baptized (Westminster Assembly, 1647, chap. 28). The Southern Baptist Convention describes baptism as immersion of a believer and a symbolic act of obedience (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000, art. 7). The Catholic Catechism teaches infant baptism and connects the sacrament to salvation while adding that God is not bound by the sacraments (Catholic Church, 1992, paras. 1250, 1257). A congregation cannot, under the same rule, both restrict baptism to professing believers and administer it to infants. Nor can the rite be merely symbolic and sacramentally regenerative in the same respect.

The Eucharist displays the same kind of conflict. Catholic teaching affirms the change called transubstantiation; the Westminster tradition rejects a bodily presence while affirming spiritual reception by faith; and the Baptist Faith and Message describes a symbolic memorial (Catholic Church, 1992, para. 1376; Westminster Assembly, 1647, chap. 29; Southern Baptist Convention, 2000, art. 7). These are the traditions' own public teachings, not categories imposed by an outsider.

Taken together, the three official records establish incompatible public positions without relying on a contestable denomination count (Catholic Church, 1992; Southern Baptist Convention, 2000; Westminster Assembly, 1647).

3.2 The conflict persists among informed readers

Disagreement alone does not prove ambiguity. A person may be careless, biased, or badly informed. The harder datum is persistence. Baptismal and Eucharistic conflicts have survived centuries of linguistic scholarship, commentary, debate, confession writing, and institutional correction. Each side includes informed defenders who know the rival readings.

This does not make all parties exact intellectual peers, nor does it force every participant to suspend judgment. Philosophers of disagreement dispute when steadfastness, conciliation, or deference is rational (Feldman & Warfield, 2010; Pittard, 2019). The narrower point is about the communicator. The strong clarity claim attributes complete foresight of these durable forks and the power to supply proportionate correction.

3.3 Answers follow inherited communities

The disputes are not randomly distributed. Views of infant baptism, sacramental presence, and interpretive authority travel through churches, families, seminaries, regions, and confessions. Social transmission does not make a belief false; nearly all human knowledge is socially mediated. But this distribution is exactly what ordinary historical transmission leads us to expect. A model of divine clarity needs to explain why inherited lineages remain so predictive and why cross-lineage correction is so weak.

3.4 Christians disagree about how disagreement should be settled

The deepest conflict concerns the correction mechanism itself. Westminster appeals to Scripture's sufficiency and the clarity of necessary teaching. Catholic doctrine locates interpretation within Scripture, Tradition, and the Church's teaching office. Southern Baptists call the Bible the supreme standard while retaining congregational

structures (Westminster Assembly, 1647; Catholic Church, 1965, paras. 9–10; Southern Baptist Convention, 2000, arts. 1, 6). These are rival answers to where God placed final authority.

An institution can settle questions inside its own community. That does not tell an inquirer which institution God authorized. If each community establishes its authority through the same disputed texts and inherited tradition, the solution risks moving the clarity problem up one level rather than solving it.

Evidence strand	Expected on strong clarity	Observed record	Comparative force and limit
Outcomes	Substantial agreement on pre-specified high-stakes teaching	Incompatible rules and meanings for baptism and Eucharist	Pressures clarity if these teachings are genuinely in scope
Persistence	Error is corrected among informed, sincere readers	Rival expert traditions remain durable	Stronger than novice confusion; expertise is not infallibility
Clustering	Correction crosses inherited lineages	Answers track communities and institutions	Fits ordinary transmission; social origin alone does not show falsity
Method	A dependable authority settles conflict	Traditions dispute Scripture, Tradition, Church, and local judgment	Especially costly because the proposed remedy is itself contested

The table is an evidence ledger, not four independent probability multipliers. Clustering helps sustain persistence, and disputed authority helps preserve first-order conflict. The cumulative case concerns the whole pattern.

4. Why the Pattern Counts Against Strong Clarity

The historical-human model expects a layered canon to generate stable plurality. Genres differ; language changes; context is incomplete; institutions select controlling passages; and communities train readers to see some interpretations as natural. Rival systems can be internally coherent while assigning different weight to texts and authorities. No special addition is needed to expect path dependence.

The pattern remains possible under divine authorization. The pressure arises under the added clarity aim. A perfect communicator knows the interpretive history in advance, can identify high-stakes forks, and allegedly intends reliable uptake. Durable first-order conflict combined with uncertainty about correction is therefore less expected unless some further divine purpose explains it.

This is comparative reasoning, not invented arithmetic. Evidence favors one model over another when it is more expected on the first, even when the models do not exhaust every possibility and no numerical probability is defensible (Sober, 2008). Here the strands are dependent and the divine model is not calibrated well enough for a trustworthy ratio. A directional judgment is the most the evidence warrants.

The symmetry argument

1. Catholic, Reformed, and Baptist communities each appeal to Scripture, learned interpretation, tradition, spiritual formation, and institutional testimony.
2. Those methods deliver incompatible conclusions and rival accounts of authority.
3. A method that supports incompatible conclusions in structurally similar ways cannot by itself identify one conclusion as the uniquely clear divine teaching.

The every-outcome dilemma

Either the clarity claim predicts some public difference—convergence, unusually resistant teaching, or a dependable correction mechanism—or it does not. If it does, the observed absence of that difference counts against it. If it does not, the claim may remain logically possible, but favorable outcomes cannot be cited as public confirmation while unfavorable outcomes are declared equally expected.

That dilemma is where disciplined polemic is appropriate. A clarity claim cannot expand when preaching and shrink when tested. If agreement confirms divine guidance but disagreement confirms divine pedagogy; if successful interpretation confirms the Spirit but failure confirms human sin; and if every rival authority is humanly inherited except one's own, then the evidence is not doing the work claimed for it.

5. The Strongest Replies and What They Cost

The strongest replies identify real possibilities. Their task is not merely to make the record compatible with God. It is to explain why this degree and distribution of disagreement should be expected while preserving some risk of error.

5.1 Only essentials are clear

Perhaps Scripture need not settle every sacramental or institutional question. It need only communicate what is necessary for salvation. This can be a legitimate narrowing of the target. The remaining questions are whether the essential core was fixed before the disagreements were inspected and whether that core actually converges in content and practice. Baptism matters because major traditions connect it, in different ways, to salvation, obedience, covenant membership, and church identity. “Essential” cannot simply mean “whatever remains after disputed teachings are removed.”

The narrowed claim may survive. It also promises less. A Christian may reasonably adopt it, but should not return to a broad rhetoric of biblical clarity once the criticism has passed.

5.2 Sin and bias corrupt readers

Christian theology has serious resources for explaining error through pride, self-interest, communal loyalty, and disordered desire. Plantinga's account of warranted Christian belief connects sin with cognitive dysfunction and divine restoration (Plantinga, 2000). It would be naive to treat every sincere self-description as proof of intellectual virtue.

The danger is circularity. If arriving at the wrong interpretation is itself sufficient evidence of culpable defect, no reader outcome can test the clarity claim. The reply should identify failure conditions independently, explain reciprocal accusations among disciplined communities, and say why divine correction does not reliably overcome the defect among people who seek it. Sin may explain some disagreement without explaining the whole pattern.

5.3 Disagreement serves humility, growth, and community

Interpretive struggle can cultivate patience, charity, humility, and dependence on others. Dormandy argues that religious disagreement can yield epistemic benefits for believers (Dormandy, 2020). That blocks the assumption that every difficulty is pointless.

The issue is proportionality. A teacher can allow struggle while remaining identifiable and eventually making the lesson assessable. A community can sustain inquiry without preserving centuries of incompatible practice.

The reply should identify which goods require which ambiguities, why less costly forms of difficulty would not secure them, and what eventual growth or convergence the pedagogy predicts.

5.4 The medium is Scripture with Church and Tradition

Catholic and Orthodox approaches need not accept a text-only target. Catholic teaching treats Scripture, Tradition, and the teaching office as one entrusted medium (Catholic Church, 1965). This may produce real internal determinacy.

The public question then becomes how an inquirer identifies the authorized institution among rival claimants. If its credentials independently discriminate it, the clarity problem weakens. If the credentials depend on the same contested history and texts, the problem has moved from “What does the Bible teach?” to “Which community speaks for God?”

5.5 Revelation aims at relationship, not a doctrinal code

Wolterstorff’s divine-discourse model and work by Moser and Rea resist reducing revelation to a list of propositions (Moser, 2008; Rea, 2018; Wolterstorff, 1995). Divine self-disclosure might aim at moral transformation, presence, or relationship rather than technical precision.

That possibility narrows the target, but does not erase action-guiding content. Relationships require enough identification to distinguish a partner from projection and rival claimants. Transformation does not decide who should be baptized, what worshippers are doing at the Eucharist, or which institution may bind conscience. The reply is strongest when it openly gives up the claim that God intended the Bible to settle those matters clearly.

5.6 Greater clarity would threaten freedom

Recognition is not obedience. A person may understand a command and reject it, know that an authority exists and resist it, or identify a doctrine and withhold allegiance. The freedom reply must therefore name the freedom threatened by clearer doctrinal content. There may be cases where distance prevents coercive overexposure. But the design space between vagueness and irresistible spectacle is large. Clearer definitions and a publicly identifiable correction mechanism do not force worship. They clarify what is being accepted or refused. The connection between religious disagreement and divine hiddenness makes this source-identification problem especially important (Matheson, 2018).

5.7 A believer may remain rational

Religious commitment need not collapse whenever informed people disagree. Pittard develops conditions under which deference and steadfast commitment may remain rational (Pittard, 2019). A believer may also possess testimony or experience unavailable to an outsider.

That point concerns a person’s total evidence. The present argument concerns public model fit. A believer can remain personally justified while acknowledging that the public distribution of disagreement is more expected under ordinary historical transmission. Conversely, a critic should not infer that disagreement makes all interpretations equally probable.

5.8 A multiverse or unknown reasons may explain vagueness

Søvik proposes that a divine multiverse could contain worlds with different revelation profiles, including goods realized through vague revelation (Søvik, 2022). More generally, finite people should allow that a perfect being may have reasons they do not understand. These replies establish logical space.

Their evidential cost is flexibility. If clarity and vagueness, convergence and fragmentation, and every local revelation profile are all expected somewhere, the observed profile tells us little in favor of the theory. Unknown reasons should moderate confidence, not erase every expectation generated by wisdom, power, and communicative intent. Used only when evidence is adverse, mystery becomes a one-way shield.

Reply	What it can preserve	What it must still explain	What changes if it succeeds
Narrow essentials	A minimal core may remain clear	Fix the core before measuring agreement	The broad clarity claim becomes narrower
Reader defect	Some error may be culpable	Expert, reciprocal, lineage-shaped conflict	Defect criteria must be independent of the verdict
Pedagogy	Difficulty may form character	Why this scale and duration are needed	The theory should predict some fruit or correction
Church and Tradition	Internal rulings may be determinate	Why this institution is divinely authorized	The medium becomes text plus institution
Relationship or freedom	Revelation need not be a manual or coercive display	How people identify the source and action-guiding content	The doctrinal aim is weakened or relocated
Multiverse or mystery	Logical compatibility is preserved	Independent support and local explanatory detail	Public confirmation weakens if every outcome fits

6. What Would We Expect If the Claim Were True?

A fair challenge should identify evidence that would weaken it. Confidence in a strong clarity claim should rise if the record displayed one or more of the following:

- a pre-specified high-stakes core that converges across substantially independent Christian lineages;
- teachings whose precision and stability resist predictable cultural and institutional distortion unusually well;
- a public correction mechanism whose authority can be identified without simply presupposing the disputed conclusion;
- reliable convergence after readers satisfy competence conditions stated before their answers are known; or
- an independently supported account showing why the observed degree and distribution of disagreement are needed for a weightier aim.

The argument also loses relevance when a theology gives up the strong aim. A Christian may hold that God permits a fallible historical witness, communicates only a minimal salvific core, or values goals other than doctrinal settlement. Such views may be coherent. They should not be advertised as though God had provided a generally clear doctrinal guide.

What does not answer the challenge by itself? Showing that one favored reading is possible, calling every dissenter insincere, appealing to an authority whose credentials are the point at issue, or naming an unknown good. Possibility is not confirmation. A reply earns evidential force by explaining the actual pattern better and by stating what pattern would count against it.

7. The Rational Response

The public evidence calls for calibration rather than theatrical certainty. The Bible can have literary, moral, historical, and devotional value even if a strong clarity claim fails. A believer with powerful private evidence or

a wider theological case may reasonably weigh more than the argument presented here. None of that licenses the claim that persistent disagreement is irrelevant.

Reflective Christians should lower confidence in proportion to the unresolved pattern. They should specify which teachings God intended to make clear, acknowledge the strongest rival readings, identify the proposed correction mechanism, and state what evidence could count against the claim. They should also stop treating inherited agreement as though it were independent confirmation. If the method used to discover the Bible's "plain teaching" was learned from the community whose conclusion it delivers, that dependence matters.

The symmetry test should be uncomfortable. Christians routinely decline to accept a rival religion's ancient book, institutional tradition, transformed lives, and inward assurance as enough to identify its revelation as divine. They ask whether the text is reliable, whether the experience is correctly interpreted, and whether the authority's reasoning is circular. The same questions must apply at home. A standard that becomes compelling only after one's own tradition is assumed does not publicly identify that tradition.

Religious institutions carry a related responsibility. Stigmatizing doubt, defining every dissenter as morally corrupt, or demanding confidence beyond the evidence deepens the problem. A community confident in truth should welcome comparison, distinguish error from bad faith, and name its own revision conditions. Insulation can preserve a tradition. It does not establish divine clarity.

Critics owe restraint too. Cultural transmission does not entail falsity. Disagreement does not show that all parties are irrational, that every doctrine is equally likely, or that no God could use Scripture. The conclusion remains comparative and bounded: the structured public record fits ordinary historical transmission better than a strong Bible-centered clarity aim unless the defender supplies a genuine discriminator.

8. Conclusion: Clarity Must Make a Difference

A God of clarity could use an ancient, literary, many-voiced canon. Indirect communication is not failed communication, and profound texts need not resemble instruction manuals. The problem arises when Christians add a stronger promise: that an all-knowing and all-powerful God authorized this canon so sincere and capable readers could reliably grasp high-stakes teaching.

The public record bears against that promise. Major traditions institutionalize incompatible teachings on baptism and the Eucharist. The conflicts survive expert attention, follow inherited communities, and extend to the authority meant to settle them. These are not four unrelated complaints. They form a cumulative pattern that ordinary historical transmission predicts readily and that a strong clarity claim must explain.

The best replies narrow the target or enrich the medium. Only a minimal core may be clear. Sin may defeat some understanding. Difficulty may cultivate goods. Church and Tradition may complete the communicative package. Revelation may aim chiefly at relationship. Freedom or unknown purposes may justify distance. Each reply deserves fair assessment. None succeeds merely by making the record possible. It must explain the degree and distribution of disagreement without making every possible outcome equally favorable.

The conclusion is therefore firm but limited. Structured Christian disagreement does not prove that no God exists, that every believer is irrational, or that the Bible lacks value. It is evidence against the claim that a perfect communicator authorized the Bible with the strong aim of securing clear, high-stakes doctrinal uptake. Where that claim predicts no public difference, it gains no public confirmation from favorable outcomes. Where it does predict a difference, the absence of that difference should lower confidence.

A final challenge to the Christian reader

Ask whether you would accept the same pattern from a rival faith. Would centuries of incompatible readings, inherited interpretive lineages, and disagreement over the final authority count as evidence that its god had communicated clearly? If not, what independent feature makes the Christian case different?

Then ask what outcome would count against your own clarity claim. If agreement confirms divine guidance

but disagreement confirms divine pedagogy; if understanding confirms the Spirit but confusion confirms human sin; if institutional unity confirms authority but fragmentation confirms freedom, then every result has been made a success. A claim protected from every possible outcome is not supported by the outcomes.

A God worthy of trust need not remove every mystery. But a tradition that speaks in God's name must do more than call its favored reading clear and blame the people who see otherwise. It must show what difference divine clarity makes. Until it can, lowering confidence is not hostility to truth. It is the ordinary intellectual honesty that high-stakes claims require.

A. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

The central inference can be stated formally, but the notation should not obscure what the argument does. It compares how readily two accounts predict the actual public record. It is not a deductive proof that no God exists. The deductive steps below are valid; the key comparative premise remains an inductive judgment supported by the evidence discussed in the paper.

In ordinary syllogistic form:

1. When an observed record is less expected under one account than under a serious rival, that record is evidence against the first account relative to the rival.
2. Structured Christian disagreement is less expected under the strong Bible-centered clarity claim than under ordinary historical transmission.
3. Therefore structured Christian disagreement is evidence against the strong clarity claim relative to ordinary historical transmission.

This conclusion is comparative and defeasible. It says which account the record favors, not that the favored account is certain or that all forms of divine involvement are false.

A.1 Symbols

- *C*: the strong clarity claim—God authorized the Bible to secure reliable uptake of high-stakes doctrine among sincere and capable readers.
- *H*: ordinary historical and institutional transmission without an overriding divine aim that secures doctrinal convergence.
- *D*: the observed structured record—incompatible outcomes, expert persistence, inherited clustering, and disagreement about correction.
- *E*: a public difference expected from successful clarity, such as substantial convergence or a dependable correction mechanism.
- *P*: the conditional-probability operator; $P(X | Y)$ means the probability of *X* given *Y*.
- *Q*: the clarity claim makes at least one discriminating public prediction.
- *A*: the observed failure of that prediction counts against the clarity claim.
- *S*: a favorable public outcome can count as confirmation of the clarity claim.

A.2 The Strict Syllogism and the Actual Evidential Claim

If the expected difference were treated as an exceptionless implication, the argument would have the familiar form of *modus tollens*:

1. $C \rightarrow E$,
2. $\neg E$,
- $\therefore \neg C$.

That form is deductively valid, but its first premise is stronger than this paper needs. Replies involving human failure, pedagogy, freedom, or a wider ecclesial medium may block an exceptionless implication.

The paper therefore makes the more modest comparative claim:

1. $P(D \mid H) > P(D \mid C)$,
2. $P(D \mid H) > P(D \mid C) \implies D \text{ favors } H \text{ over } C$,
- $\therefore D \text{ favors } H \text{ over } C$.

Premise 2 states the likelihood principle used here: evidence favors the account on which that evidence is more expected. The inference from premises 1 and 2 is deductively valid. Premise 1 is not a theorem. It is the paper's inductively supported judgment about the cumulative record, and it makes no claim to precise numerical probabilities.

The rational implication is correspondingly limited: unless an independently supported reply reverses or neutralizes the comparison, observing D should lower confidence in C relative to H . It need not reduce the probability of every theology, every form of inspiration, or every privately grounded religious belief to zero.

A.3 The Every-Outcome Dilemma

The self-sealing danger can also be expressed as a constructive dilemma:

1. $Q \vee \neg Q$,
2. $(Q \wedge D) \rightarrow A$,
3. $\neg Q \rightarrow \neg S$,
4. D ,
- $\therefore A \vee \neg S$.

Either the clarity claim risks a public prediction or it does not. If it does, the adverse record can count against it. If it does not, favorable public outcomes cannot be used as public confirmation. A defender may consistently choose either branch, but cannot consistently claim evidential success on every possible outcome.

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