

PERSONALITY, SOCIETY, AND INSPIRATION

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MODERN CRITICAL study enables us to reconstruct to a certain degree the process by which our Bible came to be and thus develop a kind of phenomenology of inspired writing which may be able to enrich our somewhat abstract notion of inspiration. The Old Testament offers an especially hopeful field for this kind of investigation, since it contains a greater variety of literary forms and shows on a larger scale the processes of development. Thus the growth of the Old Testament is easier to investigate and the results may be more broadly applicable than such as depend on the study of the more restricted gamut of forms used in the New Testament. Moreover, there has been proportionately less attention devoted to the problems of Old Testament inspiration, though the Old Testament too is the word of God.¹ There seems, then, reason enough for studying certain of the processes which produced the Old Testament with a view to the light they may throw on the problem of inspiration. Obviously, it is possible to treat only a few of the many different processes involved, and we shall concentrate on certain of them which concern the relation of Scripture to the community of God's chosen people.

This social aspect of the inspired books has been a matter of increasing interest.² We realize that the Bible was formed in, by, and for a society. First Israel and then the Apostolic Church were communities of a special sort and subject to a special influence from God. Surely this influence extended to the writings which were formed in and in turn formed the communities. Thus the social dimension in the formation of the Scriptures may offer us the way to a fuller understanding of the divine element which we affirm when we say that God is their author.

¹ So K. Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible* (Edinburgh-London, 1961), is almost entirely concerned with the New Testament.

² Cf. Rahner, *ibid.*; P. Benoit, O.P., in A. Robert and A. Tricot, *Guide to the Bible* (2nd ed.; New York, 1960) pp. 12 ff., and "Les analogies de l'inspiration," in J. Coppens, A. Descamps, and E. Massaux, *Sacra pagina* 1 (Paris, 1959) 86 ff.; J. McKenzie, S.J., "The Social Character of Inspiration," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24 (1962) 115 ff.

However, it is essential to avoid the danger of too rapid a generalization. We feel that the first modern analyses of inspiration fell short in that they took a modern concept, that of the self-conscious individual author of modern times, and applied it univocally to a body of literature produced in another time and in different ways, in the attempt to understand something of what went on in the sacred writer's mind. The problem, however, is not only that the processes of ancient authorship were somewhat different from the modern; those processes also differed among themselves. This remains true when we add the indispensable social dimension, and to subsume all the various forms of inspired writing under an anonymous social form of production is to apply a univocity with its own dangers of distortion.

Thus it would be oversimplifying to take as absolute the statement that the ancient author was in all instances the spokesman of society, and society was the real author of his book.³ The basis for such a statement in regard to the Old Testament literature is the peculiar relation of individual and society in the ancient world. Beyond doubt, the ancient lost himself in identification with his society in a way strange to us. Beyond doubt, ancient literature was a part and a product of tradition, that is, the fund of beliefs, forms of expression, and so on, held and passed on by the community, to a degree beyond anything we know. But I submit that this is still a matter of degree; individuals, anonymous to us perhaps, but still individuals, did the work, even though under the pressure of tradition. All literature—not just the ancient Oriental—involves an interplay of individual and a tradition carried in society.

The total submergence of the individual in a tradition of impersonal production is not, in fact, indicated by the ancient Oriental literatures. Thus in Accadian literature, the largest body of ancient Semitic literature known to us, tradition was of vast importance. The scribal schools were at once guardians and prisoners of a canonical tradition. They produced more than mere copies, but they tended to work within a traditional framework by gloss, expansion, and development. A bit of comparison between the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh epic and the first-millennium form will show something of the process.⁴

³ Cf. J. McKenzie, *ibid.*, pp. 117, 119.

⁴ Translations by E. Speiser in J. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (2nd ed.; Princeton, 1956).

However, this is not quite the whole story. There were individuals as well, men who spoke distinctly of their own experiences. There is personal lyric. The man posted on the temple roof to observe the movement of the stars was a cog in a social machine, his observations were guided by traditional techniques and purposes. Still, his lyric reaction was his own and not a social expression.⁵ To be sure, in a different society his position and his manner would have been different; nonetheless the personal element shines through the conventions. The writer is no mere mouthpiece for his group. Again, a hymn to Ishtar, most traditional of materials, could become a song with a truly personal note.⁶ On another level, the author of the *Era* epic departed somewhat from the retailing of traditional material to produce his own poem of comment and interpretation on stirring experiences. Precisely because he was *extra chorum* he had to appeal to divine sanction to assure his acceptance.⁷ This doubtless shows the pressure of the traditional forms, but it shows freedom within them as well.

Thus we cannot reduce ancient Oriental literature to an impersonal social product, nor, on the other hand, can we deny a large and largely determinative role to the social context in the production of other literatures. The medieval troubadour had to write his *chanson de croisade* on the themes and in the forms his society accepted for that kind of poem. Those violent individualists accepted the conventions and yet managed to produce highly personal expressions. So also the author of the individualistic Renaissance period was constrained to use certain forms (e.g., the sonnet) and certain conventions (e.g., the pastoral) because this was the poetry his society recognized. Yet no one misses the personal note in a Ronsard, a Sydney, a Marlowe. Even the very modern pose of the author as rebel, faithful to his personal vision in the face of an uncomprehending bourgeois society, is a convention determined by the traditions of his society. The Promethean man of the Renaissance and the romantics, the theories of the symbolists, and a host of other influences carried by society mark the limits within which the artist works.

This is not to deny that the group and its conventions were much

⁵ Cf. A. Falkenstein and W. von Soden, *Sumerische und akkadische Hymnen und Gebete* (Zurich-Stuttgart, 1953) p. 274.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 235-37.

⁷ Col. V, lines 42 ff. (P. F. Gössmann, O.E.S.A., *Das Era Epos* [Würzburg, n.d.] p. 37).

more important in the tradition-directed society of the ancient Orient, but we must keep perspective. The difference is not absolute and qualitative. All discourse, at least if it aspires to communication, is formed by an interplay of traditional and social elements with the personal. Of course, we use words for purposes other than communication, to relieve our feelings for instance, and here a perfectly private language would be sufficient. However, this hardly need concern the study of inspiration, for the inspired word is certainly communication. It is God's word, and the idea of God's needing to express Himself in human language as a form of relief or for any other similar motive is too grotesque to need consideration. Thus the inspired word is delimited by a social context just as any other form of communication, for it is a word and a literary form, that is, a matter of conventional signs which transmit ideas because and only because the usage of a human group has endowed them with meaning. If a writer—and this includes the sacred writer—were to demand complete freedom from the conventions of his society, he would have to give up language and destroy all possibility of communication. Thus, however personal may be the work of a writer, however new the trail he blazes, he must submit in some degree to traditional elements recognized in his society. The relative weight of personal and social factors will vary from time to time, from situation to situation, but these factors are always there. Hence we cannot reduce biblical literature to a social phenomenon, as though the social element appeared in it alone, and seek in this that which without qualification specifies inspired literature. The problem is rather to study the factors which produced our texts and to try to see if and how society functioned among them.

THE ORIGINS OF INSPIRED DISCOURSE

One class of Old Testament writing, indeed, might make us wonder about the special place of a social element in the origins of inspired discourse. The prophets were the recipients of an extraordinary, direct divine communication, revelation in a strict sense. Such immediate contact with the divine we conceive most easily in terms of the documented experiences of the mystics, but these are intensely personal, private experiences, not social. One might object that the bands of

prophets seem to have used techniques to produce ecstatic phenomena in the whole group, as in 1 S 10:5, and thus connect the prophetic delirium with group activity. However, whatever may be the case with the bands of prophets, scholars now generally agree that the great "writing" prophets were of a different type. The great inaugural visions, for instance, can scarcely be connected with an ecstatic frenzy.⁸ They impress one as personal, mystic, and private experience.

Here we must note that we cannot equate the experience of the prophetic vocation such as is recounted in Is 6, Jer 1, and Ez 1-3 with inspiration. The prophets are given a mission, but even an authentic mission, though it be grounded in direct, mystical experience, does not of itself and necessarily make human discourse the word of God. Rather, the connection between direct experience of the divine and the prophetic word is to be sought at one level in the consultation of the Lord exemplified by the activity of Elisha in 2 K 3:13-20, but especially in the divine communications which enabled the prophets to say of their speeches "Thus says Yahweh." This experience compelled the prophet to act (cf. Amos 3:8; Jer 1:6 ff.). It involved visions (Amos 7:1-9) and auditions (7:3 ff.; Jer 15:15-20). We can hardly consider this to mean a kind of dictation, in view of the very personal styles of the different prophets. The divine word did not suppress personality but was expressed through it.

In view of all this it is tempting to make some sort of direct divine communication the distinguishing note of inspiration. It is communication given in a manner transcending ordinary causes. It is, in effect, revelation, and the perennial problem, that of finding a distinct, recognizable divine element in inspiration, is solved. However, tempting though it is, the solution to the problem of inspiration does not lie in this direction. For one thing, there is a great deal of inspired writing which gives no evidence of a special, mystic contact with the divine such as is found in the prophets. Besides, the intrusion of the marked

⁸ The problem of prophetic mysticism is often complicated by a confusion which takes mystical to mean ecstatic in the sense of violent seizure with external phenomena and often involving psychic abnormalities. The truly mystical may be defined as special, more direct communion with the divine, and whatever may have been the place of the ecstatic in some elements of the prophetic movement, it is the mystical which is of concern here, and it is meant whenever the word or its cognates are used.

personal characteristics of the prophets in their message raises a warning. They surely had a direct experience of the divine, an experience we understand most easily in terms of mysticism. However, the comparison of inspiration with mysticism is strictly limited by the fact that the central element of the former is a *motus ad exprimendum*. In contrast to this, mystical experience is interior, and the problems raised by the attempt to express it are a classical page in the theology of spirituality. Thus the comparison is weakest at the crucial point.

Still, we cannot get away from the fact that the origin of the great prophetic traditions lies in an amalgam of intimate personal experience of the divine and a personal reaction which marks the communication of the experience. Where in all this is the social and traditional element? It is not lacking, for the prophet's unique experience is communicated in recognized categories. Isaiah's message has a new note, but it is not expressed or understood except in terms of the traditions of Davidic kingship and the liturgy of Zion. Jeremiah presupposes Hosea. Ezekiel is clearly in a priestly tradition. With all their personal experience of the divine, the prophets are acted on and themselves act on a tradition carried in the social structures of Israel.

What has been said thus far applies in the first place to spoken prophecy. In the beginning the prophet had an oral message to his own generation. To be a prophet, to give out the word of God, did not in itself involve writing. Hence the problem of the written message, the point where scriptural inspiration lies, remains open. However, before taking this up, it will be useful to consider a different sort of coming to terms with the divine evidenced in the Old Testament documents.

There is much in the Old Testament which may be called theological history writing, reflection on historical experience in the light of revealed notions. A great and very early example would be the Yahwist document. This was, as far as we know, the first such compilation of the oldest traditions of Israel not as a more or less indiscriminate collection but as an ordered whole. The whole history from the fathers and beyond them to the beginnings of creation is organized in view of the chosen people and the Promised Land. The point is not mere record. It is a brilliant response to the question posed by the organiza-

tion and expansion of Israel under David. The secure possession of the land flowing with milk and honey is seen as the term of a divinely directed historical process, the concrete evidence of the favor of Yahweh.⁹

Here we have the reaction of a writer to his own historical experience interpreted in terms of the Yahwist traditions. The Yahwist's experience of the divine (if we may be allowed these terms) was not of a mystical sort, as far as our evidence indicates; it comes in and through the experience of the historical situation reflected upon in the light of Yahwism. Once more there is experience, personal reaction, and tradition. The Yahwist thinks through his experience and explains it in traditional terms, and yet in a style sufficiently individual to permit us to distinguish his work amidst the whole in which it has been merged. Thus we have the same general factors as in the prophets. However, the experience, instead of being a mystical contact with the divine, is a kind of reflection comparable to our own theologizing. Where is there the mark of an extraordinary divine intervention of a mystical sort? We can find none; yet this is also inspired writing.

This is not the only example of theological history writing in the Old Testament. There is also, for example, the central section of Deuteronomy, chapters 6-28. The author of these chapters had apparently had an experience almost the contrary of that of the Yahwist writer. He saw not the secure acquisition but the threatened loss of the Land. However, once more there is experience reflected on and explained in the terms of the tradition. The new circumstances are part of the divine plan as much as the old, different as they are.

Then there was someone who added chapters 4 and 29-30 to the original Deuteronomistic document and so gave the whole a more hopeful note. Once more tradition came into play, for each of these pericopes uses the Deuteronomistic covenant form, but alters it so that it ends not with threats and curses but with the hope of repentance and return (Dt 4:29-31; 30:1-14). Surely, here again is reflection on experience, the bitter experience of conquest and exile, in which traditional doctrine is applied and new understanding achieved. We could cite the com-

⁹ For the theological analysis of J, see G. von Rad, "Das formgeschichtliche Problem des Hexateuch," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (Munich, 1958) pp. 58-81.

position of the Books of Kings from official records with the history judged in terms of the Deuteronomic traditions, and other examples as well.

Thus there is no lack of evidence for the effectiveness of theological reflection on history as a source of inspired writing. We may emphasize the role of the social and the traditional in all this, but there is also a very personal note. There was a Deuteronomic school, but a work like Dt 6–28 is not the product of featureless anonymity. The author may be nameless but he is a personality. And so of other examples. Moreover, these personalities make tradition. They are inconceivable apart from the tradition from which they draw the terms for their reflections on their experience. But equally and more, the tradition after them depends on them. It could never be the same after the Yahwist or the Deuteronomist wrote.

This touches on a special problem. What of the sources used by the sacred writers and their inspiration? Were the stories the theological writers used to construct the early history of Israel inspired? They often had a religious note, connection with cult centers or rites and so on, with often a profound meaning as in Gn 2–3. But what of the history of the kings? Here use was certainly made of documents from official archives. Were these inspired? One wonders just how inspiration affected a dusty chancery clerk. On the other hand, we feel sure that the writer who supplied the frame for the central Deuteronomic document was working on already inspired material. Surely also the redactor who composed the Pentateuch from J and E, and so on.

But how do we judge the inspiration of these things? From religious origins, value of the content? These will hardly do as criteria for inspiration—at least not without qualification. Value of content tends to mean value for me, for my generation, and it is simply a fact that different epochs find true religious values in widely diverse materials. We find the cultic minutiae of Leviticus dry and uninspiring; for someone they were of paramount interest, and that for their religious significance, and the author of Hebrews could develop a rich theology around the rubrics of the cult. So also for religious origins. Whose religion? For instance, we find the idea of an inspired government clerk amusing. Nowadays not even the bureaucrat himself would openly identify himself and his function with the divine. But what of a nation

which was a true theocracy, its governor God's vicegerent in a covenant community? Even the census had a theological meaning (2 S 21:1-17). Dry lists and numbers take on new importance in such a context.

Here, perhaps, we can see how to apply the value criterion validly. We must seek the value which a source, an idea, had not for us but for the one who used it in composing an inspired text. He chose what he did because he found there a religious value, alien though it may be to our feeling in the matter. But this way leads us once again to the community. In many such instances a thing was selected precisely because of its relevance to a stage of Israelite society. So, for example, those so pedestrian lists and genealogies of temple functionaries in Chronicles; they were all important for the temple-centered, priest-governed, traditionalist postexilic community. Thus interest in firmly establishing his society was determinative in the inspired writer's work. He functioned within the process by which the developing community established its form and acquired its normative texts. Moreover, his own product was subject to the process. As he selected from his sources, so must the divinely guided community recognize his text among its rivals because it served the life of the community. The survival of inspired texts could not be a mere accident of history.

We cannot, of course, suppose without a gratuitous assumption of special revelation that the earlier writers, whether theologians of the stature of the Deuteronomist or the chancery drudge, foresaw and willed the exact use later made of their work and so understand inspiration in terms of such a finality. However, we need not fall back on a finality in the divine plan, in the divine mind only; for if it is inaccurate to submerge the person of the ancient author in a tradition, as though he had no creative personality of his own and the literary product were due simply to society, there is no doubt that he knew himself to be part of a society far more than a self-conscious modern, and he did turn his work over to a tradition carried in a society which would live after him. Just as he had used traditional materials, reworked them, and marked them by his own experience and reflection, so he knew his own work would become part of tradition to be used.

There is another aspect to this question of the inspiration of sources. We must allow for some sort of double divine influence, that on the author of the source of a historical narrative or the prophet in respect

to his oracle, and that on the later person or persons who used these things to produce a larger whole. Preoccupied with the fascinating task of historical reconstruction or the problems of a short passage of great theological richness, we often isolate a passage from its literary context and consider it in its historical or theological context. This is valid and useful, but we must not forget that it is not merely or even primarily the sentence or the pericope which is inspired; it is the literary whole. A passage has a meaning in terms of its position in a whole, even when that whole is a mosaic constructed out of source material and not written as a unit in one sitting, so to speak. This meaning is not necessarily confined to that which it had in original isolation, and it is obviously a work of authorship to determine this new meaning.

We have looked somewhat more closely at prophecy and theological history writing, but these are only two among many diverse forms in which Old Testament literature was cast. One might add the Psalter and wisdom literature, to mention obvious cases, but even as it is, the examples cited suffice to show the difficulty in seeking the specific note of inspiration in a mystical experience or in the reception of revelation or in the pertaining to a society and its traditions. All these elements occur in the production of inspired writings, but they cannot be shown to belong to inspired works *omnibus et solis*. Our theory must cover mystic and nonmystic experience, reflection and revealed knowledge, traditional and personal production.

Moreover, so far we have been concerned with the problem of inspired discourse in general and not the specific problem, which is inspiration to write. The prophet at least was moved in the first instance to transmit an oral message. How was this related to writing? Is writing accidental, an alternative means of communication which adds no special signification of its own?

THE PURPOSE OF WRITING

Here we may ask why man writes at all. There are certainly reasons extrinsic to writing as such, social and economic pressures like conditions for academic advancement, or beliefs that writing gave words an added magic and made them more potent. Such effects can be and are obtained without writing. But there are also aspects which are

bound up with the very nature of writing. The most venerable is the practical record, as in deeds and so on. This purpose of writing does not imply publication; the idea is less to make a fact known generally than to be able to confirm it if it is questioned. The aim of writing here is predominantly permanence. Another end of writing as such is the need to communicate with those who are beyond the range of the voice, either because they are in a different place or because they live in a different, future time. These two things may be separate. Writing need not imply desire for permanence in time, as, for instance, it usually does not in our personal letters. In the Bible, Jer 30:1-6 is an explicit instance of writing aimed at communication with absent persons, the exiles of Israel. In Jer 36, writing is a means of bringing the prophetic message into the royal court, where the prophet could not penetrate in person, but when the message is rejected and the scroll containing it burnt, a new writing is prepared and it is now aimed at bringing the message to the future and so vindicating the prophet.

Now, the Old Testament contains works which in their very conception demand writing and so imply its purposes. The Books of Kings, excerpts from administrative records with theological comment, are hardly conceivable except in terms of writing. The complex data, the reference to records, and the length of the treatise mean that it could hardly have been composed otherwise. Thus, when God chose to intervene and produce such a work through inspiration, the very nature of things means He would produce a writing. The same argumentation applies to the rest of theological history writing, at least insofar as the treatises are at all extensive. There may well be much shorter forms of expression which demand that they originate in writing. This would apply to complex, finely worked poetry. A sonnet of Mallarmé, for instance, is unthinkable except in terms of a written draft and long revision. A biblical instance might well be the elaborated poetic constructions of Isaiah.¹⁰

Such forms of discourse in the Old Testament imply an aspiration to a certain width of distribution and, what concerns us more, to a permanent existence in time.¹¹ When an author took the trouble to

¹⁰ See Luis Alonso Schökel, *Estudios de poética hebrea* (Barcelona, 1963).

¹¹ And existence as a work to be read and known, not simply as a record. A literary text would seldom be committed to writing for use as a record alone.

write an extensive and/or carefully ordered work, deeply thought upon, we may imagine he would want his work to live on after him. This is especially true of an ancient writing, expensive and valuable in its material self and multiplied only by a painful process of copying. It did not, in fact, offer a great opportunity for wide distribution by modern standards; primarily it had the ability to endure. Thus we may be sure that the ancient writer and the One who inspired him to this sort of work willed to communicate to future generations. That is to say, there was a will to enter into a society and its tradition, a will more clearly and sharply expressed than it would be in the handing down of oral teaching. This will is confirmed by a glance at the content of these writings. They are religious in a special, social sense. They are concerned to understand the life of God's people in history, to judge the past and guide the future. So also the prophets, on the assumption that some of their discourse could have originated only as writing, condemned, advised, and promised with a view to edifying (in the root sense) God's people in the future as well as in the prophet's own era. It seems clear that such writings aimed at becoming a part of the complex of laws, stories, songs, and so on which made up the normative tradition of the chosen people.

Such divinely inspired contribution to the tradition would enter the stream of tradition in a relatively stable form. This is especially true of the long theological writings. Their bulk and complexity would be a protection. Glosses, expansions, and such could be introduced, but fundamental alterations would be less likely than in oral material or even in a written work which was shorter or more amorphous. The significance of the whole as a unit would be a protection against fragmentation, for fragments would be less valuable than the whole, and the size would leave the work relatively immune to change caused by being introduced into a new context. So we would expect, and such is in fact the case. The large theological history treatises tend to reach us glossed and augmented, but with the basic shape of the work preserved. Among the examples adduced, the J document would be an exception to this, for it has been truncated and used as a source for a later work. This is true, but even so the essential character of the work can be seen without much trouble. Nor does such a fate disprove the implication of permanence connected with such writing. Permanence

for us is relative, and over a period of centuries writings must be interpreted and applied to new conditions—but because they are writings and so lasting that they are there to serve in the process.

The fate of shorter texts, single poems, or small anthologies would likely be somewhat different. The very complexity from which we argue to a written origin invites error on the part of scribes, and in fact the more poetic passages of the Old Testament are often the most difficult textually. Besides these accidental changes, short units are open to a use which can bring profound changes. A slight addition or omission can mean a great deal, but especially a short text can be given a new orientation by being made part of a new, larger whole.

In this respect such poems would approach the situation of a considerable portion of the prophetic discourses. These were short units and essentially something spoken. The writing down of such speeches adds a dimension beyond what is implied in the form and situation of the discourse. Perhaps here the specific meaning of writing as such can be seen most clearly.

We may exclude accidental writing—writing as a simple *ad hoc* substitute for speech which is impeded for some reason. A prophet with a sore throat might communicate an urgent message in writing, or Jeremiah might send a note into a place forbidden to him in person. Such writing does not imply anything more than oral delivery.

What, on the other hand, can be learned from the writing of a *per se* oral form in other circumstances? The prophets themselves offer some information on the point. In Is 8:1, a saying is recorded before witnesses so that it can be referred to when fulfilled. The idea seems to be to provide credentials that the prophet is a true one rather than to broadcast the message more widely in space or time. If Is 8:16 is to be taken as referring to writing rather than as a figure for the very presence of the prophet as a testimony to the nation, the meaning would be much the same: a record to show where the truth lies, over against those who follow false oracles and go to their ruin. However, the passage goes beyond the function of mere record. The purpose is to establish that Isaiah is the true prophet, just as possession of the deed establishes the true owner of a house; but there is also the object of validating the prophet's mission, showing that his words are the true guide for Israel. Thus the passage is concerned indirectly with

publication, with getting Isaiah's doctrine known and accepted. The preoccupation with the validity of the prophetic office recurs in the mention of writing in Is 30:8. For our purpose it is immaterial whether the command to write refers to the name given Egypt in 30:7, as the parallel with the recording of the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz in 8:1 would lead one to think, or the condemnation of Judah in 30:9 ff. In either case the idea is to provide a proof that the prophet saw and revealed the truth, and a proof which will be realized in a short time. So it is with Jer 36:27 ff.: the prophet's recorded words will be seen to be true shortly and so vindicate him against the king and his advisers.¹² In Hb 2:2, things are more indefinite. The prophecy will be fulfilled, but the wait may be long, as v. 3 makes clear. Nevertheless, the record will be there.

Thus the prophetic words and actions gave a certain impetus to the preservation of the prophetic oracles in writing, but the concern was mostly with more or less immediate ends. Moreover, the writing was done not to be read regularly in a later time, but to vindicate the prophet when the events predicted came about. This is more record than literature.

THE WORD COMMITTED TO TRADITION

However, this was not the end of the matter. During and after the prophet's lifetime, there was a period of collection and preservation of the oracles, a period which involved writing from the first stages.¹³ Insofar as this was merely recording of the master's words, this function must be thought of as purely secretarial, even if it meant recording memorized material rather than receiving dictation. Such recording of the prophet's words surely implies the wish to make it known to the future, and so began the process by which the prophetic sayings became part of the tradition. In these "prophetic schools" other parts of the tradition and the society which carried them began themselves

¹² On the shortness of time involved, see W. Rudolph, *Jeremiah (Handbuch zum Alten Testament* 12; Tübingen, 1958) pp. 147-49.

¹³ This is denied, especially by the Scandinavian school. See E. Nielsen, *Oral Tradition: A Modern Problem in Old Testament Introduction (Studies in Biblical Theology* 11; London, 1954). Justification for the statement in the text is found in J. van der Ploeg, O.P., "Le rôle de la tradition orale dans la transmission du texte de l'Ancien Testament," *Revue biblique* 54 (1947) 5 ff.

to affect the prophetic words. Note, however, that even in the "schools" someone, an individual, no matter how much influenced by his community, had to do the work of writing, ordering, and so forth.

Thus committed to the hands of tradition, the prophetic words were open to development—development which was inevitable as long as they were treated as something alive, something to be used, and not a dead letter merely to be admired. Such development might be little more than a matter of grouping. Does the more or less standard order—threats against the Jews, threats against the nations, oracles of consolation¹⁴—which was one result of the activity of those who passed on the sayings, have no significance as to the meaning of the prophetic words? Does it not point up the reference to the future consolation, to the Messianic hopes?

Perhaps the example is too general to be entirely convincing. There are other more sharply defined cases, for instance, Deutero-Isaiah, Is 7, Is 10:5–27. Each of these is a grouping of originally separate, shorter oracles. Here one might raise a question as to who did the grouping. If it stems from the prophet himself—and there are those who would contend it does—what does this have to do with society and tradition? For one thing, the attribution of such work to the prophet is definitely a minority opinion, and in the case of Is 10:5–27 such attribution is scarcely tenable. In any event, even if one insisted that the prophet was the compiler, he would be functioning no longer as a prophet but merely as an agent of tradition. He appears as incapable of oracles delivered with regard to the immediate situation. He has been reduced to taking old sayings either from memory or from notes and arranging them to serve new ends.

The effects of such arrangement in Deutero-Isaiah may be seen in the well-known division between chapters 40–48 and 49–55. A main difference between the two parts is that Cyrus, the magnificent deliverer of the first part, is absent from the latter part. He had not fulfilled all the hopes that had been placed in him. He had ended the Babylonian mastery, but without punishing Babylon and without bringing about a triumphant return to the Promised Land. Still, the Cyrus oracles with their glowing terms were not suppressed or altered. Again, there are the descriptions of the return itself in magnificent terms of a new and

¹⁴ So Ezekiel, Jeremiah (LXX), and to an extent Isaiah.

more wonderful Exodus. But the prophet and his followers who had experienced the Persian conquest of Babylon and its aftermath could not have missed the sorry prospects of the actual return: a trickle of stragglers so utterly unlike the new Exodus. Yet the oracles were conserved and even added to. This could not be simply due to the fact that they are prophetic oracles which promise great things to Israel. If such were the reason for keeping them as they are, why are the fine promises of the false prophets, Jeremiah's opponents, lost? Nor can such language be discounted as mere fancy and misplaced enthusiasm. Before the event perhaps, but they could continue in use and be made part of a prophetic book only on the supposition that they were seen to apply to something more than the miserable return. The poetry of the prophet was seen to imply more than the immediate historical event which was its occasion.

There is a similar sort of development to be seen through the work of the compiler in Is 7. Because of Ahaz's faithlessness, the Emmanuel prophecy has turned into a half-threat. Hence the pregnant "days" in 17b, recalling the "day of Yahweh" which in popular belief would see Yahweh avenge His people, but which the prophetic preaching had turned into a threat against that very people.¹⁵ This word was a magnet attracting other Isaian sayings about the day (7:18, 20, 21, 23), so that now "day" serves as a link word tying the whole together, and the original story and oracle have become a larger unity. Thus the oracle must be read in the light of the rest of the chapter, for, as we have said, it is the whole structure which is the inspired word of God written for us, and not merely the isolated oracle as originally given. Now, the Emmanuel oracle referred to the Syro-Ephraimite war, while the sayings in vv. 18 ff. presumably concerned the invasion of Sennacherib some thirty years later! But if we must read the whole as a unit, the limitation of the oracle to a particular event is lifted, its significance generalized. Thus the tradition-conserving agent who not only handed the oracle on but gave it its present, final context shows a belief that the words of a prophet have a wider meaning than their first application and in consequence of this belief effectively interprets the oracle simply by giving it a place in a larger structure.

Similarly in Is 10:5-27, there are several originally separate sayings.

¹⁵ Amos 5:18.

5-14 clearly are concerned with Assyria even apart from the present context.¹⁶ 15-19 are also applied to Assyria, for with their condemnation of the arrogant it is impossible to read them as they now stand following the boasting of the Assyrian as anything but the divine condemnation of the enemy of Judah. But it is equally clear that the saying was first directed to the Jews: the picture of the desolate land belongs to the imagery of the prophetic *Gerichtsrede* against the chosen people, and the reference to the devastated forest fits Palestine rather than Assyria. Especially the remnant mentioned in v. 19 makes us think of Isaiah's prediction for his own people, and this is confirmed in the present text in that the word serves as a link word to the next oracle concerning the remnant of the chosen people. The result of the grouping here is even more complex than in chapter 7. The central oracle in 10:15-19 is clearly and fittingly applied to Assyria, yet is seen as appropriate to Israel. In sum, a two-pronged signification has been given the text by the tradition which preserved and used it. Once more arrangement has produced new meaning.

However, this was not the limit of the powers of those who passed on the prophetic word. Not being harassed by the demands of critics, they could collect with a large hand. After all, why did the "schools" preserve the oracles? It was more than simple piety toward the master, more even than the desire to justify him by preserving his fulfilled predictions. These motives were not absent, but Israel was pre-eminently practical, interested in history but not in historicism. The primary motive of the collectors was the feeling that the prophetic words had present and future reference for the life of God's people. Nor was this simply insofar as they inculcated useful moral and religious lessons of a general, universally valid character. They applied as prophecy to more particular things.

This is reflected in the freedom with which new oracles were added to the collections. This is easily seen in the sections devoted to the oracles against the nations. Sayings against the enemies of a day later than that of the prophetic master were freely taken into the corpus. These would hardly have been felt to be real alterations of the prophet's meaning. It was not just that an old oracle against Assyria, for example,

¹⁶ Vv. 5-14 actually represent more than one saying, but this does not matter for our purpose.

and a newer against Babylon were placed side by side. Rather, the master had spoken out against the enemies of Yahweh, and one merely explicitated his meaning in the oracle against the present enemy.

Further, it was possible not merely to place later oracles among earlier as a kind of interpretation, but also to give new meaning to the original saying itself. This would probably be admitted most generally in the case of additions which gave an eschatological meaning to an older oracle with a historical context. This occurs, for instance, to the oracle about the sins of Samaria in Is 28 through the addition of vv. 5-6, or in Is 52:3-6, but the thing is common enough to need little discussion. Such changes are not confined to putting in an eschatological meaning; an oracle can receive a new or a wider application by addition, change, or complete reworking. One example is the extension of a saying originally directed to one of the two Jewish kingdoms, so that it applied to both, as in Jeremiah's famous promise of a new covenant in 31:31-34. From the context we see that the original destination was the kingdom of Israel, but the phrase "to the house of Judah" has been added to extend it to the other kingdom.¹⁷

Thus the sayings of the prophets were conserved and adapted with a view to their ever-present reality and concrete reference. They were possessions of the community to be used by it. Here we meet the social element, the group in which the tradition lived and reacted to new experience. The tradition did not just pass the prophetic word on; to a considerable extent it formed it.

It is obvious that all this has its repercussions on the problem of meaning. Indeed, inspiration can hardly be discussed apart from the problem of the sense of Scripture. It is, after all, meaningful discourse which is inspired. In our case it is clear that the Israel which produced the prophetic writings saw in them a meaning or meanings beyond a narrowly conceived *intentio auctoris* in the sense of what might be the very limited horizon of the human originator of the writing.¹⁸ For Israel, for the "prophetic schools," the prophetic word had an applica-

¹⁷ E. Vogt, S.J., "Textumdeutungen im Buche Ezechiel," in *Sacra pagina* 1 (supra n. 2) pp. 471 ff., gives more examples of change by interpolation.

¹⁸ Surely the conception of authorship in a very individualistic sense has encouraged preoccupation with the intention of the first writer. If more than one person had a role in making up a text, more than one intention could be involved.

tion beyond the immediate application which seems to have been the concern of the prophet.

Further, the argument is not limited to the prophetic books. Even a well-constructed whole like the central part of Deuteronomy could and did undergo a certain amount of reinterpretation at the hands of the tradition, for the addition of chapters 4 and 29–30 definitely affects the doctrine as a whole. The consideration of the problem of the use of inspired sources to form a new whole, that is, effectively to alter and extend their meaning, points in the same direction. The effects of compilation and organization upon meaning cannot be attributed to the fact that a book was formed gradually by a “school,” as though this were the only means to such results. The same results can come from the work of a single person working with sources.

In fact, we must recognize that the problem of the meaning of texts is not so simple as is often supposed. Literature—or better, discourse, for the problem is wider than the field of belles-lettres implied by the word literature—conserved in texts is not a dead thing. It has a kind of vitality of its own, a power which cannot be limited simply to what the author consciously intended. This is true of any such discourse, and the better the composition the more the meaning. This is not a mystique aimed at justifying a spiritual sense; it is simply a principle of sober scholars derived from the study of modern, secular literature and its meaning,¹⁹ and it is clear enough on a little reflection. A text cannot be bounded by the author’s conscious understanding and intention. Apparently Housman did not have anything in his head at all when, after a good lunch and a pint of beer, some of his loveliest lines popped unbidden into his head. And it was not simply a jest when Browning denied understanding some of his own work. Or consider the classicist eighteenth-century’s view of Hamlet, that of the romantics, and that of the Freudian critics. Must we affirm that these are all aberrations, that the play does not mean any of these?

On another level, what of the formative texts of a society or culture? These are especially significant for us because, though there is great literature and almost everything else in the Old Testament, the central concern of its books is the life of God’s people. At once history, ideal,

¹⁹ See, for instance, R. Wellek and A. Warren, *Theory of Literature* (London, 1961) pp. 148, 156–57.

constitution, it is definitely for a community. So, for example, are the Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address in America. They are documents from which scientific history can glean certain ideas about conditions and events of their time, but they are much more than that. They have an intentional and emotional resonance beyond what Jefferson or Lincoln had in mind. Must we deny that these meanings come legitimately from the texts? I think not. With luck and genius the authors made words into vital, richly meaningful entities. If this is so in the cases cited and in many others, why not in the Scriptures too?

Writings of the sort, concerned with social organisms, have a complex intention. They do not merely record facts, even though they be deeply involved in the realities of their time and place. They present an ideal and a program to a social unit which exists in time. The ideal can be attained, the program implemented, only in stages. That is to say, the ideas presented are not entirely verified in the first instance, in the social structure which exists before the author's eyes and to which he applies his words. The original United States with slavery retained, to take but one example, verified the principles of the preamble to the Declaration less exactly than it did in a later era, yet the text applied to the American social unit at both stages. So too, to take but one important example, a whole strain of Old Testament literature is concerned with the Davidic monarchy. It is concerned with the reality, the actual, defective realization. Equally and more, it is applied to a better implementation, for it aimed at the ideal. The birth of Hezekiah might fulfil Isaiah's prophecy of Emmanuel, but it did not exhaust it, for the ideal of God with His people was still not implemented as it might be.

COMMUNITY UTILITY

Here the question of scriptural meaning throws some light on the relation of inspiration and society. The conception of a social origin of inspiration in terms of an impersonal source is inadequate. The great streams of Old Testament revelation are deeply marked by personalities: the prophets, the Deuteronomist, the Yahwist. Whether we know their names or not is immaterial; the discourse they produced is theirs and no one else's, a product of personal reaction to experience, mystical or ordinary.

At the same time, these experiences and these reactions took place within a tradition and a society. Their expression, with all its personal character, reflected this. In itself, however, this is true to some degree of all literature. A traditional source in this sense is no more a specifying note of inspired writing than is mystical experience. Is it perhaps some peculiar character in the society and tradition in which the Old Testament arose that marks it off as the word of God? The society was indeed the people of God, and in our examples the Old Testament texts arose out of reactions to the historical experiences of this people. More, the interpretation and expression of this experience is in terms of Yahwist doctrine. Is it perhaps this explicit connection with Yahweh's community which specifies our inspired books?

If this is so, what are we to make of the Old Testament wisdom literature? The objection is classic: much of Israel's wisdom reflects a common Oriental tradition and universal human experience. There is no explicit reference to the people of Yahweh and its special, divinely guided historical experience.²⁰ Moreover, what of expressions which are incomplete in themselves and need further development? One thinks of Qohelet and even Job, which raise doubts about received ideas, yet manage to reach no solution but end questioningly or even negatively. Still, this is inspired literature. To be sure, later wisdom writing does concern itself with the people of Yahweh. The prologue of Sirach is an explicit statement of a process we have found at the origins of theological history writing, reflection on Israel's history in the light of its religious tradition. But this will not save the case; our theory of inspiration must still account for the rest of the wisdom literature, where the Yahwist reference is lacking.

It would seem that the position of such writings can be understood only in terms of the object and value they possessed, the use that could be made of them. If not explicitly from, they were certainly for, Yahweh's chosen community. They worked to edify the people, and this was confirmed in experience. Hence, if they lack an explicitly Yahwist source, they have an explicitly Yahwist end, and so a place in the tradition of Yahweh's people. This is a link to some other factors: the implications of writing as such; the meaning of texts, especially

²⁰ This is not to deny a *de facto* Yahwist origin, but as long as this is not explicit it cannot serve as a distinguishing note of the text as inspired.

those which aim to build a society; the implications of the processes through which Old Testament books were formed. All these emphasize the importance of the place the writings had in the community which existed and developed over extended time.

It is revealing to ask in this regard why the community preserved some books and not others. The fact is certain. We know from references in the Bible itself that ancient Israel had collections of songs and stories which are lost. Why these and not our historical books? Surely because these and not the others nourished the life of the community. To cite an example from another kind of writing, the words of Jeremiah were preserved, those of his opponent prophets disappeared, because his were verified in the historical experience of the Jewish community. This is not to equate inspiration and canonicity. Jeremiah's words as written and handed on were already inspired, but it was through the community's experience that this was recognized and their meaning appreciated. This was no passive assent to an experienced *adaequatio prophetiae ad rem*. The words were true and useful, precious guides for the community. This meant use and, as we have seen, development as new phases in the life of the community were met.

For us, accustomed to dogma and religious authority, this production of inspired writing, this separating out of what was valid among competing texts, may seem amorphous and insecure. Is this not, in fact, the point? Why does the divinely chosen community produce inspired writing? Is it not precisely because it is relatively unformed and unstructured? Not yet equipped with definitive norms and definitive authorities, its own life, its own utility had to be the criterion which guided the production and recognition of the inspired, and utility is defined in terms of end. As the growing community of God, Israel was subject to a special divine intervention which guided it to its end. This was a special divine work different from providence, conservation, and so on; otherwise Israel could not have been the chosen people in any meaningful sense, its history a special history of salvation, for all peoples and all history are under the control of the ordinary providence of God. Indeed, a divinely chosen society as yet lacking definitive norms and organs had need of continuous special divine intervention to urge on and guide the process which would terminate in the true Israel.

Given the nature of society, its existence over an extended period of time, one instrument of such divine guidance must surely be writing. With no regularly constituted teaching office, nothing else could provide norms and continuity, unless we want to posit constant direct revelation. And this is what analysis reveals. God nurtures His people, and it is within and for this divinely guided community, through a complex process in which the community itself is deeply involved, that the inspired books come to be.

Before concluding, it is necessary to note that some of this coincides with Rahner's theory of the inspiration of the New Testament. I believe, however, that it is simply a result of the Old Testament data. I have not had Rahner's formulations in mind, nor have I sought to verify them in the Old Testament.

Rahner himself distinguishes the Old from the New Testament. He points out that the Old Testament community was not the final, definitive object of divine choice and so could not produce and recognize a definitive collection of inspired writings.²¹ This could be done only by the definitive society, as it alone possessed a definitive criterion. However, the distinction is not absolute. If not final, still the Old Testament community was the object of an extraordinary predefinition antecedent to man's acts.²² It was thus specially chosen and it was the object of continued divine intervention to guide it. True, in one sense the Old Covenant was conditional and liable to be ended, and the old institutions were temporary. This latter is inevitable in a developing organism. Instruments needed for one stage of growth may often not be useful in another stage or in maturity. Thus old institutions had to disappear when the divinely directed growth of the people of God had no more need of them. Even the conditional and undetermined character of some aspects of the old, the possibility which was actually realized that some institutions would not bring about the desired result, even this is to be attributed to the fact that the Old Testament people of God was growing, and there is a certain tension in all developing organisms. Just because they are developing, that is, have not reached definitive form, they are open not merely to the loss of elements needed at an earlier stage, but also to divergent developments. Not yet

²¹ Rahner, *op. cit.* (supra n. 1) pp. 41, 51-54.

²² Dt 9:4-5.

fixed, they can turn out to be good or to be bad. In brief, they can fail. This tension is reflected in the Deuteronomic form of the covenant, with its threat of rejection if the demands of the covenant are not fulfilled, and the terrible rejection is shown to be actual in the prophetic preaching of judgment. However, Israel was no merely natural society, and if it suffered from the tensions of any organism, it also enjoyed the unconditioned promise to Abraham and David which guaranteed its permanence in some sense. More, the passing institutions and even the failures, like the covenant which was broken, are not mere facts of history. They have an enduring, present meaning and value, for in the constant Christian tradition they speak of Christ and His Church.

This simply repeats in a new context what we have seen, that the Old Testament texts from their very nature and mode of growth are not closed within themselves. They look to something to come. They belong to God's people, at a lower stage of development it is true, but still specially guided so that it could produce and discern God's word in the sacred texts, if not in definitive, still in significant, valid form. It is a matter of record that it did so, producing and preserving the inspired and dropping other writings.