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WHAT SHOULD THEY BE SAYING ABOUT BIBLICAL INSPIRATION? A NOTE ON THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

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Since the promulgation of Vatican II's Dei verbum, *exegetes and theologians have paid scant attention to the subject of biblical inspiration and the theology of inspiration. The author argues that developing a theology of inspiration first requires location of the doctrine within its proper context, namely, the doctrine of revelation. Next, inspiration needs to be carefully distinguished from revelation so as to clarify how the word of God may be said to find expression in human words.*

IN THE 50 YEARS since Vatican II promulgated *Dei verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (1965), theological debate on biblical inspiration—in Catholic circles at least—has fallen silent.[1] During that time, the Catholic academy at large—both exegetes and biblical and

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[1] Of the works published on this subject, almost all are concerned with the history of biblical inspiration and the topic's past, as if the principal inquiry was on the question, what *were* they saying about biblical inspiration? During this time, the main contributions were, in chronological order: Richard F. Smith, "Inspiration and Inerrancy," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968) 499–514; James Tunstead Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique* (New York: Cambridge University, 1969); John J. Scullion, *The Theology of Inspiration* (Cork: Mercier, 1970); Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 1972); Gerald O'Collins, *Fundamental Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1981) 225–36; Raymond E. Brown, "'And the Lord Said'? Biblical Reflections on Scripture as the Word of God," *Theological Studies* 42 (1981) 3–19; Thomas A. Hoffman, "Inspiration, Normativeness, Canonicity, and the Unique Sacred Character of the Bible," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982) 447–69; Robert Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible: Theories of Inspiration, Revelation, and the Canon of Scripture* (New York:

systematic theologians—has tended to bypass the foundational question of why and how we can call the Scriptures the inspired word of God.[2] The theology of inspiration appears to be taken as a settled question; thus one may proceed directly with the more immediate and pressing task of interpreting the biblical text and applying it to the life of the church.[3] Indeed, as early as 1958, Karl Rahner lamented:

> We could hardly maintain that theological interest among Catholics today is focused upon the problem of the inspiration of the Scriptures. To be honest, we must admit that the average Catholic exegete, while not denying or questioning the inspiration of the Bible, simply leaves it aside in his exegetical work; he seems unable to make it relevant to his own labors.[4]

Paulist, 1985); Raymond F. Collins, "Inspiration," in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* 1023–33; Helmut Gabel, *Inspirationsverständnis im Wandel: Theologische Neuorientierung im Umfeld des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1991); Gerald O'Collins, *Retrieving Fundamental Theology: The Three Styles of Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1993) 127–35; Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999); *Scrittura ispirata: Atti del simposio internazionale sull'ispirazione promosso dall'Ateneo Pontificio "Regina Apostolorum,"* ed. Antonio Izquierdo (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002); Denis Farkasfalvy, "How To Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration?," *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006) 231–54; Robert J. Hill, "Reading Symbols, and Writing Words: A Model for Biblical Inspiration," *New Blackfriars* 89 (2008) 22–38; Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: the Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2009) 153–73; Denis Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration and Interpretation: A Theological Introduction to Sacred Scripture* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2010); and Gerald O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Toward a New Fundamental Theology* (New York: Oxford University, 2011) 216–33. From the Reformed tradition, see John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (New York: Cambridge University, 2003) 5–41.

[2] For reasons underlying such a changed approach to both exegesis and inspiration during the 19th and early 20th centuries, see David M. Stanley, "The Concept of Biblical Inspiration," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 13 (1958) 65–95, at 65–71. For a more recent account see Gabel, *Inspirationsverständnis im Wandel*, esp. 99–103.

[3] In this regard, much literature was produced on biblical interpretation. For two quite different introductions to the scope of the inquiry, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* (New York: Paulist, 2008); José Granados, Carlos Granados, and Luis Sánchez-Navarro, eds., *Opening up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). See also Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC), *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), and the commentary on it: Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's* The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*: Text and Commentary* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1995); and the extensive bibliography in O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 253 n.18.

[4] Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, trans. Charles H. Henkey (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961; German original 1958) 6.

And despite the significance of *Dei verbum*, even a brief review of the post-Vatican II literature on inspiration indicates that both exegetes and theologians have for the most part left the issue untreated.[5]

The question, however, is far from settled. In what follows, I intend the term "biblical inspiration" to be understood as the charism or special impulse of the Holy Spirit given to particular authors to compose and preserve in writing certain experiences of the event of divine revelation. But such an understanding, at least in practical application, may be seen as of little consequence for the academy today, at least judging by the dearth of publications on the topic. As a result of this neglect, the theology of inspiration remains clouded and at times confused.[6] This has significant implications for those foundational questions that concern fundamental

[5] In "The Inspiration of Scripture: A *Status Quaestionis*," *Letter and Spirit* 6 (2010) 281–314, Matthew Levering makes the case for the neglect of biblical inspiration by examining a "representative sampling" of the relatively few Catholic publications that, since 1965, have taken up the topic. He divides the literature into four categories. The first is the type of publication that sets out the leading theories of biblical inspiration developed during the 19th and 20th centuries, at least until the 1960s. Levering's representative choice is Burtchaell's *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration*, which he summarizes to lay out the historical terms of the inspiration debate, as well as to demonstrate the wealth and multiplicity of Catholic scholarship on inspiration that was produced up to *Dei verbum*. The second category considers the evangelical Protestant perspective. The third is the body of church documents on biblical inspiration from Vatican II onward. They include *Dei verbum*, the PBC's *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993); Pope John Paul II's April 23, 1993, address to that commission; and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994). Levering's final category is entitled "Whither the Catholic Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration," where he notes that "the great majority of Catholic exegetes and theologians have ignored the doctrine of inspiration," and gives an account of the work of Denis Farkasfalvy, one of the few Catholic scholars presently writing on biblical inspiration.

[6] Since the publication of Levering's essay, a valuable contribution has been provided by Gerald O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* (2011) 216–33, on the relations between revelation, Scripture, and inspiration; and by Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration and Interpretation* (2010). Below I return to both contributions. Since 2010, several other essays that refer to biblical inspiration have also been published. Levering's article appears in *For the Sake of Our Salvation: The Truth and Humility of God's Word*, a special issue of *Letter and Spirit* 6 (2010) dedicated to the topic of the inspiration and truth of the Scriptures. Relative to Levering's contribution, however, the articles that comprise the remainder of the volume are comparatively soft, and so I do not consider them here; they neither clarify the state of the inspiration question nor advance the terms of the debate. Similarly, from the perspective of Catholic fundamental theology, Mark J. Zia's *What Are They Saying about Biblical Inspiration?* (New York: Paulist, 2011) provides summaries of Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration* (1969), and Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (1972) but introduces no recent work. The book could well be entitled "What *Were* They Saying about Biblical Inspiration?".

theology and undergird biblical theology.[7] These questions include: (1) How are the Scriptures related to revelation, and how may they be said to authentically mediate the original divine self-communication in the economy of salvation? (2) In what sense may the Scriptures be said to be the word of God? (3) What, therefore, may be said to be the proper nature of the Christian Scriptures? And (4) how may one assess the human contribution to, and account for the human qualities of, the Scriptures, including their time-conditioned nature, literary forms, textual difficulties, imperfections, the long history of composition, diversity and even disagreement among the books, cultural contexts, anachronistic attitudes, and theological presumptions.

Accordingly, what is at stake is nothing less than a coherent and reasonable account of biblical inspiration. It is the foundation on which three subsequent questions depend, namely: (1) What is meant by the saving truth of the Bible, as a logical consequence of its divinely inspired character? (2) How do we account theologically for the formation and significance of the canon, that is, the authoritative, authentic, and normative list of inspired Scriptures. And (3) how should the Scriptures be interpreted, given the prior, informed understandings of their inspiration, truth, and canonicity?[8]

Given the complexity of these interlocking issues, my aim here is simply to clarify the question of biblical inspiration. I begin by locating the doctrine in its proper context; then by a series of negative theses, I seek to clarify what inspiration is *not*. In the second section, I examine the tendency to confuse inspiration with revelation, and attempt to situate the doctrine of inspiration in the wider reality of revelation. Third, in posing the question, What should they be saying about inspiration?, I examine the fruits of *Dei verbum* as a means to frame basic responses to that question. In the fourth and final section, I consider five areas that require further clarification. My aim throughout is to set out thematically what *should* be said about biblical inspiration, as a means to clarify how it

[7] The neglect of the theology of biblical inspiration was also a major concern of Pope Benedict XVI, who recently singled out the need for "a fuller and more adequate study" of both inspiration and the truth of Scripture: see Benedict's *Verbum Domini*, his postsynodal apostolic exhortation (September 30, 2010) (Boston: Pauline, 2010) no. 19; "Ad Praesidem Pontificiae Commissionis Biblicae occasione eius plenariae sessionis" (May 2, 2011), *Acta apostolicae sedis* (AAS) 103 (2011) 356–58; and "Ad Praesidem Pontificiae Commissionis Biblicae occasione annuae plenariae sessionis (April 18, 2012)," *AAS* 104 (2012) 442–43.

[8] On the common, Catholic tradition about inspiration, see Johannes Beumer, *Die katholische Inspirationslehre zwischen Vatikanum I und II: Kirchliche Dokumente im Licht der theologischen Diskussion* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966) 99; and O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 234–64.

is possible that the word of God may be understood to find expression in human words.

PRELIMINARY APPROACHES: BIBLICAL INSPIRATION AND THE CASE FOR CLARITY

The problem of biblical inspiration affects the nature and credibility of a central belief of the Christian faith, namely, that the Scriptures have their provenance in God and therefore in some way constitute a record of the transmission of divine self-communication or revelation. Accordingly, the topic is properly situated within the wider arena of fundamental theology. Within fundamental theology, inspiration arises as a foundational issue that falls under the topic of the mediation, preservation, and transmission of the human experience of revelation. Despite the clear relation between revelation on the one hand and biblical inspiration and the Scriptures on the other, however, inspiration must be distinguished from the broader horizon of revelation within which it is located.[9] It is tempting to collapse divine revelation into biblical inspiration, yet for reasons to which I will return, revelation may not be univocally identified with inspiration and its result, the sacred Scriptures.

The concept of inspiration is rather more restricted. It is the special charism conferred on certain authors who received a special, positive impulse from the Holy Spirit to compose documents that recorded certain experiences of the divine self-communication. While the authors may have experienced the divine self-communication throughout their lives, the inspiration to write was transitory.[10] In this way, the prophets' and apostles' proclamations through the experience of revelation (situated historically) attain a new quality: the availability and permanence of the experience for future generations, through the inspiration to write.

Biblical inspiration, therefore, marks the influence of the Holy Spirit in the transition from the occurrence of revelation itself to its transmission and preservation in manuscripts. Inspiration may be said to be a constitutive charism of the church, because the essence of inspiration is not the resultant inspired quality of a given literary text, but the direct and active impulse of the Holy Spirit, who acts upon authors during the entire process of a work's composition—from initial thought to final redaction. Hence, the charism ensures that human powers are effectively

[9] For an overview of inspiration located in the context of fundamental theology, see Rino Fisichella, "Inspiration," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, ed. René Latourelle and Rino Fisichella (New York: Crossroad, 1994) 515–18.

[10] See O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 56–57.

assisted to the extent that the resulting texts will, by some means, serve the divine purpose.[11]

To demonstrate the nature of inspiration with sufficient clarity, certain distinctions must be drawn between inspiration and related issues of fundamental theology. I have already noted the need to distinguish inspiration from revelation, and, given the significance of the connection between the two categories, it is a topic that requires further examination. Second, faith must be distinguished from revelation. While divine revelation reaches its goal and completion when it is recognized and accepted through the faith of believers, made possible by the Holy Spirit, certain believers were endowed with another special gift, the charism of inspiration to write and compile the Scriptures.[12] Third, the truth of the Scriptures is a consequence of the charism of inspiration, rather than being identical with it. If the Scriptures are inspired by God, then it is as a result of the authors' special impulse to compile and write that the resulting literary texts may be said to express truth.[13] Similarly, a fourth distinction to be drawn is between inspiration and canonicity. The question of canonicity—the list of sacred Scriptures recognized by the church as normative for Christian faith and practice—is subsequent to, and goes beyond, the stage of special inspiration in the formation of the Scriptures.[14] Finally, I must again note that, while inspiration and exegesis are closely related, if one accepts that the Scriptures constitute the transmission or record of divine self-communication, inspiration is a reality prior to exegesis.[15] Accordingly, in the search for clarity, my project focuses on inspiration understood as the special impulse of the Holy Spirit on the author to write—a charism that assists the composition of the literary work until its completion.

[11] Avery Dulles, "The Authority of Scripture: A Catholic Perspective," in *Scripture in the Jewish and Christian Traditions: Authority, Interpretation, Relevance*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) 14–40, at 23.

[12] Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped for: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University, 1994) 181.

[13] Ignace de la Potterie, "La vérité de la Sainte Ecriture et l'histoire du salut d'après la Constitution dogmatique 'Dei verbum,'" *Nouvelle revue théologique* 98 (1966) 149–69, at 152–53; Alois Grillmeier, "The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) 3:199–246, at 236–37.

[14] Raymond E. Brown and Raymond F. Collins, "Canonicity," in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* 1034–54, at 1036–37.

[15] On this difficult and controversial issue see Ignace de la Potterie, "Biblical Exegesis: A Science of Faith," in *Opening up the Scriptures* 30–64, at 35, 42; Fitzmyer, *Interpretation of Scripture*; and Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl, "(Mis)Reading the Face of God: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 513–27.

THE NEW CONTEXT OF REVELATION AND THE STATUS OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

The first major source of confusion attending the problem of the nature of the sacred texts is the identification of the inspired Scriptures, and specifically the charism of inspiration, with revelation. Rather, inspiration and revelation are two distinct, albeit related, realities. The distinction between them was suggested initially by Thomas Aquinas and subsequently clarified by the First Vatican Council.[16] But Leo XIII's 1893 encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, issued in reaction to the "modernist" controversy over historical method and biblical criticism, mandated a narrowed, neo-Thomist understanding of inspiration. On this understanding, inspiration was consequently invoked to imply that Scripture constitutes a set of propositional truths or doctrines—ones closely associated with the propositional model of revelation emphasized in Vatican I's constitution *Dei Filius*.[17] In *Providentissimus*, Leo XIII wrote:

> Because the Holy Spirit employed men as his instruments, we cannot therefore say that it was these inspired instruments who, perchance, have fallen into error, and not the primary author. For, by supernatural power, he so moved and impelled them to write—he was so present to them—that the things which he ordered, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could not be said that he was the Author of the entire Scripture.[18]

[16] *Summa theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) 2–2, q. 173, a. 4. Lessius seems to have been the first theologian to clearly distinguish the two: see Carlo Maria Martini, *Il messaggio della salvezza: Introduzione generale*, ed. Carlo Maria Martini and Pietro Bonatti (Turin: Leumann, 1968) 59. See *Dei Filius*, chap. 2: *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 43rd ed., compiled by Heinrich Denzinger, rev., enl., ed. Peter Hünermann with Helmut Hoping; English ed., ed. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012) (hereafter DH) 3004–7; and Luis Alonso Schökel, *The Inspired Word: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature*, trans. Francis Martin (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965) 55–56.

[17] DH 3004–6; René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation: Including a Commentary on the Constitution "Dei Verbum" of Vatican II* (New York: Alba House, 1966) 265–66. On propositional revelation, see O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 65–66.

[18] DH 3293. In *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920), Benedict XV adds: "Thus [St. Jerome] asserts that the books of the Bible were composed at the inspiration or suggestion or even at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; even that they were written and edited by him. Yet he never questions but that the individual authors of these books worked in full freedom under the divine inspiration, each of them in accordance with his individual nature and character. Thus he is not merely content to affirm as a general principle—what indeed pertains to all the sacred writers—that they followed the Spirit of God as they wrote, so that God is the principal cause of all that Scripture means and says; but he also accurately describes what pertains to each individual writer" (DH 3650).

On this account, as well as that of *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920), we see that the magisterium implied that the Scriptures constitute a collection of (inerrant) propositions or affirmations. It was not until Pius XII's *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) clearly pointed out the existence of different literary genres in the Bible that the magisterium was able to encourage a move away from a sense of Scripture as a series of inerrant propositions.[19] Indeed, once it is clearly understood that the Bible is made up of prayers, poems, hymns, and proverbs (to mention only some of the literary genres) and is not simply history and doctrine, one may understand textual meaning to be analogous. Moreover, without the notion that the meaning of a poem, for example, may differ from that of a proverb, inspiration could be characterized as a mere presupposition of inerrancy. Yet to suggest that inspiration necessarily presupposes inerrancy misunderstands the true nature of inspiration, and the suggestion gives rise to the tendency to confuse inspiration with revelation.

The promulgation of *Dei verbum* at Vatican II officially and clearly articulated the relationship between inspiration and revelation. There, the error of identifying inspiration with revelation was corrected by properly locating inspiration within the broader context of revelation. Chapter 1 of the constitution addresses the nature and characteristics of divine revelation, which is now understood to be historical, personal, and Christocentric.[20] By first establishing revelation as an event of God's self-communication in history, the document is then able to explain how that single "wellspring" is preserved and transmitted to future generations in history by the mutual relationship between tradition and Scripture.[21] On this new understanding, inspiration is now characterized as a charism dependent upon and subsequent to revelation, and not an identical reality.[22]

The clarity provided by the distinction between divine revelation and biblical inspiration depends on *Dei verbum*'s conception of revelation itself. Revelation is understood as an interpersonal event and encounter that is the all-embracing reality of God's self-revelation as Truth itself.[23] On this account, revelation is the free and redeeming self-manifestation of God who both invites and enables humanity to enter into a personal relationship with God; it occurs within the dynamic progress of history, which is also the economy of God's salvation of humanity. Within that economy, all revelation prefigures and anticipates the full revelation,

[19] DH 3830.
[20] *Dei verbum* (DV) nos. 1–6. See Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* 453–72.
[21] DV nos. 7–10.
[22] See also Gerald O'Collins, "Vatican II and Fundamental Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 74 (2009) 379–88, at 387–88.
[23] See Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* 458–59, 462.

namely, the incarnation of the eternal Word made flesh in Christ. All other revelation by "deeds and words"—in nature (Rom 1:20), in history, and in prophetic and action speech—is directed to the *personal* revelation in Christ.[24] Revelation, therefore, is relational: it is primarily identified neither with content nor with sets of divinely authenticated truths previously unknown but later manifested supernaturally as doctrinal propositions and otherwise inaccessible to human reason. Revelation is therefore the salvific event of the divine self-revelation and self-communication that is the fullness of both Truth and Love. It is an event of dialogical encounter between God and human persons within the concreteness of human history and experience,[25] the high-point of which is the incarnation of the Word, the resurrection of the crucified Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.[26]

The very structure of *Dei verbum* suggests the proper relationship between revelation and inspiration. The new perspective on revelation set down in chapter 1 makes possible a developed understanding of the mutual relationship between tradition and Scripture (delineated in chapter 2). Because inspiration now arises from this mutual relationship, the new context of revelation is able to provide a more accurate conception of biblical inspiration. Revelation as an event in the history of salvation is not the same reality as inspiration understood as the special impulse of the Holy Spirit. Rather, as participation in the economy of revelation, inspiration makes possible the preservation and transmission of an account of divine self-communication in history.[27]

Now located in its new context, the charism of inspiration may be said to work in the following way. Within the broader framework of the divine economy, the word (lower case) of God and then the Word (upper case) enter human history. Prophets, apostles, and others participate in the experience of the interpersonal event of the divine self-revelation, and it is this experience that they proclaim and share. By the operation of the charism of inspiration, such living experience of God's self-communication

[24] DV no. 2; see also Latourelle, "Revelation," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* 905–61, at 930–47.

[25] Lieven Boeve, "Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition: Lessons from Vatican II's Constitution *Dei verbum* for Contemporary Theology," *International Journal for Systematic Theology* 13 (2011) 416–33, at 420–22.

[26] DV nos. 2, 4, esp. 4: "To see Jesus is to see his Father [Jn 14:9]. For this reason Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious Resurrection from the dead and final sending of the Spirit of truth" (DH 4204).

[27] DV no. 11. See also Grillmeier, "Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture" 230.

is committed to writing by certain, selected human authors. This happens under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and is completed under the Spirit's guidance to preserve and transmit God's own self-communication. The written record of revelation, now rendered accessible in human words through inspiration, is made available for future generations in a permanent form. The charism of inspiration itself and the resulting written Scriptures differ from the reality of the actual, living event of the divine self-communication. The Scriptures are instead a permanent record that arises from a participation in revelation.[28]

During the period of foundational revelation ending with the apostolic age, God's self-communication was available to all believers, although the charism of inspiration was given only to certain believers. It was these who received a special impulse from the Holy Spirit to write down what they—within their communities of faith—had experienced of the event of revelation. Moreover, while the event of revelation was experienced by the writers of the sacred texts throughout their lives, the charism of inspiration was periodic. That is to say, unlike revelation, the inspiration to write lasted only during the period of textual composition.[29] Revelation, then, constitutes living events in the history of salvation and may not be identified *tout court* with inspiration.

For these reasons, revelation understood as a living, personal event in history, means that inspiration may not be conceived of as some sort of Docetic reality of divine proclamation and human transcription, where the actual circumstances of the experience and proclamation of the event are ignored. Such was the legacy of the neo-Scholastic, intellectualist school, whose literalist and univocal approach in the manuals of theology provided "proof" of biblical inspiration, thereby demonstrating each and every book of the Catholic Bible to be inspired.[30] In this model, inspiration was defined as a supernatural power working on the authors of the scriptural texts, who became instruments that penned solely, exactly, and completely what God had communicated to their minds.[31] As a consequence,

[28] Albert Vanhoye, "The Reception in the Church of the Dogmatic Constitution 'Dei verbum,'" in *Opening up the Scriptures* 104–25, at 105–7.

[29] O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 216–18.

[30] For examples of the manualist approach in the Roman schools, see Hildebrand Höpfl, *Introductio generalis in Sacram Scripturam*, 5th ed., ed. Benno Gut (Rome: Arnodo, 1950); Augustin Bea, *De inspiratione et inerrantia Sacrae Scripturae: Notae historicae et dogmaticae* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954); and Sebastian Tromp, *De Sacrae Scripturae inspiratione*, 6th ed. (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1962).

[31] See Alonso Schökel's treatment of instrumental causality in *Inspired Word* 58–66. Representative of the position is Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, promulgated on November 18, 1893, especially at DH 3293. See n. 18 above.

the manualist model abstracted the sacred writers from their human state during the period of inspiration in order to record mechanically the literal, textual statements of God. Thus the whole biblical text was taken as God's unalloyed, inspired composition, perfectly constituted in all its parts by divine and historical truths, and was therefore a source of objective propositions of revelation.[32]

After *Dei verbum*, however, revelation is more accurately understood as Christ's personal showing forth of himself, who is all Truth. It is an event grounded in the reality of history and brought to its fullness with Christ's incarnation. As a participation in revelation, inspiration is understood to have a more human and historical character, particularly in regard to the relationship between divine origins and the nature of human writing.[33] Revelation and inspiration, then, are discrete but related realities. The first constitutes the event of the divine self-communication in history. The second makes possible its preservation and transmission for future generations, through the written witness of authors inspired by the Holy Spirit. And it is precisely the preservation and transmission of revelation in Scripture that establishes the latter's true nature. After Pierre Benoit, then, we may conclude that inspiration is both the result and the aim of revelation, but the two realities are not the same.[34] Three consequences issue from this new perspective. First, both tradition and the inspired Scriptures are connected to the original, climactic event of God's self-revelation by the apostles and their witness. Any historical separation of Scripture and tradition is overcome by the recognition that the gospel is the single source of the saving truth.[35] They spring from the one source of revelation as an organic unity that then manifests itself in two modes. The first mode, tradition, "takes the Word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the apostles and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known."[36] As Ratzinger observes, "The fact that 'tradition' exists is primarily based on the non-identity of the two realities, 'revelation' and 'scripture.'"[37] The place of the inspired

[32] Gnuse (*Authority of the Bible* 22–33) provides an excellent survey of the strict verbal inspiration in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions.

[33] For a study of the new context of revelation, see Ghislain Lafont, "La Constitution 'Dei verbum' et ses précédents conciliaires," *Nouvelle revue théologique* 110 (1988) 58–73.

[34] Pierre Benoit, "Inspiration and Revelation," *Concilium* 10 (1965) 5–14, at 10.

[35] DV no. 7.

[36] DV no. 9 (DH 4212).

[37] Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (London: Burns & Oates, 1966; German original, 1965) 35–37.

Scriptures in the course of handing down, or transmission, is privileged: Scripture "is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit"; tradition passes on the word of God, as the apostles preserved, interpreted, and explained it.[38] The conception of revelation as personal event in history means that inspiration and the inspired Scriptures originate from and witness to the event of revelation, and thus exist in mutual relationship with tradition.[39] Grounded in history, the charism of inspiration, with tradition, belongs to the realm of the preservation and transmission of revelation and not to its constitution.

Second, the nature of inspiration is considered in its own right, and not as a mere function of the inerrant truth of Scripture. Rather than being subordinated to the doctrine of inerrancy, the restored priority of inspiration enables the affirmation of the human contribution to the authorship of the Scriptures without derogating from the latter's divine provenance and character. It overcomes the reduction of biblical inspiration to a catena of truths, arrived at by a supernatural knowledge unaffected by the concrete realities of the economy of salvation. Instead, because the inspired Scriptures arise from the personal, concrete circumstances of the human authors' experience and proclamation of revelation, they themselves are imbued with the same conditions of the historical economy.[40] Accordingly, it may be said that not only is God the author of the inspired Scriptures, but that the human writers are also true authors of the sacred texts, with all their attendant cultural, historical, and personal limitations.[41]

Given this renewed approach, it need not be stated explicitly that each single declarative statement in the inspired Scriptures constitutes truth. Rather, truth is more properly located within the canon as a whole, rather than within discrete passages. We may say that the foundational truth of the Scriptures is that they record the event of God's self-communication, which itself is the full and universal Truth of God's redeeming plan for humanity. The inspired Scriptures, then, do not constitute revelation itself, but in fact form a part of the latter's wider impact and consequences.

Finally, turning to the content of Scripture, as a whole they record the "deeds and words" that mediate the event of divine self-communication.[42] Yet, in certain sections of the whole, it is less easy to say specifically how God is being revealed. Indeed, various matters are recorded that may be characterized more appropriately as treating the human condition—much

[38] DV no. 9.
[39] See Hermann Pottmeyer, "Tradition," in *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* 1119–26.
[40] See Alonso Schökel, *The Inspired Word* 26–45.
[41] DV no. 12.
[42] DV no. 2 (DH 4202).

of the content of the Wisdom literature, for example.[43] While it may be said that such literature constitutes God's ratification of human, rational, and constructive observations as to human flourishing and social harmony, it nevertheless remains difficult—on the face of the text at least—to specify the extent to which God's revelation is definitively *manifested* in the literature. Take another example: Paul, writing to the Corinthians, observes, "Concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy" (1 Cor 7:25); here Paul consciously reflects on the possibility of having received a revelatory insight, but he concludes that he has not received it and goes on to share his natural wisdom. Accordingly, the inspiration under which the texts were authored provides few clues as to the degree of divine revelation that should be recognized. Given their historical character, certain texts may be produced through inspiration, yet that charism does not definitively guarantee their positive contribution to revelation. In this way too, it may be seen how the charism of inspiration is marked off from the reality of revelation. Without minimizing the significance of the distinction between revelation and inspiration, what may be said of the *connection* between the two? The primary significance of inspiration is that it makes possible the expression of the event of revelation in written, human words, by means of the divine action.[44] This event of revelation is frequently designated the "Word of God," in order to show that Christian revelation in its fullness comes through the incarnation of the Son of God, who is the eternal Word. The "Word of God" thus expresses the personal nature of God's self-communication as an event of divine revelation, manifested in its fullness.[45]

However, the term "Word of God," here applied in its revelatory sense, is also used in a second sense, to denote the written word of the inspired Scriptures. The second sense is related to the first by operation of the charism of inspiration: inspiration preserves and transmits revelation as "Word of God" in the written form that is the "word of God." In this way, the inspired Scriptures—the word of God—form a concrete record of the *foundational* experiences of God's self-communication, as well as the human responses that issued from them. Inspiration therefore functions to seal the sacred Scriptures' provenance from God, in order that the word might truly witness to the foundational event of the "Word of God."[46]

[43] See O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 218–20.

[44] Scripture "*is* the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit" (DV no. 9: DH 4212, emphasis added).

[45] Latourelle, "Revelation" 932.

[46] Vanhoye, "The Reception in the Church of the Dogmatic Constitution 'Dei verbum'" 105–7.

But the written record is not to be consigned to the past. Rather, because it constitutes a witness to future generations of the experiences of God's self-communication manifested during the period of foundational revelation, the inspired Scriptures are not only an effect of the divine self-revelation but also enable it in the period of dependent revelation.[47] While the word of God is confined to what is written down in the sacred texts, this record of what was manifested during the past period of foundational revelation enables *ongoing* experience of God's self-communication—the Word of God—in the present.[48] The unfolding of ongoing revelation occurs in the proclamation and interpretation of the gospel as living tradition: the written word of God is not an inanimate or inert deposit consigned to ancient texts, but exists to propagate the "Word of God" living and active in the present time, making possible ongoing human experience of the divine self-communication. For this reason, Henri de Lubac insists:

> Christianity is not, properly speaking, a "religion of the book." It is the religion of "the Word," but neither uniquely nor principally of the Word in its written form—or even oral form. It is the religion of the Word, "not of a mute and written word," says St. Bernard, "but of a Word incarnated and living."[49]

WHAT SHOULD THEY BE SAYING? THE DEVELOPMENTS OF *DEI VERBUM*

Inspiration, then, is the charism that enables human words to constitute the word of God that makes present the Word incarnate and living. Because of the special impulse from the Holy Spirit to write, one might say that the texts of the Scriptures issuing from the labors of human authors are authored by God and therefore may be called the word of God. However, because the Scriptures are silent on the precise nature of the divine-human origin of the text, the classical formulation of "God, author of Scripture," and the dynamic of inspiration that explains it, requires further clarification.[50]

[47] O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 223–24.

[48] Indeed, DV no. 10 refers to "verbum Dei scriptum vel traditium," further understanding the "Word of God" as *both* Scripture and tradition: "The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on." (DH 4214).

[49] Henri de Lubac, "Commentaire du préamble et du chapitre 1," in *La révélation divine*, 5 vols., ed. B.-D. Dupuy (Paris: Cerf, 1968) 1:157–302, at 296 (my translation).

[50] See *Dei Filius*, where the council teaches: "The Church holds [the Scriptures] to be sacred and canonical, not because, having been carefully composed by mere human industry, they were afterward approved by her authority or merely because they contain revelation with no admixture of error, but because, having been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their author and have been delivered as such to the Church herself" (DH 3006).

The model that has shaped the course of the Catholic theology of inspiration over the past century has been the Thomist synthesis of Marie-Joseph Lagrange.[51] It presents biblical inspiration as the special instance of collaboration between God and human writer: God acts as primary author or the principal cause of the text, while the writer acts as its instrumental cause. The approach emphasizes that the resultant Scriptures come from both God and the human author, in a way that God causes the activity of the writer but at the same time preserves the latter's own freedom.[52] As a consequence, God's intention is transmitted without errors, but the literary result is conditioned by the language, culture, and learning of the human writer.[53]

Despite the influence of the biblical and patristic currents that informed the new context of revelation in *Dei verbum*'s first and second chapters, the constitution's treatment of inspiration reverts quickly back to the Thomist synthesis. Chapter 3 begins with the concept of "God, the author of the Scriptures," but this soon shifts to a new interpretation of double authorship, which modifies the Thomist model to account more adequately for both the humanity of the biblical authors and the human qualities of the texts they produced. In accentuating the human contribution, the council maintains the general causality of God but locates the literary authorship in its proper sense in the human collaborator; it affirms that the human authors in the process of writing retained their full human faculties and abilities.[54] This move constitutes an implicit rejection of any verbal dictation theory that denies the genuinely human quality of the word.

Indeed, article 13 displays a contrary movement by indicating what is crucially characteristic of the inspired Scriptures, namely, that they express revelation in the complete vulnerability of human words. Here, the biblical and patristic impetus emerges. The divine action is described as the depth to which God's revelation is infused in the human realm, and thus the humanity of the word of God issues from the prime mystery of God's own humanity, shown forth in the incarnation. Accordingly, the divine movement is not to raise up the human author beyond his humanity.

[51] See Gnuse's extensive bibliography on this point in *Authority of the Bible* 36 n. 9.

[52] Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration* 121–63; Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* 98–99.

[53] This position is well represented in the encyclicals of Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* (1893); Benedict XV, *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920); and Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943).

[54] "In composing the sacred books, God chose men, and while employed by him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things that he wanted" (DV no. 11: DH 4215).

Rather, God adapts to the human way of perceiving and speaks through it. This notion of the divine infusion in human perceptivity relates to John Chrysostom's idea of the divine condescension.[55] According to this idea, God's message is incarnated in the language of humanity save error, on the analogy of Jesus becoming human in every way save sin.

As a consequence, the concept of condescension can account for various forms of literary expressions, where God modifies his speech in the light of human nature, while maintaining that the imperfections and time-conditioned features of the text are due to the author's human nature. The analogy, however, should not be pressed too far. While incarnation and inspiration are two modes of God's condescension and accommodation to humanity, the complete inerrancy of Scripture is not a proper conclusion. Rather, divine condescension can accommodate human defects, with the consequence that the charism of inspiration need not require that a human writer's literary ability be elevated by the Holy Spirit.[56] The shortcomings and limitations that can be found in the inspired texts point to the results of authentic human activity that reflect the limits of ability, capacity, history, and culture.

Moreover, the presence of various literary genres and forms betrays the difficulty of constructing propositional, divinely-revealed truth claims.[57] Grounded in the historical economy of salvation, truth is revealed in the form and style of the human author's culture and time, and the human author's experience of the divine self-communication is expressed in narrative, verse, sayings, proverbs, pronouncements, letters, and legislation.[58] Given that these genres are bound to cultural and historical situations and draw on communal stories and general traditions, the biblical texts as a whole may not be read as one might read texts belonging to a later period. To do so is to introduce an anachronism. Rather, on account of inspiration, the texts record the human author's experience of God who is Truth. Because the divine activity does not elevate the human author beyond his or her humanity, the author remains bound by time and cultural conditioning. As a consequence, the texts that result from inspiration may not

[55] DV no. 13.

[56] Grillmeier, "Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture" 226–27.

[57] DV no. 12.

[58] To quote DV no. 12: "To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to 'literary forms.' For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts that are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture" (DH 4217–18).

have the benefit of the fullness of physical or natural truths that emerge in the subsequent progress of history.[59]

WHAT SHOULD THEY BE SAYING? *DESIDERATA* FOR THE THEOLOGY OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

Dei verbum chapter 3, then, sets out several central principles that a theology of biblical inspiration should affirm. The first is that inspiration describes the Holy Spirit's work in the production of the biblical text. But if the logic of what it means for God to "inspire" is not clarified, inspiration can easily merge with revelation. To properly clarify the meaning of inspiration, five specific issues must be attended to: (1) the appropriateness of the metaphor, "God, the author of Scripture"; (2) a proper account of human authorship, given the historical economy in which inspiration occurred; (3) the question of degrees of inspiration; (4) the status of the text that results from human authorship and the consequent locus of biblical inspiration; and (5) the validity of recognizing an analogy between biblical inspiration and the incarnation.

1. I have already shown that *Dei verbum* applies a model of inspiration that arises out of the prior Thomistic synthesis without providing a theoretical account of the causality of inspiration. Indeed, unlike the treatment of inspiration that we find in *Providentissimus Deus*, there is no explicit reference in *Dei verbum* to terms such as "principal cause" and "instrumental cause," as might be expected. The constitution, rather, restricts itself to two cardinal affirmations. First, the Scriptures "have God as author." Second, the writers are "true authors," who in their writing applied "their faculties and their strengths," during which God also "acted in them and through them" (DV no. 11). But within this account of the causation of the inspired texts, the notion of double authorship is not a sufficient cause, since actual literary authorship may not be properly ascribed to God.

Early in his *Inspiration in the Bible*, Rahner observes that it is not reasonable to identify God as the literary author of the text (*Verfasser*). Rather, God is more properly identified as its originator (*Urheber*).[60] Given the location of the composition of the Scriptures in the historical economy, the appropriate starting point for working out the proper sense in which God may be called the author of Scripture is the place where the Scriptures originate, namely, the first eyewitnesses during the apostolic age, and their Old Testament predecessors. The testimony of these eyewitnesses was informed by their contextual experience, which was the

[59] See O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 227–30.
[60] Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible* 16.

church's developing self-understanding expressed in affirmations and formulas. Within this process of crystallization, the Scriptures originate from the church's life-processes, resulting from the faith preached, lived, and interpreted over long periods of time in various community settings.[61] The cause of the church's reality, including the formation of its essence and structure, is the saving action of God in history. By extension, then, it may be said that God initiated and guided the action by which the church arrived at its self-expression in literary form. In this sense, then, God may be said to be the author of Scripture.[62] But this understanding of "author" does not connote actual literary authorship of Scripture, and over against the "double authorship" suggested by *Dei verbum*, such authorship is not to be conceived of in the same way that human literary authors are understood to be authors.

2. The sense and role of the human author in the composition of the Scriptures also require clarification. Developments in modern exegetical methods have pointed to the need for increased attention to the biblical text itself and to its complex history of development toward its final form.[63] If a given text is shaped according to the dynamics of a given believing community, it is in some way brought into existence by more than one actor. Prophets, apostles, and preachers proclaim the message, while certain others are inspired to write it down, and still others to edit, augment, and comment upon the written text until it is settled. From the point of view of its composition, then, the written text is not a unilateral or individualistic creation but is a collaboration conditioned by social circumstances.[64]

Given the changed understanding of the production environment of the texts, certain theologians have come to see inspiration as a charism shared by the whole community, as opposed to a single, specific author.[65] Most often, those who wrote down the Scriptures were anonymous scribes whose role was to articulate the faith of the believing community. In this way, their written work expressed the corporate insight, as opposed to that of an individual author, and for this reason the charism of inspiration is located in the community, and is active during the entire process of producing the written texts.

[61] Ibid. 47–48.

[62] For Schökel's account of Rahner's position see *Inspired Word* 220–22.

[63] See Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's* The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*: Text and Commentary* 24–50.

[64] See Gnuse, *Authority of the Bible* 50–59.

[65] On social inspiration in the context of *Dei verbum*, see Helmut Gabel, "Inspiration und Wahrheit der Schrift (DV 11): Neue Ansätze und Probleme in Kontext der gegenwärtigen wissenschaftlichen Diskussion," *Theologie der Gegenwart* 45 (2002) 121–36.

In this regard, Rahner proposes a model for social inspiration that is able to account for the charism as divine intervention in human history, and specifically in the history of a given believing community:

> God's will is a supernatural and historical community of redemption, which finds its objective and self-realizing ultimate end in the book. And, as he wills that community effectively and absolutely, historically and eschatologically, and in an historical process beginning anew in himself, God *eo ipso* is, in a real sense, an author.[66]

In this way, the charism of inspiration is uniquely a function of the foundational, apostolic church and the preparation for it. On account of the divine operation in the church itself, the scriptural record articulates the structure of that community's faith, for "Scripture itself is the concrete process and the objectification of the original church's consciousness of the faith."[67] God, then, is the creator of the Christian church, and the latter produced a written record of its response in faith to the divine self-communication. In this way, God may be understood as the principal author of the Scriptures, while the church functions as a consequent author. Its tradition produced the Scriptures, which themselves constituted a witness and a deposit of the faith passed on by the oral tradition.[68] As such, the inspired Scriptures may be said to be the normative "objectification" of the earliest parts of the Christian community's tradition, and "the concrete norm for the post-apostolic Church in its future understanding of the faith."[69]

In Rahner's conception of the ecclesial operation of inspiration, there is at first sight an omission: the biblical authors of the texts themselves are not featured. In not referring specifically to the human authors of the text, Rahner could be interpreted as preferring to attribute inspiration to the community alone, and deny any "super-added" inspiration to the writers who actually wrote down the texts. However, on closer reading of Rahner, one notices that he not only refers to the church as a whole but also affirms that it is made up of different parts—for "at the same time as God . . . wills and produces the primitive Church *and its constitutive elements*."[70] Here, one might think about the unique roles

[66] Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible* 59. As John Scullion notes (*Theology of Inspiration* 24), Rahner's understanding is not original, but stems from the view of the Tübingen school—especially that of Johann Sebastian von Drey and Johann Adam Möhler—which considered the Scriptures to be the embodiment of tradition.

[67] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: Seabury, 1978) 376.

[68] Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible* 39–63; Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* 158–61.

[69] Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* 363.

[70] Ibid., emphasis added.

of the twelve apostles, Mary the mother of Jesus, other apostles such as Paul, and other "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (Lk 1:2, NRSV). As there are differentiated, constitutive elements in the church, it follows that particular functions attend such elements, and that each element may receive its own appropriate charism. For some community members, the particular gift might benefit the community itself, while others might be for the service of the gospel mission.

In this way a charism is grounded in and springs from the faith of the community, even if the charism is not, strictly speaking, conferred on the community but on an individual person.[71] Indeed, the fruits of exegetical criticism establish that the books of Scripture emerge from a complex process of development, whereby several authors contribute to the final form of the text. It would then be odd to claim that the charism of inspiration is limited to a final redactor, when in fact that redactor's contribution might have been minimal, and earlier authors were responsible for the production of most of a given text.[72] More accurately, one could say that the charism of inspiration—the special impulse to write—flows as a stream shared by all who participated in the production and shaping of a biblical text across all its stages. A completely inspired text, then, would be the product of stages of writing and redaction, containing the perspective of several, inspired literary agents who compose it in conversation with the faith and traditions of a community of believers.[73]

3. Given the dynamism and variety of the action of the Holy Spirit in the production of the Scriptures, a third, related issue requires clarification. As the charism of inspiration may be seen to have operated jointly and severally, as well as differently, in relation to those who participated in the production of the biblical text, it follows that we must allow for the possibility that the gift of inspiration was granted in different degrees to the writers of various scriptural texts.

[71] See Schökel's observations on Rahner's view of personal inspiration: *Inspired Word* 221.

[72] Vanhoye, "Reception in the Church of the Dogmatic Constitution 'Dei Verbum'" 116–17.

[73] Farkasfalvy draws attention to the assumption that *Dei verbum* does not attend to this collective dimension of inspiration, on the basis that the traditional doctrine of inspiration holds to "a precritical, and therefore naïve, individualistic model." Calling the assumption into question, he suggests that the concept of collective inspiration is not necessarily a modern one, and that further research into patristic understandings may reveal that "the Church Fathers saw that the scriptural documents were depositories of traditions held in firm possession by a collectivity and were also the product of a plurality of authors" ("How To Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration?" 242).

It is not in question that every inspired author experienced the charism of inspiration to write. However, depending on the varying significance of the role of the various authors in the proclamation of the gospel—say, that of Paul or of certain eyewitnesses—the Holy Spirit may have acted in varying degrees of presence and intensity in the authorial process. First, in the case of the OT, the NT authors recognized the latter's value as mediator of divine revelation, revelation that reached fulfillment in the Christ event. The NT events, which are understood to fulfill the initial revelation of the OT, do so in a way that is mutual and dialectical, for "Scripture reveals the meaning of events and . . . events reveal the meaning of Scripture."[74] As such, one might propose that OT texts that are more closely associated with the Christ event were also more inspired. Second, given that Christ, the incarnate Word, is the fullness of divine self-communication, it is not unreasonable to posit that those who were inspired to record the witness to his events, deeds, and words received a higher degree of inspiration than the author of, say, the epistle of Jude. Third, in a similar vein, it may also be maintained that the thematic importance of a text is proportionally related to its degree of inspiration: in the case of, for example, Romans 8 or the Prologue to John, the centrality of the themes treated there would suggest that the authors of those texts also received a higher degree of inspiration than did the author of Jude.[75] Generally speaking, one could reasonably expect that as the revelatory and salvific self-communication of the Trinity reached its climax with the coming of Christ in history, higher degrees of inspiration may have accrued to the production of the texts that witness to that event.[76]

4. Considerations of varieties and types of inspiration point to a fourth area in need of clarification: questions as to whether biblical inspiration is located solely in the inspired authors, or whether it extends to the enduring form of the inspired texts, and to what extent it is actuated in the reading and faithful response of subsequent believers. Farkasfalvy points out that *Dei verbum* begins its consideration of inspiration by using the concept of "subjective inspiration," that is, the double authorship of God and the human person.[77] But from that point on, the Constitution

[74] Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's* The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*: Text and Commentary* 136.

[75] See O'Collins, *Rethinking Fundamental Theology* 228–29.

[76] I recognize the problematic that underlies this suggestion. My intention here is merely to raise the question for future consideration, without pretending to make a definitive case for it.

[77] "Those divinely revealed realities that are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (DV no. 11; DH 4215).

oscillates between (1) treating the text itself as possessing an inspired quality, thus "objective inspiration," and (2) the subjective inspiration of the human authors to write the scriptural text, taking into account their human condition, situation, characteristics, and limitations.[78] But the difference between the two conceptions of inspiration is not explicitly identified, defined, or explained.

Given its prominence in *Dei verbum*, subjective inspiration is understood to be the proper and most accurate understanding of the operation of the charism.[79] Therefore, the primary and essential meaning of biblical inspiration is the conferral of the special impulse of the Holy Spirit upon human agents to write down their experience of the divine self-communication in literary form. Subjective inspiration, however, must have a secondary sense that derives from the first. That secondary sense is objective inspiration: the enduring, inspired quality of the text itself that arises by reason of its nexus with the divine special impulse that brought about the text's creation. The text's inspired quality perseveres precisely because of its divine provenance, which also constitutes its essence.[80]

But this raises a further question: can the charism of inspiration, or any charism for that matter, inhere in something that is inanimate? A charism properly understood is a grace received from God by a person for the purposes of building up the church.[81] The one who receives the grace then participates in a personal, relational experience of the divine self-communication, in a way that an inanimate thing presumably could not. As such, even though the text of Scripture has its provenance in God, and so has an inspired quality, it nevertheless remains a "dead letter" unless some notion of ongoing, divine-human relationship attends it.[82] The notion of biblical inspiration, then, should not be invoked to objectify the activity of God, for to suggest that revelation is objectified would be to accord priority to the inspired product and not to the divine-human dynamic action that characterizes the presence of God.

In response to such concerns, certain theologians suggest that the charism of inspiration might extend also to the readers of the biblical text.[83] On this understanding, the Scriptures are not only inspired but

[78] DV nos. 11–13; see Farkasfalvy, "How To Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration?" 242–43.

[79] DV no. 11.

[80] Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration and Interpretation* 250.

[81] Karl Heinz Neufeld, "Charism/Charisms," in *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 2005) 63–66.

[82] Rahner and Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition* 36.

[83] Gabel, "Inspiration und Wahrheit der Schrift (DV 11)" 130.

inspiring. This position is based in what some theologians call *relecture*, that is, the authoring of new texts based on the informed and inspired rereading of earlier texts. In relation to OT writings the text of Daniel 1–12, for example, may be seen to have its origins in Sirach, while NT texts appear as a *relecture* of OT passages, where the events and/or content of the latter are reinterpreted through the lens of the Christ event.[84] The charism of inspiration, therefore, refers not only to the special impulse of the Holy Spirit that affects not only the original producers of the text but also the readers. By extension, one may then legitimately point to a charism of inspiration conferred on the reader, guiding the reader to uncover hitherto undiscovered meanings of ancient Scriptures, and augmenting that meaning in a creative and revelatory manner.[85]

The difficulty here is that the inspired reader does not augment the canon with new material. Although dependent revelation becomes fully present when the inspired texts are read and responded to in faith, the grace conferred is not the original charism of inspiration that led to the production of the Scriptures in the period of foundational revelation. A different grace, or "inspiration," is involved here, one that actuates the transmission of God's divine self-communication, recorded and witnessed to in the text of the Scriptures.[86] God makes himself present again by a personal encounter that issues from reading inspired texts, without at the same time producing a canonical supplement to the Scriptures themselves. This is not to say, however, that the texts resulting from the operation of the charism of inspiration do not possess an inspired quality. On the contrary, precisely because of their provenance from God and status as canonical witness to the divine revelation, the inspired Scriptures make possible the believer's subsequent experience of the reality of dependent revelation in the present. In this sense, the charism of biblical inspiration both impacts and involves the reader of the inspired texts.

Yet in the attempt to avoid objectifying God's activity, one must also be careful not to spiritualize the very concept of biblical inspiration, such that the divine action is no longer recognized in either the biblical text or the charism of the literary authors, but is over-identified with the faith of the communities that receive the text. John Macquarrie, for example, proposes that biblical inspiration is associated not with the text itself but with the community's reception of it. Here, biblical

[84] See Jean Zumstein, "Der Prozess der Relecture in der johanneischen Literatur," *New Testament Studies* 42 (1996) 394–411.

[85] For a qualified, but not necessary, sense in which the inspiration of the reader may be said to arise, see Rush's proposal in *Eyes of Faith* 161–72.

[86] Vanhoye, "Reception in the Church of the Dogmatic Constitution 'Dei Verbum'" 118.

inspiration is a kind of expression or affirmation of faith that is capable of re-presenting or symbolically mediating the disclosure of foundational revelation such that it finds application in the life (or "worlds") of the receiving community. The direct implication is that inspiration is not located in the words of the text, but is attributed to the Scriptures "only as they are set in the context of the whole life of faith in the community."[87]

If one were to proceed down such a path of spiritualization, three particular methodological consequences would result. First, if we assert that *the* ground of the theology of biblical inspiration is the reception of the text by the believing community—that is, a retroactive, epistemic affirmation or action of humanity—we risk sliding into historicism, an immanentism, whereby the historian ascertains and explains religious data by referring to ordinary positive and empirical events; this, however, simultaneously distorts the transcendent or revelatory character of such events.[88]

Second, if we quarantine the work of the Spirit to the faith of the believing community, we can fall into a Docetist understanding of biblical inspiration, such that the inspiring activity of God is associated principally with the epistemic state of the receiving community and not the text itself. A third consequence, following from the second, is that if we separate out the text and the Spirit's inherent "ownership" of it, a tendency may emerge to understand the text as merely an *effect* of the divine self-revelation in the foundational period, and not as a *cause* of ongoing experience of God's self-communication in the current period of dependent revelation. If we excise the notion of the presence and action of the word of God in this way, the lacuna that remains is left to be filled only by the activity of the believing community.[89]

For these kinds of reasons, the theological explanation for the connection between subjective inspiration and objective inspiration is not clear. Subjective inspiration may be understood in relation to revelation by reason of its nature as the special impulse to write down experiences of the event of the divine self-communication. Serious theological inquiry will be needed, however, to discover to what extent the experience of revelation is captured in the objective text (so that it may be called "inspired"), and, more importantly, how inspiration is actuated in the reading and faithful response of subsequent believers.

[87] John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1966) 8; see also Rush, *Eyes of Faith* 153–72.

[88] See Maurice Blondel, "History and Dogma," in *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma*, trans. Alexander Dru and Illtyd Trethowan (London: Harvill, 1964; French original 1904) 219–87, at 231–42.

[89] Compare Webster's approach (*Holy Scripture* 30–36), albeit from a different context.

5. A final area for the clarification of inspiration flows from the new context of revelation set up in *Dei verbum* chapters 1 and 2. The renewed incarnational perspective gives rise to the possibility of an analogy between the dynamics of inspiration and incarnation. As noted earlier, the doctrine of inspiration is now located within the general area of the preservation and transmission of the divine self-communication that occurs in the historical economy of salvation; it is therefore no longer restricted solely to the model of double authorship. The Scriptures issue as a record of the event of divine revelation, which is a diverse but unified history that has its fullness and unity in the incarnation of Christ.[90]

In this revelatory context, the word, which by divine action becomes transmitted in history as tradition and Scripture, is a dynamic feature of the Word that becomes flesh. As such, the charism of inspiration participates in the new context of revelation, where the inspired Scriptures constitute part of the dynamic of God becoming present and active in history.[91] But theologians have by no means worked out the relationship between inspiration and the incarnation. Doing so will require extensive theological research.[92] If the task is to be done, however, two important consequences must be kept in mind. First, our understanding of the way the divine self-communication in history was recorded and transmitted in writing will improve. Second, it will both open up a new and deeper understanding of the nature of the inspired text, in light of the human, literary qualities of the text, and better serve to understand the availability of God's self-communication via the quasi-sacramental nature of the text.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD THE CLARIFICATION OF INSPIRATION THEOLOGY

In addressing the question, What *should* theologians and exegetes be saying about biblical inspiration?, I have attempted to clarify the terms of the debate, so as to identify the foundational principles that require

[90] The argument for a parallel between the two natures of Christ and Scripture as both the word of God and the human word appears in the PBC's *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, but it is not developed.

[91] See the possibilities enumerated by Schökel in relation to inspiration and incarnation in *Inspired Word* 111–25.

[92] See Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl's review of the PBC's case for the christological parallel with the "two natures" of Scripture, as well as their critique of it, which is made with reference to *Dei verbum* and the dynamics of classical Christology (Lewis Ayres and Stephen E. Fowl, "[Mis]reading the Face of God: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Theological Studies* 60 [1999] 513–28).

further development if we are to attain a more adequate theology of inspiration. My account of the nature of inspiration, its relationship to and place within the broader context of revelation, the contribution of chapter 3 of *Dei verbum*, and the *desiderata* for further clarification raise the following, tentative conclusions:

(1) The essence of the charism of biblical inspiration is the special impulse from the Holy Spirit, received by certain human authors, to produce and develop literary texts.
(2) The charism of inspiration may not be identified with divine revelation. Rather, it constitutes a participation in the broader context and reality of the divine self-communication in the historical economy of salvation.
(3) Inspiration, then, as a charism of the church, follows upon revelation. It constitutes a crucial element in the preservation and transmission of divine revelation, the single source of tradition and Scripture.
(4) For the purposes of fundamental theology, inspiration is to be further distinguished from the believer's response of faith, the question of the truth of Scripture, the issue of canonicity, and the task of scriptural interpretation.
(5) The notion of "God as author" and the theory of double authorship of Scripture both require clarification. While the principle of verbal dictation is rejected, identifying God as the author of Scripture does not connote actual literary authorship—the divine origin of the text may not be understood in the same way that inspired human literary authors are known as authors.
(6) The inspired Scriptures express the revelatory word in the full humanity of human words. Thus the biblical text contains the results of human activity: the charism of inspiration does not preclude human shortcomings and limitations in ability, historical accuracy, and cultural conditioning.
(7) The location of inspiration in the context of historical revelation enables the recognition that the inspired Scriptures may comprise various literary genres and forms, all of which are bound to cultural and historical situations. Despite their inspired origin, the Scriptures may not be read as modern documents.
(8) The operation of inspiration in relation to the human authors in the composition of scriptural texts calls for reconsideration, particularly given the authors' ecclesial context and the complex process of textual composition and redaction.
(9) The charism of inspiration can operate in varying degrees of intensity, such that certain authors may have received a higher degree of inspiration than others.

(10) While subjective inspiration is the proper and most accurate understanding of the charism's operation, inspiration also has a second, derivative objective sense. By reason of its connection with the divine special impulse to write, the resulting texts must also in some way be said to be objectively inspired. Accordingly, the relationship between subjective and objective inspiration requires clarification.

(11) The full consequences of the new context of revelation for inspiration requires considerable exploration. On the basis of inspiration's location in the incarnational perspective of the event of divine self-communication, the possibility of an analogy between the dynamic of inspiration and that of incarnation must become an option.

It is then in the process of clarifying what should be said about biblical inspiration that the magnitude of the task for fundamental theologians emerges. However, it is only by means of careful attention to each of the areas here considered—as well as others not considered—that a comprehensive and reasonable account of the doctrine of biblical inspiration might be achieved. Nearly 50 years from the close of the Second Vatican Council, such an undertaking would meet the recent call of Pope Benedict XVI to address and further reflect on the topic of the inspiration of the Bible, precisely because it is essential and decisive for a correct hermeneutic of the sacred Scriptures.[93] Its achievement would finally give some answer to Rahner's lament by demonstrating the requisite relevance of inspiration both to the work of the modern exegete and to the church in the world today.

[93] See n. 7 above.