

Revelation and Inspiration

Peter M. van Bemmelen

Introduction

That the living God has revealed Himself and continues to reveal Himself to the human family is foundational to Christian faith. The Scriptures, both OT and NT, present a record of the way God manifested Himself in human history—especially the history of Israel, and supremely in the person of Jesus Christ. Without this divine revelation, humanity would perish, ignorant of God's true character and will and estranged from Him through sin and guilt.

In Scripture the creation of the world and the majesty, beauty, and bounteous provisions of nature are perceived as manifestations of God's glory, wisdom, and loving care for His creatures. Such manifestations are referred to in theology as general revelation. However, the present condition of humanity and this world, filled with sin, disruption, disaster, and death, raises serious questions about the possibility of a true knowledge of God through the natural world or through human experience. Scriptural evidence suggests that such wisdom and knowledge as can be gained from

these sources by themselves is inadequate to give us a true understanding of God's character of love and His intention to save us from sin and death.

God has met this predicament by making Himself known to human beings on a personal level. In theological language this is called special revelation, particularly as it is revealed and recorded in the Scriptures. Fully aware of the various criticisms of the Bible—ethical, historical, linguistic, scientific, philosophical, and theological—we have chosen to focus on the claims made by the biblical writers regarding their own and each other's writings, and especially on Jesus' attitude toward and use of the Scriptures. The prophets, apostles, and supremely Jesus Himself accepted the Scriptures as the trustworthy and authoritative Word of God, given by the Holy Spirit in human language. Revelation and inspiration are ultimately acknowledged as divine mysteries; however, even our limited human understanding of these subjects is of crucial importance for a mature, intelligent Christian faith.

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I. Revelation

A. Definition

The noun “revelation” and the verb “to reveal” are used in theological as well as in secular language. The basic meaning of the verb, which is derived from the Latin *revelare*, is to take away a covering, to uncover or unveil something that is hidden; therefore, to make known what is secret or unknown. The noun can refer to the act of revealing but also to that which has been revealed. In common language many other words—such as “tell,” “make known,” “bring out into the open,” “bring to light”—are used to express the same idea.

In reference to God’s act of revealing Himself and His will and purpose for the human family, these words acquire a new depth of meaning. The essence of divine revelation can be summed up by saying that God reveals Himself in words and acts, through many different channels, but most fully in the person of Jesus Christ. God’s explicit intention is that through this revelation human beings may come to know Him and enter into a saving relationship, which will result in eternal fellowship with Him (John 17:3).

B. Biblical Terminology

1. The OT

English translations of the Bible use the words “reveal” and “revelation,” but not as frequently as one might expect. In the RSV the verb “reveal” occurs 65 times, of which 28 are in the OT as a translation of the Hebrew or

Aramaic verb *gālāh* (except in Genesis 41:25, where it is translated from the Hebrew verb *nāgad*). The verb *gālāh*, like the Latin *revelare*, expresses the idea of uncovering something that was covered or hidden. It occurs frequently with a merely secular meaning (Ruth uncovers the feet of Boaz, Ruth 3:4), as well as in reference to divine revelations (God reveals Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2:19). The noun “revelation” occurs twice in the RSV OT as a translation of forms of the verbs *yārāh* and *gālāh* (Hab. 2:19; 2 Sam. 7:27).

Other words and phrases are used in the OT to describe divine revelations. Some expressions focus on their auditory aspect: “The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah” (Jer. 47:1); “And the Lord said to Moses” (Lev. 19:1); or the oft-repeated “Thus says the Lord” (Amos 1:3). Such phrases occur hundreds of times and highlight the auditive aspect of revelation.

The visual also is essential in the process of God’s self-revelation. Verbs such as *rā’āh* (see, be seen, appear, cause to see, show) and *hāzāh* (see, see in vision or dream, behold), and the nouns *rō’eh* (seer), *mar’eh* (sight, appearance, vision), *hōzeh* (seer), *hāzôn* (vision) are also used. Other more general cognitive words used are *hāwāh* (to make known, to inform), *yāda’* (to know, to make known, to publish), and *nāgad* (to make known, to report, to tell). This list is by no means exhaustive but shows the variety of words used to describe the different ways in which God communicates with people on earth.

A study of all the revelatory expressions in

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the Bible shows the conviction of the biblical writers that they were the recipients and messengers of divine revelation. In the OT this consciousness is especially prominent in the writings of the prophets, but it is also found elsewhere. King David, who is referred to as "the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel," expresses this conviction: "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:1, 2). Solomon's wisdom comes as a gift promised by divine revelation and is itself a manifestation of God's wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-14).

Terms that indicate God's revelation are also used in reference to specific events attributed to God's action or intervention. To Noah God announced, "Behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth" (Gen. 6:17) and instructed him to build an ark, so that he and his family might be saved. God gave Moses and Aaron power to perform signs so that Israel might believe that God had appeared to Moses and instructed him to lead them out of Egypt (Ex. 4:1-9, 27-31). On another occasion God employed a violent storm and the belly of a giant fish to nudge a runaway prophet into fulfilling his God-appointed task (Jonah 1:4-3:3). Such divine actions or interventions were usually preceded or accompanied by explanatory revelations. Amos states, "Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). According to the OT, words and acts belong together in God's dealings with human beings.

Frequent OT references to prophets, visions, dreams, signs, and wonders provide evidence of the persistent desire of God to reveal Himself through channels of His choice. The personal manifestations of God to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses—so-called theophanies, or appearances of God—and His cloud-concealed presence during the Exodus were intended to show His loving purpose to enter into a special covenant relationship with Abraham and his descendants, so that through Israel God might make Himself, His

will, His salvation, and His gracious character known to all peoples (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18; 26:1-5; 28:10-15; Ex. 19:1-6).

In the letter to the Hebrews the entire process of divine revelation in the OT is summed up in these words: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1). This statement stresses the preeminence of God's speaking through the prophets. It does not, however, limit the divine revelation to the prophetic witness.

The common OT word for prophet is *nābî*, which occurs more than 300 times. Its derivation is uncertain, but it is widely held to have a passive sense, "one who is called," and an active sense, "caller, speaker." The first stresses the divine origin of the prophetic ministry, while the second focuses on the task of the prophet as a spokesperson or mouth for God. The latter meaning is illustrated by the appointment of Aaron as spokesman on behalf of Moses to Israel and to Pharaoh. God told Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you; and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land" (Ex. 7:1, 2; cf. 4:10-16).

Other terms were used to refer to prophets. When Saul was seeking the lost asses of his father, his servant suggested that they consult "a man of God" in the nearby city. This man of God is also referred to as "the seer" (*ro'eh*), with the note that this word is equivalent to "prophet" (1 Sam. 9:9). This same parallelism appears elsewhere with the word *hozeh* (seer) in 2 Samuel 24:11; 2 Kings 17:13; Isaiah 29:10; for all practical purposes these two Hebrew words and *nābî* are synonyms.

Not only did the prophets proclaim the word of the Lord by mouth, but they also wrote many of the things that had been revealed to them, either by divine command or by the prompting of God's Spirit. The first known writing prophet was Moses, who wrote what came to be known as the Torah, or the law (Joshua 8:31; Luke 24:44). Later prophets also were

moved by the Spirit to put their messages into writing. The Lord told Jeremiah, "Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you" (Jer. 36:2). Daniel referred to these as "the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet" (Dan. 9:2).

The word of the Lord written down by Moses and the prophets became a prominent means by which God revealed Himself and His purposes for Israel and the nations. It was the divine intention that these books should be read and heard by future generations so that the people might know God as their Saviour and King. By obeying His word they would experience His blessings (Deut. 4:5-8; Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-3) and be warned of the terrible consequences of turning away from God (Deut. 31:26-29; Isa. 30:8-14).

Long after the dynamic voice of the prophets had fallen silent, the living voice of God still spoke through their writings. Undoubtedly to these writings could be applied the words written earlier: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29; see also *Spiritual Gifts* IV).

2. The NT

The NT also uses various words to convey the idea of divine revelation. The verb *apokalyptō* (to reveal) and the noun *apokalypsis* are the most prevalent. These words are generally used in a religious context and refer to such revelations as that of the righteousness and wrath of God (Rom. 1:17, 18), the second coming of Jesus (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:13), the coming of antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3), the knowledge of human thoughts (Luke 12:2), or the Revelation of Jesus to John (Rev. 1:1). The word *phaneroō*, "to disclose or reveal," is also used (Rom. 16:26). Other words used in the context of divine revelation are *gnōrizō* (to make known, Eph. 1:9), *deiknymi* (to point out, John 5:20), *epiphainō* (to appear, show itself, Luke 1:79), and *chrēmatisō*

(to impart a revelation, Matt. 2:12, 22).

While significant OT phrases such as "the word of the Lord came" or "thus says the Lord" do not appear in the NT, the NT does not negate various types of divine revelation to human beings. God communicated with Joseph through dreams (Matt. 1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22). Zechariah the priest (Luke 1:22), Ananias of Damascus (Acts 9:10), the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10:3), and the apostle Peter (Acts 11:5) received visions. Paul could speak of the danger of "being too elated by the abundance of revelations" (2 Cor. 12:7), which he apparently received on many occasions during his ministry (Acts 16:9, 10; 18:9, 10; 26:19; 27:23, 24; 2 Cor. 12:1-4; Gal. 2:1, 2).

The revelational terminology of the NT focuses on Jesus Christ. John the Baptist testified, "I came baptizing with water, that he [the Christ] might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:31). John the apostle presents Jesus as "the Word," the only Son from the Father, who "became flesh," and who "has made him known" (John 1:1, 14, 18). Matthew tells us that "no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). The revelation of God in theophanies, visions, dreams, and prophetic utterances has now found its culmination and fulfillment in the incarnation of the Son. For this reason the Epistle to the Hebrews begins with a majestic summary: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son. . . . He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb. 1:1-3). Christ is God revealed in human form; thus He could say in words that would fit no other human lips: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Paul also uses a wide range of revelational terms and he, perhaps more than any other, presents Christ as the fullest revelation of God. Paul received the gospel which he preaches not from man but "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). The crucified and risen Lord

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appeared to him on the road to Damascus while he was persecuting the Christians (Acts 9:1-9). The mystery of Christ was made known to him by revelation; this mystery "was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). The role of the Holy Spirit is crucial to the revelation of Jesus Christ; in this Paul is in full agreement with the rest of the NT (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13, 14; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

While Paul proclaims the gospel of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ as a mystery, he also closely ties both the revela-

tion and its proclamation to the OT (Rom. 1:1-3; 16:25, 26; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Tim. 3:14, 15). This again is in full harmony with Jesus' own understanding and use of the Scriptures, both before and after His resurrection (Luke 22:37; 24:25-27, 44-47; John 5:39-47).

The Scriptures play an essential role in divine self-disclosure: Christ is revealed in and through the Scriptures. The dynamic voice of the apostles, like that of the ancient prophets may fall silent, but the Holy Spirit will still speak through their writings and unfold the mystery of Jesus Christ to all nations and all generations until He comes again.

II. General Revelation

A. Introduction and Definition

Revelational language is mostly used in connection with people. But the Bible also uses such language in regard to phenomena of the natural world. Phrases such as "the heavens are telling the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1) show that God reveals Himself through His created works. Different terms have been used to refer to this concept; however, "general revelation" is probably the most common.

Not only does the Bible speak about a revelation in nature (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:19-23), but it points to an inner awareness of God in the human consciousness. The author of Ecclesiastes asserts that God "has put eternity into man's mind" (Eccl. 3:11), while the apostle Paul speaks of Gentiles who "show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness" (Rom. 2:15). The moral responsibility, the universal awareness of a distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, has been seen as a manifestation of God in the human consciousness.

General revelation can be defined as that revelation of God that is universal, accessible to all human beings everywhere, by which God is known as Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of the entire universe. As far as humanity is concerned, this general revelation is both external and internal; it is also inescapable. No

matter where we turn we are confronted with God's handiwork and ultimately with the presence of God, for as Paul proclaimed to the Athenian philosophers, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Various questions have been raised in regard to general revelation. A crucial issue is whether general revelation provides the necessary elements for a rational knowledge of God, a natural theology. What concept of God will be deduced from the pervasive presence of evil, suffering, deterioration, destruction, and death? Another vital question, especially in the context of an increasingly articulate religious pluralism, is whether general revelation provides a saving knowledge of God. Is God known by followers of any or all religions or worldviews apart from the Judaeo-Christian tradition and, if so, are Christian missions necessary? Has God revealed Himself universally, so that every religion leads to a saving knowledge of God?

In order to address these questions, one must recognize the situation in which the human family finds itself. According to the Bible, at the end of Creation, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). This "very good" included the first human pair, whom God had created in His own image and likeness. In them was no imperfection—spiritual, moral, mental, or

physical. In the words of Ecclesiastes 7:29, "God made man upright." This perfection, unfortunately, did not last long. According to Genesis 3, Adam and Eve distrusted and disobeyed. The consequences were radical. Shame and fear replaced love and respect. Guilt-ridden, the pair hid at the approach of the Creator. Since then, evil, suffering, and death among human beings are stark realities that cannot be denied or escaped. The world is no longer "very good." According to Paul, "the whole creation has been groaning" (Rom. 8:22). Human beings are "subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb. 2:15). In their alienation from God, human beings find it difficult to receive and interpret God's revelation. They find it even harder to respond in love and faith to that revelation. (See Sin III. B. 1-3; Man II. A, B.)

B. Modalities of General Revelation

Generally speaking, three main modalities of general revelation have been distinguished: nature, human beings, and history. While Scriptures warrant this distinction, Christians disagree on the extent to which revelation is mediated through each.

I. Nature

Biblical writers often refer to the phenomena of nature as a revelation of God and His attributes. All aspects of the universe in which we live are manifestations of divine glory and wisdom. Several psalms ascribe praise to God as the Creator of heaven and earth, who constantly upholds all His works and provides for the needs of all living creatures, including His human children (Ps. 8:1-4; 19:1-6; 33:1-9; 104:1-35; 136:1-9). These psalms of praise for the community of faith show that the works of creation are a revelation of God's majesty and loving care. Many other portions of the OT, especially in Job and Isaiah, convey the same message. The challenging questions of Isaiah 40:12-31 point to an omnipotent, yet tender-hearted, Creator and Lord.

Jesus frequently directed the attention of His hearers to the things of nature to illustrate spiritual truths. The birds of the air and the lilies of the field show God's care for the humblest creatures, and Jesus asks, "Are you not of more value than they?" (Matt. 6:26). God causes the sun to "rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:44, 45). Other lessons from nature include the good tree that bears good fruit and the bad tree that bears evil fruit—the false prophets (Matt. 7:15-20). In harmony with Genesis 3, Jesus teaches that nature reveals the knowledge of good and evil.

The phenomena of nature, however, give us an ambivalent picture of good and evil. Further, as a consequence of evil, nature at times becomes the instrument of divine judgment. The greatest "natural disaster" to hit this world was the worldwide flood of Noah's time. According to Genesis 6-8, it was God's response to the determined wickedness of the antediluvians. The Bible frequently presents destructive forces in the natural world as manifestations of divine wrath upon human sin (the 10 plagues upon Egypt, Exodus 7:1-12:32; the devastating drought in the time of Ahab and Jezebel, 1 Kings 17:1; or the storm that threatened the ship in which Jonah tried to flee, Jonah 1:1-16). All are set forth as divine responses to human rebellion, apostasy, and disobedience. And although Scripture shows us in Job 1 and 2 that natural disasters may be the result of satanic activity, their ultimate control is always attributed to God. Concerning the disasters that befall Job, God said to Satan, "you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause" (Job 2:3).

Paul affirms nature as a modality of divine revelation. God, he said, is "clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). According to Scripture, nature shows divine glory, wisdom, and care. However, in the decay, disease, disaster, and death so prevalent in this world of sin, nature also displays the consequences of the Fall. God's care is daily manifested, but God's judgment upon human

sin is also clearly exhibited. Both aspects need to be kept in mind to understand the matter of natural theology.

2. Human Beings

Human beings constitute another modality of general revelation. Even in their fallen condition they bear the marks of their divine origin (Gen. 1:26, 27). When David beheld God's mighty works, he cried out, "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" He answered his own question with the affirmation that God had crowned him with glory and honor (Ps. 8:4, 5).

The Scriptures strongly suggest that human beings have an intuitive knowledge of God. From the outset a knowledge of His existence is assumed: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). At Athens the apostle Paul asserted that God "is not far from each one of us" and corroborated that assertion with a quotation from the Cretan poet Epimenides (sixth century B.C.): "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27, 28). Still, despite this intuitive awareness, to these wise men "the God who made the world and everything in it," was an unknown God (verses 23, 24).

The Bible also points to the voice of conscience as a manifestation of God. The main task of conscience is to encourage us to do the right and to avoid the wrong. It also pronounces judgment. This faculty is a universal phenomenon, even though its operation differs from person to person. According to the NT, the voice of conscience can be resisted and even suppressed (1 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:15).

Human reason has been presented as a means by which a true knowledge of God can be attained. Some, especially among rationalists and deists, went so far as to claim that the light of reason was fully adequate to know God, His attributes, and His will, and that supernatural revelation was not indispensable. Reason plays a crucial role in receiving and understanding revelation and in grasping divine truth, but it does not generate them. This fact was expressed long ago in Zophar's

question to Job: "Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do?" (Job 11:7). Paul noted that through reason and wisdom the world did not know God (1 Cor. 1:21). The Bible does not present autonomous human reason as a source of a true knowledge of God.

3. History

History is also considered by many as a modality of general revelation. The Scriptures present God as the Lord of history as well as the Lord of nature. In the words of the prophet Daniel, "He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings" (Dan. 2:21). The prophetic and historical accounts of the Bible consistently portray God as directing the affairs of nations and judging them and their rulers (Gen. 6:6, 7; 11:7-9; 18:16-19:25; Jer. 18:7-11; Amos 1:3-2:16). Paul declared to the wise men on the Areopagus that God "made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26).

Yet, without specific divine enlightenment to interpret the ever-changing flow of history, it is difficult for short-lived human beings to perceive the divine hand in the confusing panorama of historical events. Only in the light of the Scriptures are we able to trace the outworking of God's purpose for the salvation of sinners, first in the history of Israel; in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and in the proclamation of the gospel through the apostolic church (Matt. 24:1-14; Acts 7:1-53; 10:34-43; 13:16-41; 17:22-31; Eph. 1:3-3:13). The Bible gives meaning and purpose to the whole of human history, but that meaning and purpose cannot be detected apart from the Scriptures. While history is a modality of divine revelation, that revelation can be recognized only when God Himself provides a divine interpretation of its events.

The evidence presented in the preceding survey of nature, human beings, and history

strongly suggests that each constitutes a channel of divine revelation. But this revelation alone is not an adequate source for a natural theology. It does not give a knowledge of God that can bring assurance, peace, and reconciliation with God. (See God I. B.)

C. *Natural Theology and the Salvation of the Gentiles*

For centuries students of the Scriptures have debated whether a true knowledge of God can be derived from the natural world and through logical reasoning. Through rational reflection the ancient Greek philosophers came to the conclusion that there was a universal reason (Gr. *logos*) which they called God (Gr. *theos*). This philosophical knowledge about God was called "theology" (Gr. *theologia*), a reasoned knowledge concerning God. It also was called natural theology to distinguish it from mythical theology, the knowledge of the gods. Although this natural theology made the Greek philosophers critical of their ancient mythology, it did not turn them from worshipping many gods to worship the one true God.

The apostle Paul never uses the word "theology." However, his writings give evidence not only that he was acquainted with the natural theology of the Greeks, but that he was convinced of its inadequacy to lead people to a saving knowledge of God. Paul states that "Greeks seek wisdom," but asserts the ineffectiveness of their wisdom, for "the world did not know God through wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22, 21).

Paul believed that creation reveals God but also that the knowledge of God it manifests is suppressed by human minds darkened by unbelief, distrust, guilt, and ignorance (Rom. 1:19-21). The wisdom gained from God's works by those who are unenlightened by the Spirit of God leads to idolatry rather than to the worship of the true God. The apostle pointed out that human beings "exchanged the truth about

God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (verse 25). The final result was base idolatry, gross immorality, and hideous criminality (verses 22-32; cf. Eph. 4:17-19).

Another much-debated question is whether Gentiles can be saved through the revelation of God in nature, in conscience, and in history. The biblical evidence suggests that a true knowledge of God can be gained only from creation and providence when, in response to the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, human minds and hearts are transformed and the spiritual perceptions are aroused. Scripture closely connects the transforming action of the Spirit with the proclamation of the Word of God, the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38, 39; 10:42-44; 11:15-18; Gal. 3:1-5; 1 Peter 1:10-12). Salvation comes through Christ alone, as Jesus Himself witnessed: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). For this reason Jesus told His disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15, 16; cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 10:9-17; 1 Tim. 2:3-7).

Certainly "the true light that enlightens every man" (John 1:9) can penetrate even where Scripture is not known. Further, Paul speaks of "Gentiles who have not the law" yet "do by nature what the law requires," so that "they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts" (Rom. 2:14, 15). These statements indicate that the Holy Spirit can work transformation even where the word of the gospel is not preached by the human voice, but they do not suggest that there is salvation apart from Jesus Christ. Neither do they imply that non-Christian religions are alternative ways to a saving knowledge of God. (See God VII. C. 5.)

III. Special Revelation

A. Introduction and Definition

Turning away from God has always brought tragic consequences. Human beings, estranged from God by sin, guilt, shame, and fear have distorted and suppressed the knowledge of God as manifested in nature and in human consciousness. The whole earth, and especially all living beings—plants, animals, and humans—have become subject to decay, disease, and finally death. In this condition, humanity desperately needed a new revelation of God, a revelation that would not only restore the broken relationship between God and humanity but would ultimately bring the entire universe back into harmony with God. Christians hold that God has given such a revelation, that “he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ” (Eph. 1:9, 10).

This revelation is often referred to as special revelation in contrast with general revelation. Whereas general revelation is universal, accessible to all human beings everywhere, special revelation is addressed to specific human beings and is not immediately accessible to all. Whereas through general revelation God is known as Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of the universe, in special revelation He reveals Himself in a personal way to redeem humanity from sin and reconcile the world to Himself.

The center and substance of special revelation is the person of Jesus Christ, God in human flesh (1 Tim. 3:16; John 1:14, 18). In His manifestation in human form on earth, the Son of God submitted Himself to the limitations of human nature: He was “born of woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4). He became flesh, Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, a Jew who lived for about thirty-three years in Palestine, who died on a cross outside Jerusalem under the governor Pontius Pilate, and who rose from the tomb and ascended to His Father.

God never intended that this revelation would come to humanity as a thunderbolt from a blue sky. On the contrary, from the moment that our first ancestors fell into sin God began to reveal His purpose to save us through a promised seed or descendant of the woman. For thousands of years God revealed Himself through channels of His choice, especially through patriarchs and prophets, to prepare the human family for the supreme revelation, the incarnation of the Son of God. The entire history of preparatory revelations belongs to the realm of special revelation. (See Christ I-III.)

God provided not only anticipatory revelations but also confirmatory testimonies. From among His disciples Jesus chose 12 apostles to witness His life, death, and resurrection, to be eyewitnesses of the supreme revelation of God (Acts 1:21, 22; 1 John 1:1-3). In view of their unique calling and authority as heralds of divine revelation, Paul could say that the church was “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20).

This complex dynamic process of divine revelation—in the history of Israel; in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and in the apostolic witness of that supreme event—would be of no use to later generations unless it were preserved and conveyed to them in a trustworthy, authoritative, and persuasive way. Under the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit, prophets and apostles not only proclaimed but also recorded what God revealed to them. Under the guiding hand of divine providence, their writings were eventually put together to form the OT and NT.

The Scriptures as the record of special revelation have become an essential factor in the process of divine revelation. While an equation of special revelation with the Scriptures fails to do justice to the complexity of the process of revelation, the Scriptures do fulfill a crucial role in that process. According to the

biblical writers the Scriptures come to us as the word of God. That was the conviction of prophets and apostles and of the Lord Jesus Himself (see Dan. 9:2; Matt. 4:4; Mark 7:13; Heb. 4:12). The knowledge of the only true God as revealed in Jesus Christ is conveyed through the Scriptures, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Special revelation is the entire process by which God has revealed Himself and His redemptive purpose for the human race to and through Israel, the prophets, apostles, but supremely in Jesus Christ. It is also the means by which He continues to reveal Himself through the Scriptures under the illuminating and convicting power of the Holy Spirit, and through the proclamation of the church to all nations on earth. At the heart of this process is the great redemptive act of the incarnation of the Son of God, who through His life, death, resurrection, and intercession, redeems from sin all who believe in Him and restores in them the true knowledge of God.

In the deepest sense the process of revelation and redemption are one, for both center in the person of Jesus Christ. Both will come to final fruition when Christ returns to reveal Himself in the fullness of His glory to bestow immortality upon His people and to take them into the presence of the Father. Even then the mysteries of redemptive revelation will continue to arouse the deepest gratitude and the keenest study on the part of the redeemed. As Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" (1 Cor. 13:12).

B. Characteristics of Special Revelation

Special revelation is distinguished by its specific characteristics: 1. Special revelation is selective: God communicates with specific human beings on a Person-to-person basis with all that is involved in such communication. 2. Special revelation is redemptive: the primary focus of special revelation is the sin-

ner, whom God wants to save and restore. 3. Special revelation is accommodative: it is marked by divine condescension, or accommodation, to the level of humanity. This characteristic is inextricably intertwined with the previous ones and culminates in the incarnation of the Son of God.

1. Special Revelation as Selection

In revealing Himself to humanity God chose specific persons to whom and through whom to make known His character and His will. He chose Abraham and made a covenant with him, promising him descendants and blessings (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18). The covenant promise began to be fulfilled with the birth of Isaac. To him and to Jacob, his son, the initial promise was repeated and confirmed by God (Gen. 26:1-5; 28:12-15).

God appeared to these patriarchs in so-called theophanies. We learn from the Genesis narratives that "the Lord appeared to Abram" (Gen. 12:7; 17:1) and to his descendants (Gen. 26:2; 35:9). God also revealed Himself to them in visions and dreams (see Gen. 15:1; 28:12; 31:10, 11; 46:2). In a very special theophany, Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes, struggled with God and received the divine blessing (Gen. 32:24-28).

God's election of Israel as the recipient and channel of His special revelation continued in succeeding generations. A high point of God's self-revelation occurred at the Exodus, when God revealed Himself through mighty acts of redemption, and proclaimed His glory or character as a compassionate and forgiving God. The revelations of Yahweh as the merciful Redeemer and the supreme lawgiver (Ex. 3, 20, 24) were deeply engraved on the consciousness of Israel and provided a firm foundation for all subsequent revelations.

The Lord continued to reveal Himself to the chosen nation in a special way, primarily through men and women on whom He bestowed the gift of prophecy. Among these were: Samuel (1 Sam. 3:21), Isaiah (Isa. 6), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-16), and many others.

God Himself called to the prophetic office; never was anybody endowed with this gift as a result of human initiative or effort. As Peter states it, "no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21).

God's relationship and providential dealing with the chosen nation were unique. To no other nation on earth did He reveal Himself as He did to Israel. One of the psalmists stated that God "has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his ordinances" (Ps. 147:20). Centuries later Paul affirmed that the advantage of the Jews was "much in every way"; they had been "entrusted with the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1, 2). The results of God's special revelation to Israel were unparalleled. They alone worshiped the one true God. No other nation had a law like the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath as a weekly day of rest commemorating Creation was peculiar to Israel. And no nation could claim to have a body of sacred Scripture produced by inspired writers over a period of more than a thousand years. A prominent feature of Yahweh's special revelation to Israel was the oft-repeated promise of a royal Son, the son of David, who would bring redemption and everlasting peace, not only to Israel but to the ends of the earth (Gen. 49:8-10; 2 Sam. 7:8-16; Ps. 2:1-11; Isa. 9: 6, 7; 11:1-10; 49:1-6; Jer. 23:5, 6; Micah 5:2-4; Zech. 9:9, 10).

Although the revelations made by Yahweh to Israel and His providential dealing with the chosen nation were unparalleled, the Lord made it clear from the beginning that the revelation given to Israel was for the benefit of all nations on earth. God had said to Abraham that in him and his descendants all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). At Mount Sinai the Lord reminded Israel how He had redeemed them from Egypt and told them, "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples" (Ex. 19:5). This revelation was certainly selective. But imme-

diately the Lord added, "for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (verses 5, 6). God chose Israel to reveal Himself and His redemptive purpose to the whole earth, to be His witnesses among the nations (Isa. 43:9-12).

2. Special Revelation as Redemption

The supreme purpose of all forms or modalities of special revelation is to bring redemption to sinful human beings. The revelations given to Moses and the prophets, and through them to Israel, were intended to bring a knowledge of "the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34:6, 7).

Redemption centers in Jesus Christ; therefore, so does special revelation. However, the revelations given of old were partial and progressive; they came "in many and various ways," until at last God revealed Himself in His Son, who fully reflected "the glory of God" and bore "the very stamp of his nature" (Heb. 1:1, 4). It is not surprising, therefore, that the prophets "searched and inquired about this salvation," and "inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory" (1 Peter 1:10, 11). Jesus affirmed the privilege of His disciples: "Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Matt. 13:17). From these and many other passages it is evident that special revelation is progressive as is the believer's understanding of that revelation (Prov. 4:18; John 16:12, 13; 1 Cor. 13:9-12).

Because special revelation is redemptive, the Bible as the written record of special revelation in all its diversity finds its common focal point in Christ and His salvation. The aged apostle Paul pointed Timothy to the Holy Scriptures as the God-given means to instruct

him, "for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). This saving knowledge is specific, yet universal in its intent. Because in Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3), He can bring all people to Himself and to the Father.

3. Special Revelation as Accommodation

No revelation would accomplish its divinely intended purpose if it were beyond the possibility of humans to receive and grasp it. In order to reach us in our fallen condition, God accommodates His revelation to human capacity. The Lord condescends to our level of understanding, using human language, employing figures and symbols known to human beings to reveal Himself so that we may know Him and understand His character and His dealings with us. This accommodation, or condescension, is found in all His dealings with the human race, yet it reached its climax in the incarnation of the Son of God, who became a human being, Jesus of Nazareth.

The very fact that God selects fallen beings to convey the revelation of Himself to other fallen beings, in human language, with all its foibles and imperfections, is by itself an unfathomable act of condescension. While we do recognize divine accommodation in the Scriptures, we must guard against pressing

the concept of accommodation so far as to deny or distort the true meaning of Scripture.

Of the many different forms or manifestations of divine accommodation, we can only provide some samples. One prominent form is the use of anthropomorphic language in reference to God's person and His attitude toward human beings. God is represented in the Bible as having a bodily form; He has a face (Ex. 33:20), eyes (Ps. 11:4), ears (Ps. 18:6), nostrils and mouth (verse 8), arms and hands (Isa. 62:8), and feet (Ex. 24:10).

Scripture also ascribes human feelings and attitudes to God. He remembers (Ex. 2:24), hates (Ps. 5:5; Isa. 61:8), abhors (Ps. 106:40), laughs (Ps. 2:4), is angry (1 Kings 11:9), and is pleased (Matt. 3:17; Col. 3:20). If such expressions are understood in an extreme literal sense, we may have a distorted picture of God. The Bible itself contains corrective cautions against misinterpreting the human expressions used in reference to God. While 1 Samuel 15:11 reports God as saying "I repent that I have made Saul king," the same chapter affirms that God "is not a man, that he should repent" (verse 29). In Genesis 15 we find God condescending to ratify His covenant, as was the custom of the day. In many other passages, He speaks in human language so that He might be understood.

IV. Biblical Inspiration

A. Introduction: The Problem of Definition

Christians commonly refer to the Bible as an inspired Book, a holy Book, a divine Book, or simply as Scripture. Jesus often appealed to or quoted from the Scriptures, and there can be no question that He considered the Hebrew Scriptures as carrying divine authority (Matt. 4:4; John 10:35). The apostle Paul, likewise, accepted the Scriptures as being of divine origin (2 Tim. 3:16). He referred to them as "the holy scriptures" (Rom. 1:2), "the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2), and "the sacred writings" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Belief that the Hebrew Scriptures came into being as the result of divine inspiration has been widespread and persistent among Jews and Christians. However, there is no agreement as to exactly what "inspiration" means. Concepts on biblical inspiration range from verbal dictation by the Holy Spirit to merely human inspiration. Some think the concept of inspiration should be discarded altogether.

A number of factors have contributed to the diversity of opinions concerning biblical inspiration. While the concept is biblical, the word "inspiration" is not. In addition, those who study the issue of inspiration do not all start from the same presuppositions. Finally,

no biblical author presents a detailed discussion of the topic. Because of these factors, a detailed study of the biblical evidence for inspiration is necessary.

B. A Biblical View of Inspiration

1. Inspiration: Word or Concept?

The words "inspiration" and "inspired" do not appear as such in the original languages of the Bible. They are derived from the Latin and appeared in the Vulgate translation of 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21. Their basic meaning is to "breathe in."

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul affirms that all Scripture is *theopneustos*, or "breathed by God." Benjamin Warfield concludes that "Scripture is called *theopneustos* in order to designate it as 'God-breathed,' the product of divine inspiration"; thus "the Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation" (296).

Peter points out that "men . . . spoke from God," *pheromenoi* (carried, blown, or impelled) "by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Following the Vulgate, some translations have used the word "inspired" here, but most have used the phrase "moved by the Holy Spirit." In any case, the sense of the text is that biblical prophecy has its origin in the Holy Spirit.

Thus, while the word "inspiration" is not a precise translation of any Greek word used in the Bible to describe the process by which Scripture comes to the human mind, it may be appropriately used to represent a process in which the Holy Spirit works on selected human beings, to move them to proclaim messages received from God. Some spoke the word; some wrote it. The written form constitutes the God-breathed Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16). "Inspiration" refers to the Holy Spirit's work on these messengers or prophets, whether they spoke or wrote. Because these people were "inspired" or "moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21), their utterances and writings may be con-

sidered inspired as well (2 Tim. 3:16).

While the word "inspiration" focuses primarily on the activity of the Holy Spirit, a careful study of the biblical data makes it clear that both human and divine activity are involved in the process by which the Scriptures came to be written.

2. The Human Shape of Scripture

At face value the Scripture is a human book, or rather a collection of human books. Many of these have a human name attached to them; all bear the marks of human authorship. This authorship shows in their opening words: "the words of Jeremiah" (Jer. 1:1), "the proverbs of Solomon" (Prov. 1:1), "the elder to the beloved Gaius" (3 John 1), "Paul . . . and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:1, 2). The first five books of the OT are attributed to Moses, many of the Psalms to David and Asaph. The prophetic books each bear the name of a prophet, the Gospels the name of an apostle or of a close associate of the apostles. Thirteen letters explicitly mention Paul as their author, and the book of Revelation was written by John, traditionally understood to be the apostle John.

Authors frequently refer to themselves with personal pronouns; they also record their own experiences (Ezra 8:15-30; Neh. 1:1-11; Isa. 6:1-8; Jer. 1:1-19; Dan. 7:1-28; Gal. 1:12-2:10; Rev. 1:9-19). Peculiar characteristics of style and language point to the distinct individuality of each writer.

Numerous historical references and literary forms link the biblical writings with their times and backgrounds. Many of the laws of Moses show remarkable parallels with other ancient laws, such as those of Hammurabi. Patriarchal customs and social conditions in Genesis reflect in a notable way the conditions in Mesopotamia and Egypt in the second millennium B.C. Significant parallels exist between some psalms and Canaanite religious literature, and between some biblical proverbs and their contemporary Egyptian proverbs.

These and other parallels between biblical and nonbiblical literature give the Bible a very human face.

Some books of the Bible belong to the world's classics, as expressions of the deepest human emotions. Human drama is portrayed in Job and in Ruth, passionate yet delicate love in the Song of Solomon, gripping suspense in Esther, and supreme distress in Lamentations. And one cannot remain untouched by Paul's plea for a wayward slave in the Epistle to Philemon.

The historical books of the Bible provide evidence of historical research (Luke 1:1-4). The apostle Paul quotes pagan authors (Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 15:32, 33; Titus 1:12). Jude cites the pseudepigraphical book of Enoch (Jude 14, 15).

The human shape of Scripture is unmistakable. Human authors—using human language, quoting human sources, operating in specific human contexts, describing human emotions—are subject to all the weaknesses and failures of humanity. Prophets and apostles were not free from sin. They doubted, they were afraid, at times they succumbed to temptation (Ex. 4:10-14; Num. 20:10-12; 2 Sam. 11:1-27; 1 Kings 19:1-3; Luke 22:54-62). Neither were they free from pride and prejudice, as is quite evident from Jonah and the Gospel narratives (Matt. 20:20-28).

One may well wonder how some forty writers from divergent historical and cultural backgrounds, who differed widely in status and occupation, as well as in intellectual and spiritual endowments, produced a collection of books that manifests a remarkable unity and that from beginning to end reveals one God, Creator of heaven and earth, whose love embraces all things. Beyond this, one may wonder how such writers portrayed a person like Jesus of Nazareth, so truly human and yet so completely free from all the weakness and imperfection of the biblical writers themselves. The answer to these questions, as Christians through the ages have believed, lies in the fact that the Scriptures have not

merely a distinct human character but also a divine origin.

3. The God-breathed Character of Scripture

Just as plain as the idea of the human shape of Scripture is the conviction of its human authors that their writings owe their origin to God. In the words of 2 Timothy 3:16, they are God-breathed. That conviction comes to expression in many different ways.

Innumerable places in the Scriptures show single sentences, large paragraphs, or even entire chapters directly attributed to God as speaker. The very first chapter of the Bible, for instance, presents God as a speaking God. The different acts of Creation are introduced and initiated by the phrase "And God said" (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). As soon as God had created the first human beings He spoke to them (verses 28, 29). Throughout Genesis we find God speaking to human beings, usually to those who believe in Him, but at times also to those who do not acknowledge Him (Gen. 4:6-16). From Exodus 3:4, where God calls Moses, through the Pentateuch, we find the ever-recurring phrase "And the Lord said to Moses," or words of similar intent (Ex. 20:22; 25:1; 34:1, 6; Lev. 1:1; Num. 1:1; Deut. 32:48).

Moses announced that the Lord would communicate in future times with His chosen people through prophets (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:15-19). In fulfillment of promises such as verse 18, many prophets arose through the centuries. They spoke and wrote the words that God put in their mouths and in their hearts and minds. Ezekiel received this command, "Son of man, all my words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. And go . . . to your people, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God'" (Eze. 3:10, 11). To Jeremiah the Lord declared, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5). "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth" (verse 9).

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There is every reason to assume that such commands apply to all the prophets appointed by God. They spoke and wrote the word of the Lord.

The spoken word became the Written Word by divine impulse and command. There is sufficient evidence in the books of Moses and the prophets to show that God called them to speak and to write the words He had entrusted to them (Ex. 17:14; Deut. 31:19, 24; Jer. 36:2; Hab. 2:2). Through the Written Word God would speak to later generations, long after its human authors had passed away (Deut. 29:29; Isa. 30:8). The book of the law of Moses was to be studied, believed, and obeyed by successive generations in Israel, for it was the law of the Lord. Israel's prosperity and relationship with God as His covenant people depended on their wholehearted acceptance of His law. When they rejected the law, they actually rejected the Lord, and the results were disastrous (Joshua 1:7, 8; 8:34, 35; 1 Kings 2:1-3; Isa. 5:24, 25; Dan. 9:11-13).

Books by prophets, wise men, and psalmists were added to the law of Moses in subsequent centuries. In some of these we find statements by the human authors that point to God as the source of what they wrote. Of the young prophet Samuel it is written, "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground." "The Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel" (1 Sam. 3:19, 21; 4:1). David testified about himself, "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). Solomon, "the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (Eccl. 1:1), "taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care" (Eccl. 12:9). That is the human aspect of his writings. Yet, immediately he adds that "the sayings of the wise . . . are given by one Shepherd" (verse 11), the Lord, the God of Israel.

Though written by human authors, law, history, prophecy, psalms, and proverbs were all

attributed to God. He was the One who called human beings to be His messengers, revealed Himself to them, instructed them through His Spirit, endowed them with wisdom, guided them in their research, and moved them to speak and write. True, the evidence for this attribution of the OT writings to God is much more prominent in some parts of them than in others; it is especially limited in the historical parts. Still, that all of the OT was regarded as of divine origin becomes explicit in the NT.

The four Gospels show us that Jesus constantly appealed to the Scriptures of the OT as having ultimate authority. Underlying these appeals was the fundamental conviction of the divine origin of Scriptures. When tempted by the devil to relieve His hunger, Jesus resisted by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Three times He refuted Satan's temptations with the answer "It is written," clearly implying that all Scripture proceeds from God.

On another occasion Jesus introduced the quotation of Psalm 110:1 with the words "David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared" (Mark 12:36). He quoted the words of Genesis 2:24 as if spoken by God, in spite of the fact that in the original they appear to be a comment by Moses (Matt. 19: 4, 5). When Jesus introduced statements from the OT with expressions such as "It is written," (Matt. 21:13) "have you never read" (verse 16), or "this scripture must be fulfilled in me" (Luke 22:37), He attributed to Scripture divine inspiration and authority. (See Christ I. B. 1. b.)

In a confrontation with the Pharisees and scribes, our Lord drew a sharp distinction between human tradition and "the Word of God" (Matt. 15:6), a phrase used by Jesus in reference to the OT (see John 10:35; 17:17). In referring to the word He preached as the word of God (Luke 8:21; 11:28), He did so in the awareness that He spoke the words which the Father had given Him to speak (John 14:24; 17:8). He also knew that the Holy Spirit would bring these words to the remembrance

of His disciples who would proclaim the same words in oral and written form (John 14:25, 26; 16:13-15).

The apostles accepted the OT as divinely inspired. They attributed words written by prophets and psalmists to the Holy Spirit. Peter introduced Psalms 69:25 and 109:8 to his fellow believers in the upper room by saying, "The scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David" (Acts 1:16, 20). Similar statements crediting the Holy Spirit as the source of words from the OT can be found in several places in Acts and in the Epistles (Acts 4:25; 28:25; Heb. 3:7; 10:15). God was the One who spoke through the mouth of His chosen servants (Acts 3:18, 21; Rom. 1:2; Heb. 1:1; Rev. 10:7).

This conviction that the prophetic writings originated with God is summed up in the words of Peter: "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). Paul, with obvious reference to "the sacred writings," with which Timothy had been acquainted from childhood, declared, "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). For the Lord Jesus and for the apostles, all Scripture, all of the OT, originated with God and was truly God-breathed.

The NT suggests that the apostolic writings were accepted as being part of Holy Scripture, together with the OT. As one would expect, such indications are especially found in the later books of the NT (Luke 10:7; cf. 1 Tim. 5:18). In 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul juxtaposes a statement of Jesus, "The laborer deserves his wages" with a quotation from the OT (Deut. 25:4) and introduces both with the phrase "for the Scripture says." The introductory phrase suggests that the apostle Paul was acquainted with the Gospel of Luke and recognized it as Scripture. In a similar manner, Peter appears to recognize Paul's letters as Scripture, "according to the wisdom given him" (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

Paul, Peter, and John use expressions that clearly exhibit their consciousness of being

moved, like the prophets of old, by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:4, 5; 1 Peter 1:12; Rev. 1:10, 11). They are conscious of speaking and writing with divine authority.

The application of 2 Timothy 3:16, that all Scripture is God-breathed, should be made not only to the books of the OT but to those of the NT as well. That their writings were already recognized as inspired Scripture by Christian authors of the second century A.D. provides additional justification for such an application.

C. Mode, Locus, and Extent of Inspiration

Given the human and divine aspects of Scripture, one must ask how these two aspects relate to each other. Unfortunately, biblical writers do not directly address the question. However, scattered throughout the books of the Bible one finds indications and suggestions concerning the process of inspiration and its results. On the basis of these biblical data we will try to reach some conclusions. The subject will be discussed here in terms of the mode, the locus, and the extent of inspiration.

1. The Mode of Inspiration

Biblical authors agree on the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in moving them to write. The initiative is wholly with the Spirit: He calls, gives revelations, moves, or inspires. Peter states it succinctly: "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man" (2 Peter 1:21). Even the unwilling prophet Balaam could utter only what the Lord allowed him to say (Num. 24:2-9, 13).

While recognizing the fact of inspiration, we must examine the mode in which it occurs. This entails studying the process by which biblical authors received revelations and wrote them down.

God commonly revealed Himself to prophets in visions and dreams (Num. 12:6). They then wrote down what they had seen and heard, either immediately or later. We ask, Did

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the prophets do the writing of themselves, or was it always under God's guidance? This question must be answered indirectly, for the prophets say little about the matter.

Jeremiah's experience helps answer our question. The Lord tells the prophet, "Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations" (Jer. 36:2). It is hard to believe that Jeremiah, unaided by the Spirit of God, could have remembered and written down what God had revealed to him over a period of many years. The story continues: Jeremiah called Baruch, who "wrote upon a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord which he had spoken to him" (verse 4). Then "Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll" (verse 10), but these words were "the words of the Lord" (verses 8, 11).

This identification of the words of the prophet as the words of the Lord suggests strongly that the prophet was inspired, i.e., was moved and directed by the Spirit of God, in putting the words of the Lord in written form. Likewise, when the prophet Micah, contrasting his message with that of false prophets, exclaimed, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, . . . to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (Micah 3:8), he included written as well as spoken words.

When King Jehoiakim defiantly burned the scroll, "Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, . . . who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them" (Jer. 36:32). This was a second, enlarged edition of the book of Jeremiah.

The experience of Jeremiah indicates that the prophets did not write their books as if they were mere copyists. They were fully involved, while moved and guided by the Spirit, in their writing. The same can be said of biblical writers who are not specifically referred to as prophets. Solomon, the author of many

proverbs and songs, tells us that he "taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging proverbs with great care." He also "sought to find pleasing words, and uprightly he wrote words of truth" (Eccl. 12:9, 10). Luke, author of the Gospel and of Acts, tells us that it seemed good to him, "having followed all things closely [or accurately] for some time past, to write an orderly account" (Luke 1:3). Thus, careful historical research and literary assessment were important to the composition of the books written by Solomon and Luke. There is good reason to believe that a similar process was involved in the composition of other biblical books, even when that fact is not explicitly stated.

Whether the human messengers in the process of speaking or writing were always conscious of the moving of the Holy Spirit is not entirely clear. However, indications of such consciousness are found frequently in connection with the names of prophets and apostles. A careful study of the biblical data suggests that both the inspired persons themselves as well as others who heard them or read their writings recognized this special moving of the divine Spirit in their communications (Moses, Num. 12:7, 8; Joshua, Deut. 34:9; Samuel, 1 Sam. 3:19; David, 2 Sam. 23:2; Ezekiel, Eze. 2:2; Daniel, Dan. 9:22; 10:9-11; Micah, Micah 3:8; Peter, Acts 11:12; Paul, 1 Cor. 7:40; John, Rev. 1:10).

Remarks by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 have led some to conclude that Paul distinguishes between things he said under inspiration and other things which were merely his personal opinion. He writes in verse 10, "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord"; in verse 12 he adds, "To the rest I say, not the Lord." Again in verse 25 he states, "Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." These texts do not, in fact, deal with the issue of inspiration. The contrast Paul draws in verses 10 and 12 is that in one case he can refer to an explicit command of the Lord (Matt. 5:32; 19:1-6), whereas

in the other he cannot. Yet the advice in verse 12 and elsewhere is given under inspiration, for Paul concludes this discourse on questions regarding marriage with the emphatic assertion, "I think that I have the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 7:40). The Bible may not explain distinctly the process by which the Holy Spirit moved and guided the writers of the different books of Scripture, but one fact is clear: These writers functioned fully as human beings with the involvement of their total personality.

2. The Locus of Inspiration

The locus of inspiration concerns the question Who or what is inspired? Does inspiration pertain to specific individuals chosen by God, such as prophets and apostles, or to the messages they delivered in oral or written form—particularly to the Scriptures, or to the community of faith in which the Scriptures originated? The first two options have long been a matter of debate; the third option has especially come to the fore in recent years.

The biblical evidence presented earlier in this article points to specific individuals, chosen by God, as the primary locus of the working of the Holy Spirit. Scripture says "Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21); "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2); "As for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord" (Micah 3:8).

Whether inspiration should be attributed to the inspired writers or to the Scriptures written by them is to a large extent a needless dilemma. It is clear that the primary locus of inspiration is in people. The Holy Spirit moved upon people to speak or write; yet what they spoke or wrote was the inspired word of God. In the words of Paul to Timothy, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV). Peter recognized the letters of Paul as part of the Scriptures, written according to "the wisdom that God gave him" (2 Peter 3:15, NIV). In writing his Epistles, Paul was inspired or moved by the Holy Spirit, and the letters he produced became part of the God-breathed Scriptures.

Inspiration worked on Paul, and under inspiration Paul wrote inspired letters. The primary locus of inspiration is the apostle; the result of that inspiration is Holy Scriptures.

The third option for the locus of inspiration, the community of faith where Scripture had its origin, hardly deserves mention as a viable alternative. The concept is based, to a great extent, on a specific method of Bible study. By a literary-historico-critical study of the Bible, scholars have come to the conclusion that many biblical books are the end product of a long process, in which unknown writers, editors, and redactors were involved. On the basis of such phenomena, the understanding that books of the Bible had specific authors—who lived in well-defined historical contexts, and wrote under inspiration—is denied. Instead of these authors being inspired, the community among which the writing reached its final form is inspired to recognize the validity and authority of the Bible message. (See Interpretation IV, F, G.)

While there is evidence of redaction and editing, much of this can be attributed to the inspired authors themselves, to their immediate associates, or possibly even to later inspired writers. Joshua, for instance, may well have—under divine inspiration—edited the books of Moses and made additions to them, such as, for example, the last verses of Deuteronomy. In any case, given the absence of evidence for the locus of inspiration in a community rather than in a biblical author, the statements of Scripture must stand. The locus of inspiration is in the inspired author.

3. The Extent of Inspiration

The "extent of inspiration" refers to the matter of how much of the Bible is inspired. Are the words of the Bible themselves inspired? Or are only the thoughts behind the words inspired? Are some parts of the Bible more inspired than others? Are some parts not inspired at all? Is the Bible inspired in its totality or is it inspired only in degrees?

From discussion of special revelation and

inspiration (III. B and IV. B) it is evident that the revelation-inspiration process has many aspects and that available information does not answer all our questions. However, there is little doubt that thoughts as well as words are involved in this process. In visions and dreams or by impressions of the Holy Spirit, inspired persons received thoughts in visual or verbal form. These they then conveyed faithfully and truthfully as they had received. At times they seem to express their messages in precisely the words given to them by the Spirit.

Regardless of the way the thoughts were received, the biblical writers emphasize that their words are words from God. Moses quotes God as saying that He will put His words in the mouth of the prophets (Deut. 18:18; cf. Jer. 1:9). Referring to Scripture, Jesus declared, quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

The words written by the biblical authors are distinctly human words. For that reason they can introduce their books with such expressions as "the words of Jeremiah" (Jer. 1:1) or "the proverbs of Solomon" (Prov. 1:1). The thoughts, and at times the words, are given by revelation of God to be expressed by the human authors in words familiar to them and their immediate readers.

Truly the Scriptures are fully human and fully divine. Any idea that some parts of the Bible are merely human while other parts are divinely inspired contradicts the way the biblical writers present the matter. Paul's words, that "all Scripture is God-breathed," do not allow for any concept of partial inspiration. Neither are there any hints in Scripture suggesting degrees of inspiration. Some portions of Scripture may be more important than other portions (Jesus speaks in Matthew 23:23 about "the weightier matters of the law"), but that does not mean that they are more inspired. Every Christian would do well to receive the words of Holy Scripture in the

manner in which the believers in Thessalonica accepted the words of Paul, "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13).

D. Effects of Inspiration

What does inspiration accomplish? What are the effects of the special influence exercised by the Holy Spirit on the inspired writers? Does the moving of the Spirit give to their writings qualities that make the Bible different from any other book in the world? The majority of Christians throughout the centuries have answered the last question in the affirmative, though they have differed as to the unique qualities, attributes, or effects of inspiration. Some of these differences and the conflicts engendered by them will be discussed in the historical survey at the end of this article.

The primary purpose here is to consider four qualities of Scripture: Scripture is the living voice of God, the authority of Scripture, the truthfulness of Scripture, and the sufficiency of Scripture. While it is appropriate to look at each of these effects of inspiration separately, qualities of Scripture should never be seen in isolation from each other. They constitute the different hues of a spectrum of colors formed by the bright light of the Word of God.

1. Scripture: The Living Voice of God

In diverse ways the biblical writers stress that the words of Scripture are God's voice speaking to human beings as an ever-present dynamic reality. The "thus says the Lord" of the prophets speaks as directly to human beings in the twentieth century A.D. as in the eighth or fifteenth century B.C. When the Sadducees tried to trap Jesus with a question about the resurrection, He straightforwardly told them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God." He asked them, "Have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living"

(Matt. 22:29, 31, 32). Jesus quoted here words spoken by God to Moses and recorded more than 1,000 years earlier as applicable to his questioners: "What was said to you by God."

In Scripture God speaks to all generations. Referring to certain judgments that came upon Israel of old because of their unbelief, Paul reminds the Christian believers in Corinth that "these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Peter, speaking about the revelations regarding the sufferings and the glory of Christ given by the Spirit to the prophets, told his fellow Christians that those prophets "were serving not themselves but you" (1 Peter 1:12). The word of God given through prophets, psalmists, sacred historians, and apostles is a living word that speaks directly to those who read or hear that word. This is forcefully expressed in Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

The Spirit of God who moved the human authors of the Bible to write is the same Spirit who addresses each generation in and through the words they wrote. For this reason NT writers quote words from the OT as being spoken by the Holy Spirit (Heb. 3:7-11; 10:15-17). Because of this, John the revelator concludes each of his letters to the seven churches with the urgent admonition: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Thus "word" and "Spirit" belong together. The apostle Paul refers to the Word of God as "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17). The Spirit of God gives efficacy and power to the Word of God. The new birth or regeneration is attributed both to the Spirit and to the Word. Jesus told Nicodemus that it was necessary to be born anew of the Spirit (John 3:5-7) while Peter wrote to the scattered believers, that they were "born anew, . . . through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

2. Scripture: Its Authority

From Genesis to Revelation supreme authority is ascribed to God, the Creator of heaven and earth. As such, He revealed Himself to the patriarchs (Gen. 17:1; 35:11; 48:3) and to Moses (Ex. 3:13-15; 6:2, 3). David acknowledged the Lord as ruler above all, to whom belong greatness, power, and majesty (1 Chron. 29:10-13). Daniel, as well as Nebuchadnezzar and Darius, ascribe supreme wisdom and everlasting dominion to the God of heaven (Dan. 2:20-22; 4:34, 35; 6:26, 27).

The authority of God is, however, primarily based not on His infinite power and knowledge but on His character. To Moses God revealed Himself as "the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6). Consequently the authority of the Lord is not exercised as it is by human rulers. God's absolute authority is an authority of love and peace, expressed in humility, service, and self-sacrifice. This authority is supremely manifested in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, "who is the head of all rule and authority" (Col. 2:10), yet who laid down His life by His own power and authority (John 10:17, 18).

The authority of Scripture as the Written Word of God manifests all the characteristics of the authority of God. Its authority is expressed in absolute demands of obedience (Ex. 20:1-17), in compassionate pleas of love (Isa. 1:18; Matt. 11:28), in promises of forgiveness and blessing (Matt. 5:3-12; 1 John 1:9), and in earnest warnings of judgment (Jer. 6:1-8).

God endowed His chosen messengers with His own authority when they spoke or wrote under the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the writings of prophets and apostles speak with divine authority to every generation, even though the human authors of those writings have long since passed away. Thus Paul can say that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone"

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(Eph. 2:20). Thus Peter admonishes believers to “remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” (2 Peter 3:2). The authority of prophets and apostles was based on God’s calling them and making them recipients and witnesses of divine revelation (John 15:16; Acts 9:15, 16; 2 Peter 1:18; 1 John 1:1-4).

Jesus repeatedly confirmed the authority of the Scriptures. He resisted the temptations of the devil with a decisive “It is written” (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). He refuted accusations of His opponents by quoting to them specific Scriptures which exposed their misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the word of God (Matt. 12:1-7). When the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy, He quoted Psalm 82:6 and affirmed the authority of the word of God with the categorical assertion that “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:33-35). He finally silenced His questioners by asking how the Messiah could be both the son and Lord of David, according to the Scriptures (Matt. 22:41-46).

Jesus and the apostles appealed to Scripture to show that in Him its types and prophecies had met their fulfillment. His conception and birth fulfilled “what the Lord had spoken by the prophet” (Matt. 1:22, 23); the place of His birth had been “written by the prophet” (Matt. 2:5). After reading a messianic prophecy from Isaiah 61:1, 2, Jesus solemnly declared to His audience, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Announcing His impending death, Jesus told His own that Isaiah 53:12 “must be fulfilled” (Luke 22:37). After His resurrection He showed them “that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

The apostle Paul refers to the OT as “the holy scriptures” (Rom. 1:2), “the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2), and “the sacred writings” (2 Tim. 3:15), titles that express their divine origin and authority.

Jesus and the apostles used the word “Scripture” or “Scriptures” only in reference

to a well-known and firmly established body of writings. When Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, “You search the scriptures” (John 5:39), or when Paul argued with the Jews in Thessalonica “from the scriptures” (Acts 17:2), they appealed to the Hebrew Scriptures—the law, the prophets, and the writings.

The same authority came to be attached to the 27 books of the NT. The apostle Peter already placed the letters of Paul on a level with “the other scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16), by which he undoubtedly meant the OT. Together, OT and NT form the canon, or rule, of faith and doctrine. There is wide agreement among Christians that the canon of the NT consists of 27 books. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have included in the OT canon the so-called Apocrypha, or deuterocanonical books, but Protestants have adhered to the 39 books of the Hebrew Scriptures. There is no evidence that the Jews in Palestine, or Jesus, or the apostles considered the Apocrypha to be a part of the Scriptures.

The principle of the supreme authority of the Scriptures is often expressed in the Latin phrase *sola scriptura*, “by Scripture alone.” In other words, only in the Scriptures has God committed to the human race in written form the supreme and authoritative revelation of Himself and His will, by which everything else is to be tested. No other holy books, sacred histories, ancient traditions, ecclesiastical pronouncements, or creedal statements may be accorded authority equal to that of the Bible.

This also means that conscience, reason, feelings, and religious or mystical experiences are subordinate to the authority of Scripture. These may have a legitimate sphere, but they should constantly be brought under the scrutiny of the Word of God (Heb. 4:12).

The Bible warns repeatedly against anything or anybody that would undermine or usurp the authority of the Word of God. It warns against false prophets who pretend to speak words from God (Deut. 18:20-22; Jer. 27:14, 15; Matt. 7:15), against false apostles claiming to be true apostles (2 Cor. 11:12, 13),

and false christs who will deceive many (Matt. 24:24), all of them substituting their own authority for that of God.

The authority of the Scriptures has been the target of blatant opposition or subtle substitution for thousands of years. In Jesus' days the Jews had "made void the word of God" through their tradition; Jesus accused them of worshiping God in vain, "teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:6, 9). Other means by which biblical authority has been undermined are worldly wisdom, science, and philosophy (1 Cor. 1:20-25; Col. 2:8), adding to or taking away from the Word of God (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18, 19), or twisting the meaning of the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16).

The *sola scriptura* principle is as much in danger of opposition now as at any time in the past. Through exalting the authority of human reason, tradition, and science, many have come to deny or to limit the authority of Scripture. Christians who still submit in humility and faith to the authority of Scripture as the living and supreme Word of God must be prepared to give account of their faith and to say with the apostles, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

3. Scripture: Its Truthfulness

One of the attributes of God is His truthfulness. Throughout the Scriptures this characteristic is constantly proclaimed. He is called "the God of truth" (Isa. 65:16), who speaks the truth (Isa. 45:19). All His words are true—promises (2 Sam. 7:28), laws (Neh. 9:13), ordinances (Ps. 19:9), commandments (Ps. 119:151), judgments (Rev. 16:7; 19:2). Whatever God says is true and trustworthy (chap. 19:9; 21:5; 22:6). The attribute of truthfulness also belongs to the Son, who was "full of . . . truth" (John 1:14), and to the "Spirit of truth" (chap. 14:17; 1 John 5:7).

When God chose human beings as messengers, He not only endowed them with His authority but also clothed their words with His truthfulness when they spoke or wrote

under inspiration. Numerous assertions on the part of the inspired messengers affirm that they speak the truth. At other times this fact is acknowledged by others. Solomon, the Preacher, uprightly "wrote words of truth" (Eccl. 12:10). Jeremiah testified, "In truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words" (Jer. 26:15). John affirms that "his testimony is true" and that he "tells the truth" (John 19:35; cf. 21:24). Paul repeatedly asserts the truth of what he writes (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:10); he states that he has been appointed a "teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (1 Tim. 2:7).

There are also general declarations of the truth of God's Word. The psalmist declares, "The sum of thy word is truth" (Ps. 119:160). The gospel preached by the apostles is "the word of truth" (Eph. 1:13; see also Col. 1:5). Jesus emphatically affirms, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17).

Because all of Scripture is God's word and every word that comes from God is true, it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that all of Scripture is truth. That is evidently what the biblical authors claimed for their writings. This is what our Lord affirmed and what the majority of Christians through the centuries held and confessed.

The implications of the complete veracity of Scripture are clear. Not only do its authors tell the truth in what they say about God and salvation but also in regard to other matters. The historical narratives of the Bible are to be accepted as reliable and true. Among these authentic accounts of real events are the creation of the world and the first human beings in six days, the fall of Adam and Eve, the universal flood, the lives of the patriarchs, the history of Israel, the Gospel narratives, and the story of the Spirit-led origin and development of the apostolic church.

The claim that Scripture is true in everything it says has never gone unchallenged. Already during the first Christian centuries the historicity of many biblical narratives was questioned by pagan philosophers opposed to Christianity. But especially in modern times

the assertion of the autonomy of human reason has led to a denial not only of the inspiration, authority, and truthfulness of Scripture, but of the intrusion of the supernatural in the natural world, especially in the incarnation and bodily resurrection of the Son of God. As a consequence the biblical narratives have been reinterpreted as myths or legends. Such assertions, however, run counter to explicit assertions of prophets and apostles that their words are truth because they transmit the Word of God.

Many today claim that there are numerous errors, contradictions, historical inaccuracies, anachronisms, and other flaws in the Scriptures. Worse still, it is alleged, the Bible contains deliberate distortions of historical events (e.g., the Exodus), narratives colored by national pride and prejudice (e.g., the story of Esther), and pseudonymous authorship (e.g., that the book of Daniel was not written by a sixth-century prophet). Such claims and allegations constitute a serious indictment against the truthfulness of Holy Scripture. (See Interpretation IV, F, G.)

Although it may not be possible to find satisfactory answers to all the criticisms leveled against the Bible, much recently discovered historical and archaeological evidence has corroborated the historical reliability and accuracy of the scriptural narratives. The precise fulfillment of biblical prophecies in the history of ancient Israel, in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, in the unfolding drama of the Christian Church, as well as in the climactic events of our own age have provided abundant confirmation of the veracity of Scripture. But more important still, the recognition of the uniqueness, graciousness, and majesty of the God who reveals Himself in Scripture, and above all the experience of salvation through faith in the living Christ to which the Scriptures testify, has, under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, convinced millions in past and present that Scripture is all it claims to be: the Word of God, the Word of truth.

4. Scripture: Its Clarity and Sufficiency

Some claim that the Bible is an obscure book, much of which is difficult, if not impossible, to understand. On the other hand, to countless others, Scripture is full of light and comfort. The Bible strikes them as clear and easy to grasp. Why this difference?

According to the biblical writers the problem is not in the Scriptures. They affirm in a variety of ways that God's Word is a source of light and understanding. The psalmist wrote, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" and, "The unfolding of thy words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple" (Ps. 119:105, 130). The apostle Peter refers to the prophetic word as "a lamp shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). The sacred writings, according to Paul, "are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

Paul touches here on a serious problem, namely our attitude toward Scriptures or, more precisely, our attitude toward God, who reveals Himself in the Scriptures. Faith in God and in Christ is essential. We may study the Scriptures and yet never understand them because we do not believe their message. The Jewish teachers and leaders in the days of Jesus searched the Scriptures diligently but did not understand their true meaning. According to Jesus, their problem was unbelief (John 5:39, 40, 46, 47).

No serious student of the Bible will deny that there are difficulties in Scripture. Peter admits that Paul's letters contain "some things in them hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16); he does not say that they are impossible to understand. However, these difficulties do not affect the clarity of Scripture, much of which can be understood by young children. The message of salvation is presented in such a plain manner that even people of limited intelligence can grasp it. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7), says the psalmist. Jesus went a step further and thanked His Father that the truth con-

cerning His person and His works was hidden from the wise and understanding but revealed to babes (Matt. 11:25).

Not only are the Scriptures clear in what they teach; they are also sufficient for the purpose for which God gave them. When Paul writes that the Scriptures are able to instruct us for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, he further explains that all Scripture, being God-breathed, is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," so that every believer "may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). No other writing, tradition, human wisdom, or experience is to be put on the same level as the Scriptures. Scripture itself repeatedly warns neither to add to nor to take away from what God has revealed in His Word (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18).

The Bible should be read and studied by every human being endowed with intelligence. The eternal gospel, as recorded in the Scriptures, is intended for "every nation and tribe and tongue and people" (Rev. 14:6). The Bible can benefit poor and wealthy, unlearned and educated, young and old. Although the Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew,

Aramaic, and Greek, God intended them to speak to all the members of the human family in their own tongues. That intention is fast becoming a reality now that the Bible has been translated into thousands of languages. The Word of God will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it into the world (Isa. 55:10, 11). It will not fail. To those who believe and accept that Word, it means eternal life; to those who reject it or twist its meaning, it means perdition and eternal death (Matt. 7:24-27; 2 Peter 3:16).

The Scriptures were given to humanity not to be subjected to criticism, but to reveal God and the salvation He offers in Jesus Christ. Though written by human beings in human language, they speak as the living voice of God in order that we may know Him and believe in Him. As the Word of God, they are the Word of truth, which does not deceive. The history given in the Bible is completely reliable and trustworthy. The promises of Scripture are to be received by faith, its commands to be obeyed by the grace of God. Above all the Holy Scriptures "are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15).

V. Practical Applications

When we study the Bible, a realization of its divine origin and authority as well as of its human character is of crucial importance. If we a priori reject the possibility of supernatural revelation, the Bible will be seen as a purely human product, and our interpretation will be biased from the outset. If, on the other hand, we lose sight of its human shape, we are in danger of interpreting its statements in an uncritical, dogmatic manner. In view of their divine-human character, our study of the Scriptures should be conducted in a spirit of humility as well as honest inquiry, with earnest prayers that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, may guide us "into all the truth" (John 16:13). Some practical guidelines in our search for a personal knowledge of God through the Scriptures are here suggested:

1. We should study the Scriptures with the deep conviction of faith that they are as the living voice of God speaking to us personally. It is through "the living and abiding word of God" that we "have been born anew" (1 Peter 1:23). A true knowledge of God can grow and mature only by an obedient listening to His Word (Rom. 10:14-17; 16:25-27).

2. The foremost purpose of the Bible is to strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour from sin and as Lord of our life. "The sacred writings," wrote Paul, ". . . are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). One should always read and study the Bible with the definite aim to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

3. In reading the Bible we should pay

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special attention to its numerous promises. Through them God intends that we find the assurance of forgiveness, peace of heart and mind, comfort in times of suffering, hope for this life as well as for the life to come, and an abiding joy in the knowledge that God in His love and mercy has adopted us as His sons and daughters through faith in Christ (Rom. 15:4; 2 Peter 1:3, 4).

4. The Scriptures also function as a guide for practical Christian living. The biblical principle of love for God and for our fellow humans lies at the foundation of the well-being of all our spiritual and social relationships. Those who, with God's help, study and practice the Ten Commandments and the many Scripture principles for practical living derived from them will become truly balanced persons, sound in body, mind, and spirit. "Blessed [or happy] are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord" (Ps. 119:1).

5. Because the Scriptures are the very words of God in human language, we may have confidence that they always speak the truth. Jesus prayed to the Father for His disciples in all ages, "Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17). We should trust in God's Word as a reliable word. This is true not only of its spiritual teachings but also of its records of the origin and early history of our world, the narratives of the Flood, the patriarchs, the Exodus, the history of Israel, as well as the

Gospel records of Christ's birth, ministry, death, and resurrection, and the history of the early church. These narratives are not myths but authentic historical records and should be accepted as such (Luke 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16-21). A denial of their historicity sooner or later will lead to a rejection of the spiritual and moral teachings of Scripture as well. The historical, spiritual, and moral teachings of the Bible are inextricably intertwined and cannot be separated from each other.

6. Because the Scriptures are subject to the limitations, imperfections, and historical conditioning of human existence, it is useful and necessary to study the languages in which they were written, the historical background in which they originated, and the human conditions which they addressed. We should beware, however, of exaggerating the differences, the distances in time and space, between conditions in biblical times and in our own time. Neither human nature nor biblical principles of truth change (cf. Eccl. 1:9, 10). God's Word is intended for all people in all ages everywhere (Matt. 24:14; 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8; Rev. 14:6).

To sum it all up in the words of Paul, let us receive the Scriptures, "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess. 2:13). That Word will give us hope, comfort, faith, wisdom, love, and at last life eternal in the wonderful presence of our Lord.

VI. Historical Overview

A. *The Early and Medieval Church*

While early Christian writers did not discuss revelation-inspiration as a distinct issue, the Church Fathers had much to say on the subject. During the early period there was general agreement that in Jesus Christ a new and full revelation had been given. Using the NT terminology, Christ is referred to as the Word of God, the image of the Father, the Master, the Teacher, the Way, the Light of

the world. Irenaeus (c. 130-c. 200) calls Christ "the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Against Heresies*, pref. 5) and asserts that "in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless our Master, existing as the Word, had become man. For no other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except His own proper Word" (*Against Heresies* 5. 1. 1). Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215) affirms that "our Instructor is the holy God Jesus, the Word, who is

the guide of all humanity. The loving God Himself is our Instructor" (*The Instructor* 1. 7).

This emphasis on Christ as the supreme divine teacher and Word of God did not mean, however, a denial or disparagement of the revelations given in the pre-Christian Era. According to the same Clement, the Word "has appeared as our Teacher." He is "the Lord, who from the beginning gave revelations by prophecy, but now plainly calls to salvation" (*Exhortation to the Heathen* 1). In opposition to Gnostic heresies, Irenaeus stressed the unity and the progress of revelation through the Word from Creation until its culmination in Christ's incarnation and the subsequent witness of the apostles to the Word.

René Latourelle summarizes, "Irenaeus is aware of the dynamic and historical aspect of revelation. He stresses the movement, the progress, the profound unity. He sees the Word of God at work from the very beginning . . . the apostles, the church—these are all distinct moments in the activity of the Word, in the economy of the progressive manifestation of the Father through the Word. . . . Hence, the indivisible unity of the two Testaments" (105). Such views represent the general understanding of early Christians.

Already in the NT, and abundantly in Christian writers of the second century, the acceptance of the NT writings as Scripture is evident. Irenaeus refers to the Scriptures as "the good words of revelation" (*Against Heresies* 1. 3. 6). Similar sentiments were expressed by other early Christian writers.

In their confrontation with heresies such as Montanism, Gnosticism, or Marcionism, the Church Fathers defended the Christian faith on the basis of the entire Scriptures with an appeal to the true apostolic tradition. There can be little doubt that "in the early Christian Fathers, tradition (*paradosis, traditio*) means the revelation made by God and delivered by Him to His faithful people through the mouth of His prophets and apostles" (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 1983, 1388). However, with the passing of time some de-

velopments tended to weaken the supreme authority of the Scriptures.

The appeal to tradition, as maintained in the churches of apostolic origin—especially that of Rome—was gradually changed into the claim that the Bible was to be accepted on the authority of the church. The church, it was claimed, determined which books belonged to the canon of the Bible. Furthermore, through the influence of Basil the Great (c. 330-379) it came to be held that unwritten traditions of apostolic origin, not found in the Scriptures but preserved in the church, could be accepted as having divine authority. Another tendency was to attribute special authority to the writings of the Church Fathers. These developments did not happen suddenly, but took place gradually, and in the West they were reinforced by the growth of papal authority over the centuries.

During the Middle Ages Scholasticism brought the question of the relationship between reason and revelation to the forefront. The first question addressed by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in his *Summa Theologica* asks whether we need any knowledge besides philosophical science. He answers in the affirmative, explaining that "it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation." He adds that even those truths about God that human reason could have discovered needed to be taught by divine revelation, because "the rational truth about God would have appeared to only a few, and even so after a time and mixed with many mistakes" (*Summa Theologica* 1^a. 1. 1). Aquinas makes a clear distinction between truths of reason and truths of revelation. The faith of the Christian "rests on the revelation made to the Prophets and Apostles, who wrote the canonical books, not on a revelation, if such there be, made to any other teacher" (*ibid.* 1^a. 1. 8). However, the believer needs to adhere to the teaching of the church, which proceeds from the truth as revealed in Holy

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Scripture, as an infallible and divine rule (*ibid.* 2^a: 2^o. 3). Although Aquinas clearly accepts Scripture as the primary source of revealed truth, his teaching nevertheless tended to dilute its authority through his rationalistic approach to theology on the one hand, and through his emphasis on the infallibility of the teaching of the church on the other.

In the late Middle Ages the question of the relation between Scripture and tradition as sources of revelation became more acute. On one hand, some scholars held that Scripture and tradition were essentially identical, the tradition being a faithful interpretation of the revelation given through prophets and apostles; both came from the same divine source and were preserved in the unity of faith within the church. Others held that there were two distinct sources of revelation: the written tradition of the Scriptures and unwritten traditions transmitted by the apostles to their successors; both were to be accepted as a divine authority.

B. Reformation and Counter-Reformation

Martin Luther (1483-1546) affirmed that in their sinful, corrupt condition, human beings do not and cannot know God. To meet their need, God has revealed Himself in certain specific ways. God is not a vague entity, rather "He is a God revealed and, so to speak sealed. He has circumscribed Himself with a certain place, Word, and signs, so that He might be acknowledged and grasped" (*Commentary on Psalm 51:6*). Supremely God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and Christ is revealed in Scripture, the written Word, and in the proclamation of the gospel. The proper knowledge of God, as Luther called it, is uniquely given to us in Scripture.

Early in his career Luther became critical of the rationalistic approach of Scholastic philosophy and theology as is evident from his *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* written in 1517. Luther became convinced that the ultimate standard for faith and doctrine

should be Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*): "Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth" (*Luther's Works* 32:11, 12). All truth and doctrine essential for our knowledge of God and salvation is revealed to us in the Word.

In contrast with scholastic theologians, Luther was not willing to acknowledge that the authority of the church was needed to affirm what is God's Word or to provide the right interpretation of the Scriptures. Rather, it was the work of the Holy Spirit to bring the external word of Scripture into the heart and to convince the human spirit that this is the Word of God.

The views of John Calvin (1509-1564) on revelation and the authority of Scripture were similar to those of Luther. In his influential work *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he took the position that a man blinded by sin cannot benefit from the revelation of God's "everlasting Kingdom in the mirror of his works with very great clarity" (*ibid.* 1. 5. 11). In His goodness and mercy, God "added the light of his Word by which to become known unto salvation" (*ibid.* 1. 6. 1). Like Luther before him, Calvin repudiated as a malicious falsehood the claim that the credibility of Scripture should depend on the judgment of the church. Rather the church should be itself rooted in and dependent on Scripture. The Reformer stated emphatically, "Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated" (*ibid.* 1. 7. 5).

The essence of revelation, according to Calvin, is the gospel, which is "the clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ." This would include the OT promises and testimonies which God gave to the patriarchs of old, but in a higher sense the word refers to "the proclamation of the grace manifested in Christ" (*ibid.* 2. 9. 2). Calvin pointed out that "where the whole law is concerned, the gospel differs from it only in clarity of manifestation" (*ibid.* 2. 9. 4). In essence, therefore, the

OT and NT constitute a unity, both being a revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The New, however, gives clearer proclamation of Christ than the Old.

In reaction to the Protestant reformation the Roman Catholic Church redefined its position in the Council of Trent (1545-1563), claiming that the apostolic tradition included both Scripture and tradition handed down by the church. The Council promulgated in 1546 the "Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures," which affirmed that the gospel of old promised through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures, was promulgated by the Lord Jesus Christ and by His command preached by His apostles to every creature "as the source of every saving truth and of instruction in morals." However, "this truth and instruction is contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions." Therefore the OT and NT, as well as the traditions relating to faith and morals, are to be received and venerated with equal feelings of piety and reverence, "as having been dictated either by Christ's own word of mouth, or by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in the Catholic Church by a continuous succession" (Denzinger 244). The council inserted in the decree a list of sacred and canonical books, which included the so-called Apocrypha, and pronounced an anathema on anyone who would not accept this list in its entirety.

Although the Tridentine Council rejected a proposal that the apostolic tradition be considered as partly contained in the Scriptures and partly in the unwritten traditions, a long debate ensued. The issue was whether there were two sources of revelation—Scripture and tradition—or whether the two should be considered as two streams of one tradition, one written and one unwritten.

C. The Age of Reason and the Enlightenment

The modern debate about revelation and inspiration originated in the Age of Reason, with the rise of rationalism, modern science,

and biblical criticism. These and intellectual movements such as deism and the Enlightenment led many to question the necessity or even the existence of divine revelation. Such questioning challenged the very essentials of the Christian faith and especially manifested itself in incisive criticism or even wholesale denial of the Bible as an inspired source and record of revelation. This in turn called for deeper reflection on the reality and nature of revelation by those who maintained fundamental Christian convictions.

The discoveries of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), and Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) brought about the definitive change from a geocentric to a heliocentric view of the solar system. When eventually the scientific evidence for the heliocentric view proved to be irrefutable, the divine revelation and infallibility of the Bible—which was understood to teach a geocentric view—were questioned. Other scientific discoveries made during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially Isaac Newton's (1642-1727) laws of gravity, enhanced a mechanistic concept of the universe. From such a perspective, a supernatural revelation was perceived as unnecessary or even misleading, as a myth or deceptive concoction of religionists.

The dawn of modern science was matched by the rise of rationalism, making human reason the criterion for truth. René Descartes (1596-1650) initiated a philosophical revolution when in 1637 he enunciated his axiom "*Cogito, ergo sum*" ("I think; therefore I am") as the basic principle for attaining true knowledge. Descartes, a faithful Roman Catholic, never intended to deny the need for divine revelation, but his philosophy could not but bring into question the relationship between reason and revelation. His younger contemporary and admirer Baruch Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) went beyond Descartes by making a sharp distinction between the sphere of reason and the sphere of revelation (by which he clearly meant Scripture), making reason the ultimate arbiter of what could be accepted as

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truth in Scripture. Spinoza considered many things in Scripture to be repugnant to reason and pointed out what to him seemed to be undeniable contradictions.

The rise of modern biblical criticism was frequently, as in the case of Spinoza, correlated with a rationalistic approach to the Bible and a reduced view of the role of divine revelation. Other factors contributed to this development. Probably the first full-scale modern work on biblical criticism, *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament*, was published in 1678 and earned for its author, the French priest Richard Simon (1638-1712), the designation of "father of biblical criticism." Simon wanted to demonstrate the insufficiency of Scripture and consequently the need for ecclesiastical authority and tradition for its correct interpretation. But at that time neither Protestants nor Roman Catholics could accept his critical handling of the Bible.

In England the criticism of the deists focused strongly on what were considered to be the moral imperfections of the Bible, especially in the OT. In 1693 Charles Blount (1654-1693) published a collection of papers and letters, *The Oracles of Reason*. Here Blount denied any need for a specially revealed religion. Deists generally agreed that reason was adequate for natural religion and that true Christianity was nothing but the religion of reason. The mysteries of the Christian religion, such as the Trinity and the atoning death of Christ, were considered later accretions, not part of the simple original Christian faith. Many of the famous Boyle Lectures, which started in 1692, treated the topic of revelation. Joseph Butler's (1692-1752) *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, which appeared in 1736, argued incisively that many of the objections to supernatural revelation were equally valid against natural religion, as both presented unexplainable mysteries. Butler stressed an inductive approach to the question of divine revelation and, unlike Blount and other deists, rejected the imposition of any a priori condi-

tions to which a divine revelation should conform.

To circumvent moral and historical criticism of Scripture, a number of scholars in Britain suggested that the inspiration of the Bible was either partial or graded. The theory of degrees of inspiration was considered to allow for historical errors and moral imperfections in Scripture while maintaining its inspiration and authority in matters of faith and practice. Others, however, such as John Wesley (1703-1791) and Charles Simeon (1759-1836) rejected such a compromise with rationalistic theology and upheld the plenary inspiration and infallibility of the Bible.

During the eighteenth century, the era of Enlightenment, the controversy over the necessity and nature of divine revelation and the authority and inspiration of the Bible, sparked by Deist literature in England, also affected other countries. François-Marie Voltaire (1694-1778), thoroughly acquainted with English deists and their writings, never denied God's existence but was highly critical of any revealed religion. In Germany the works of English Deists played a significant role in the rise of higher criticism in the second half of the century. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), German writer and dramatist, published between 1774 and 1778 seven fragments from the previously unpublished *Apology for or Defense of the Rational Worshippers of God*, by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768). The fragments presented familiar Deist arguments against a supernatural revelation. Lessing argued that historical records, including biblical records of miracles, could have only relative certainty and that truths of reason could not be proved by history. Lessing himself did not completely deny revelation, but in his work, *The Education of the Human Race*, published in 1780, compared revelation to education. As education helps us to grasp things faster than we would on our own, revelation teaches us truths which we could discover by our reason. When reason has been perfected, revelation will become superfluous.

D. Contemporary Development

The doctrine of revelation and inspiration has emerged as a crucial issue in the theological debate in the last two centuries. A never-ending stream of literature on these subjects, sometimes calm, sometimes turbulent, challenges Christians. It is evident that faith in divine revelation and in the inspiration, as well as in the trustworthiness and authority of Scripture, is being eroded in a variety of ways.

In reaction to the rationalistic approach of the eighteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) postulated the feeling of absolute dependence on God as the basis of Christian faith. He defined the idea of revelation as "the originality of the fact which lies at the foundation of a religious communion" but was unwilling to accept its cognitive operation, for "that would make the revelation to be originally and essentially doctrine" (Schleiermacher 50). For him, inspiration had only a subordinate significance. He distinctly limited to the NT the authority of Scripture to formulate doctrine. Religious experience, rather than Scripture, became the criterion for judging spiritual truth and values. The focus of theology shifted increasingly from the transcendent to the immanent.

Nineteenth-century liberal or modern theology, with its anthropocentric emphasis, often combined a strong belief in human progress with an attitude critical of so-called dogmatism and bibliolatry. According to this theology the Bible cannot be equated with the Word of God; it merely contains words of God. Scripture is not so much the revealed Word of God as a unique record of religious experiences with Jesus Christ as the supreme manifestation of God-consciousness or the highest moral example.

Belief in human progress was reinforced by rapid advances in science and technology. As a result of the writings of Charles Lyell (1797-1875) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) the theories of geological uniformitarianism and biological evolution undermined the faith of

many in the facticity of the Genesis accounts of Creation, the Fall, and a worldwide flood. Confidence in the reliability of the history of Scripture, the accuracy of its text, and the genuineness of the authorship of many of its books was further reduced by what were claimed to be the assured results of historical and literary criticism. Proponents of critical methodology, whose presuppositions excluded supernatural revelations or interventions such as predictive prophecies or miracles, studied the Bible as they would any other book, placing it on a par with other ancient literature.

Concepts of revelation and inspiration were reinterpreted to fit the new theology. Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) in Germany defined revelation as the manifestation of the divine ideal for man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. J. Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872), in England, saw it as an immediate unveiling of God to the soul. To Ernest Troeltsch (1865-1923), leading representative of the history of religions school and the historical-critical method, no divine revelation could be considered absolute, because of the historical relativity of all events. Troeltsch stressed that historical data, including biblical data, must be evaluated by the principle of analogy which means that past events can be accepted as probable only if they are analogous to present events. Measured by this principle of historical criticism, many biblical events, such as the Incarnation, virgin birth, and resurrection of Christ could not be considered historical.

Two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century shattered all dreams of human progress and exposed the inadequacy of the prevailing theology with its emphasis on divine immanence. Karl Barth (1886-1968) initiated a revolt against this theology. He and other theologians, such as Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) and Emil Brunner (1889-1966), stressed the transcendent God as the wholly other. Barth developed a theology of the Word, according to which God speaks His decisive word in Jesus Christ, who alone is revelation in the true sense. Scripture and the preached

word are only witnesses to revelation, but God in His grace addresses us through them.

Although the neoorthodox theologians made revelation central to their theology, they considered Scripture as only a fallible human witness to that revelation. Like their liberal predecessors, they upheld the historical-critical method as essential to the study and interpretation of Scripture and rejected or reinterpreted such concepts as biblical authority, inspiration, and truth. Brunner taught that truth consists in an I-Thou encounter, not in propositional statements.

In the face of calls for radical renewal and change in the understanding of revelation and inspiration, many scholars in different denominations have appealed to Scripture's own teaching, maintaining that the concept of revelation includes all forms of supernatural manifestation and communication found in the Bible, even divine acts and words. This view has been set forth extensively by Carl F. H. Henry (1913-) in his comprehensive work *God, Revelation, and Authority* (six volumes, 1976-1983). Twentieth-century evangelical theologians generally have maintained the plenary, verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, though there is no unanimity among them about the precise meaning of these terms. However, a number of evangelical scholars, such as Clark H. Pinnock (1937-), have become uneasy with these concepts.

Despite the influence of modern liberal theology, biblical criticism, and evolutionary theories the Roman Catholic Church in the nineteenth century took a very conservative position in regard to the doctrine of revelation and inspiration. Papal encyclicals rejected the modernist position and upheld the traditional Catholic views as set forth by the Council of Trent. However, this position has changed dramatically over the last half century. Since Pius XII published the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* in 1943, Catholic scholars have moved rapidly into the vanguard of critical-biblical scholarship. This has led to a great diversity of theories in regard to

revelation and inspiration, as is evidenced in the work of Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (1983). During its fourth and final session Vatican Council II promulgated the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," stressing that God Himself is to be considered the object of revelation in His deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other. "The most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation" (Flannery 751). The Constitution maintained the position taken at the Council of Trent that "both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence" (*ibid.* 755).

Some Protestants are moving closer to the Catholic position. Even evangelical scholars have begun to put greater emphasis on the consensus and authority of Christian tradition. It seems that this inevitably must lead to a curtailment of the *sola scriptura* principle, which for many centuries was held to be a fundamental principle of Protestantism.

E. Adventist Understanding

From their earliest publications, Seventh-day Adventists affirmed their acceptance of the Bible as the inspired Word of God. In a small pamphlet entitled *A Word to the "Little Flock,"* published in 1847, James White stated succinctly, "The Bible is a perfect and complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice" (p. 13). However, for many years there was hardly any extended discussion of revelation and inspiration in denominational publications.

In 1874 George Ide Butler (1834-1918), then serving as General Conference president, proposed in a series of articles in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* a theory of degrees of inspiration. This concept, though for a short time enjoying some popularity, did not find permanent acceptance among Seventh-day Adventists. Neither did the con-

cept of verbal or mechanical inspiration. While concepts of plenary and thought inspiration have been widely favored, the church has never formulated a precise doctrine of inspiration nor of revelation. Through more than 100 years, however, Adventists have reiterated and elaborated the convictions held by their pioneers in various statements of fundamental beliefs.

The latest statement of fundamental beliefs, adopted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists during its quinquennial session at Dallas, Texas, in 1980, declares that the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—“is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation” (No. 2). This self-revelation of the Godhead found its fullest expression in the incarnation of the Son, the Word made flesh. “Through Him all things were created, the

character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged” (No. 4).

It is through the Scriptures, however, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit and by the proclamation of the church, that the revelation of God is communicated to the world. The first of the fundamental beliefs sums it up in these words. “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”

VII. Ellen G. White Comments

A. Introduction

Although Ellen White does not claim to be a theologian, her writings give evidence of deep theological insight. This is very much the case in regard to the subjects of revelation, inspiration, and Scripture. She teaches on these subjects all through her writings, but her most extensive discussions are found in the latter half of them, from about 1880 till 1915. Her greatest and persistent concern is to uplift Christ as the supreme revelation of God and to urge her readers to accept the Scriptures as the inspired, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. She upholds the Bible as the revelation of God’s character, the reliable record of God’s dealings with humanity, and the unerring standard of faith and doctrine.

B. Revelation

According to Ellen White a true knowledge of God is essential as “the foundation of all true education and of all true service,” “both for this life and for the life to come”; therefore “we must know Him as He reveals Himself”

(MH 409). She recognizes that God has revealed Himself in a variety of ways. She speaks of “the living God, as He is revealed in His word, in Christ, and in the works of creation” (GC 583). This does not mean that she considers the different revelations to be of equal clarity or sufficiency.

Frequently Ellen White writes about the revelation of God in His created works. She starts a chapter entitled “God in Nature” with this affirmation: “Upon all created things is seen the impress of the Deity. Nature testifies of God. The susceptible mind, brought in contact with the miracle and mystery of the universe, can not but recognize the working of infinite power” (Ed 99). In a similar vein she elaborates that “God has bound our hearts to Him by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth. Through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, He has sought to reveal Himself to us.” But she adds the sobering thought “Yet these but imperfectly represent His love” (SC 10).

Although she often speaks in a lofty man-

ner about the revelation of God's love, wisdom, and power in nature, Ellen White points out that this revelation by itself tends to lead human beings to idolatry or skepticism rather than to the knowledge and worship of the only true God. She attributes this to the fact that sin caused two major changes, one in humanity's relationship to God, the other in nature. On the one hand, human beings separated from God through sin can "no longer discern the character of God in the works of His hand"; on the other hand, nature, marred by the curse of sin, "can bear but an imperfect testimony regarding the Creator. It cannot reveal His character in its perfection" (8T 256). Consequently in their human wisdom "men gather an imperfect knowledge of Him from His created works; but this knowledge, . . . tends to make men idolaters. In their blindness they exalt nature and the laws of nature above nature's God" (*ibid.* 257).

Human beings with minds darkened by sin and hearts estranged from God are in need of a personal revelation of God's character. That need God has met in Jesus Christ. "As a personal being, God has revealed Himself in His Son," for "God saw that a clearer revelation than nature was needed to portray both His personality and His character" (*ibid.* 265). This revelation is sufficient, for "all that man needs to know or can know of God has been revealed in the life and character of His Son" (*ibid.* 286), maintains Ellen White, quoting John 1:18. The emphasis on Christ as the all-sufficient revelation of God's character and personality is consistent throughout her writings. This revelation of God's love to man in Jesus Christ "centers in the cross. Its full significance tongue cannot utter; pen cannot portray; the mind of man cannot comprehend" (*ibid.* 287; MH 423).

While Ellen White's writings strongly emphasize Christ as the supreme revelation of God, at the same time she upholds revelations given to and through patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. She clearly recognizes the Scriptures as an essential part of divine revelation. In an

article entitled "Christ Revealed the Father" she writes, "Jesus had imparted a knowledge of God to patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. The revelations of the Old Testament were emphatically the unfolding of the gospel, the unveiling of the purpose and will of the infinite Father" (RH Jan. 7, 1890). To Ellen White, divine revelation is a very comprehensive concept as is evident, for instance, from the following paragraph:

"The Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old. Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ. Christ as manifested to the patriarchs, as symbolized in the sacrificial service, as portrayed in the law, and as revealed by the prophets, is the riches of the Old Testament. Christ in His life, His death, and His resurrection; Christ as He is manifested by the Holy Spirit, is the treasure of the New. Both Old and New present truths that will continually reveal new depths of meaning to the earnest seeker" (CT 462).

Appealing to the biblical record, Ellen White closely associated the prophetic gift bestowed upon patriarchs and prophets with visions and dreams. Commenting on the defiant confrontation of Moses by Miriam and Aaron, she wrote, "Their claim to the prophetic gift was not denied; God might have spoken to them in visions and dreams. But to Moses, whom the Lord Himself declared 'faithful in all mine house,' a nearer communion had been granted" (PP 385). She did not attempt to give a detailed explanation of the process of divine revelation through dreams and visions but stressed the fact that prophetic dreams were distinct from ordinary dreams as well as from Satan-inspired dreams and visions. She wrote that "dreams from the Lord are classed in the word of God with visions and are as truly the fruits of the spirit of prophecy as are visions. Such dreams, taking into the account the persons who have them and the circumstances under which they are given, contain their own proofs of their genuineness" (1T 569, 570).

C. *Scripture and Inspiration*

Her emphasis on the fact that Christ is the Author and culmination of divine revelation does not lead Ellen White to deny or downplay the crucial role of the Holy Scriptures as a revelation from God. To her "the whole Bible is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ" (8T 319). Those who through their own experience have seen and heard and felt the power of Christ can testify: "I needed help, and I found it in Jesus. Every want was supplied, the hunger of my soul was satisfied; the Bible is to me the revelation of Christ. . . . I believe the Bible because I have found it to be the voice of God to my soul" (*ibid.* 321; cf. SC 112).

She sees a significant analogy between the incarnation of Christ, the eternal Word, and the inscripturation of the Word of God in the Bible. In the very informative introduction to her book *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* she states, "The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:14)" (GC vi; cf. "The Word Made Flesh" in 5T 746-749).

While she thus recognizes that the Scriptures are both human and divine, she firmly rejects any theory of partial inspiration or degrees of inspiration. Some denominational leaders in the 1880s suggested that parts of the Bible were divinely inspired, while others presented merely human thoughts. Ellen White responded to these ideas both in personal letters and in publications. In a penetrating chapter, "The Mysteries of the Bible a Proof of Its Inspiration" (5T 698-711), she discusses at length the difficulties and mysteries in Scripture that cannot be fully resolved or comprehended by human reason. She is aware that "the difficulties of Scripture have been urged by skeptics as an argument against the Bible," but argues that, to the contrary, "they consti-

tute a strong evidence of its divine inspiration." While on the one hand the Bible "unfolds truth with a simplicity and perfect adaptation to the needs and longings of the human heart," on the other hand "beneath these truths, so easily understood, lie mysteries which are the hiding of His glory—mysteries which overpower the mind in its research, yet inspire the sincere seeker for truth with reverence and faith. The more he searches the Bible, the deeper is his conviction that it is the word of the living God, and human reason bows before the majesty of divine revelation" (*ibid.* 700).

In the last pages of the same chapter she warns against "views in regard to the inspiration of the Bible which have not the sanction of the Spirit or the word of God." She asserts that "when men, compassed with human infirmities, . . . undertake to arraign the word of God, and to pass judgment upon what is divine and what is human, they are working without the counsel of God" (*ibid.* 709). She urges believers to "let the word of God stand just as it is. Let not human wisdom presume to lessen the force of one statement of the Scriptures" (*ibid.* 711).

The union of the divine and the human in the Scriptures is the result of the working of the Holy Spirit upon chosen human beings. According to Ellen White, "The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language" (GC v). Elsewhere she explains more fully, "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God" (1SM 21). The Holy Spirit did not over-

ride the individuality of the different writers. Rather, "the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another" (GC vi). Because "the Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language," but "in the language of men," its language is subject to human imperfection. Emphatically she states that "the Bible was given for practical purposes" and that "God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible" (ISM 20, 21). She even admits the possibility or probability that some mistakes might have resulted from copying and translating the Bible (*ibid.* 16).

But all these things provide no pretext for anybody to sit in judgment on the Scriptures. Repeatedly Ellen White uttered strong warnings against the disastrous effects of criticism of the Bible such as this one: "The work of 'higher criticism,' in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God's Word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives" (AA 474).

As she sees it, one of the most significant effects of inspiration is the fact that the inspired writers were completely truthful in what they wrote. This point was stressed by Ellen White in an article "Bible Biographies," originally published in 1876 (ST Feb. 24) and later in a more permanent form (4T 9-15). While critics of the Bible asserted that many historical narratives in Scripture could not be accepted as literal history, Ellen White affirmed in emphatic terms: "The lives recorded in the Bible are authentic histories of actual individuals. From Adam down through successive generations to the times of the apostles we have a plain, unvarnished account of what actually occurred and the genuine experience of real characters." Commenting on the fact that the pages of sacred history were clouded by the record of human frailties and

faults, she explained, "The scribes of God wrote as they were dictated by the Holy Spirit, having no control of the work themselves. They penned the literal truth, and stern, forbidding facts are revealed for reasons that our finite minds cannot fully comprehend." To her this truthfulness "is one of the best evidences of the authenticity of the Scriptures" (*ibid.* 9).

But the inspiration of Scripture is not only manifested in the truthful record of human sin and rebellion, but also in the marvelous revelations of divine mercy and forgiveness. "Bible history stays the fainting heart with the hope of God's mercy. . . . The words of inspiration comfort and cheer the erring soul" (*ibid.* 15). "The highest evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible," according to Ellen White, is its life-transforming power in mind and heart when "we contemplate the great things of God's Word." "This change is itself the miracle of miracles. A change wrought by the word, it is one of the deepest mysteries of the word. We cannot understand it; we can only believe, as declared by the Scriptures, it is 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' Colossians 1:27" (Ed 171, 172).

Throughout all her writings Ellen White stressed the importance of personal Bible study. "The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as if we could hear it with our ears," and consequently the reading and contemplation of the Scriptures should "be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One" (ST Apr. 4, 1906). In a chapter entitled "The Scriptures a Safeguard" (GC 593-602) she enunciated that "it is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth" (*ibid.* 598). She was deeply concerned that Christians should not be deceived by erroneous doctrines undermining their confidence in the Scriptures. She urged that the study of the Scriptures "should be critical and thorough, and should be pursued with meekness, and with sincerity of purpose, to know the truth as it is in Jesus" (RH Apr. 24, 1888). Like the Protestant Reformers, she held that it was the privilege and duty of all believers, whether learned or unlearned, to study the

Bible for themselves. In an article "The Bible to Be Understood by All" she asserted that "the Bible and the soul were made one for the other, and through the agency of the word and the Holy Spirit, God moves upon the heart," add-

ing that "the Bible has been addressed to everyone, to every class of society, to those of every clime and age" (ST Aug. 20, 1894). All should know for themselves the conditions upon which salvation is provided.

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