

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION: METHOD FOR A NEW APPROACH

FERNANDO L. CANALE
Andrews University

My first article¹ explored the ground on which a new approach to the doctrine of revelation and inspiration could be eventually developed. In this second article I consider the method by which a new approach to revelation-inspiration as theological problem may be developed.

The thesis of this article is that the method to be followed in clarifying the epistemological² origin of Scripture is the methodology utilized by systematic theology. However, this methodology must be adjusted to the historical nature of the ground uncovered in the first article.

1. *Beyond Biblical Scholarship*

A consistent commitment to the *sola Scriptura* principle³ led us, in the first article, to uncover a ground Christian theology has forgotten and neglected, namely, the historical conception of both God and human nature. On the basis of such a ground not only the

¹Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Ground for a New Approach," *AUSS* 31 (1993): 91-104.

²Epistemology is the area of philosophical study that deals with the understanding and interpretation of human knowledge and its scientific enterprise. Thus, "epistemological origin of biblical writings" makes direct reference to the cognitive nature of the origin of biblical writings, to the exclusion of other historical considerations.

³Wolfgang Pannenberg considers that the attempt to develop Christian theology on the basis of *sola Scriptura* was an "illusion" ("The Crisis of the Scripture-Principle in Protestant Theology," *Dialogue* 2 [1963]: 308). He explains that "the development of historical research led to the dissolution of the Scripture-principle, at least as seventeenth century orthodoxy held it" (*ibid.*, 310). Pannenberg may be right as long as he is describing an accomplished historical fact. Yet, from a theological view point there is no reason why biblical scholarship should uncritically accept a method that looks for realities and meaning "behind" the text (*ibid.*, 311, 313).

doctrine of revelation, but also the whole range of Christian teachings, should be examined anew. The exploration of such a possibility, however, requires the possession not only of untrodden ground, but also of an appropriate and working methodology that would lend itself to the processing of pertinent data in search of ever-growing knowledge about the subject matter under scrutiny, namely, the origin of Scripture.

The question before us is, then: How should Christian theology proceed to define a theological position about the origin of Scripture which is able to integrate all the pertinent data provided by Scripture itself? I am aware that such a question may seem superfluous to Christians who adhere to the *sola Scriptura* principle. For them the mere asking of such a question may suggest a suspicious lack of confidence in the Bible as ground and norm of all doctrine and practice, or even a lack of genuine conversion. Christians who uphold what they call a "high view" of Scriptures seem to have no doubt about the methodology to be followed: a technical interpretation of the origin of Scripture can only be obtained by going to the Bible itself. In other words, exegesis and biblical theology should deal with the issue of revelation and inspiration on the sure foundation of biblical revelation.

The obvious limitation of the exegetical-biblical methodology in relation to the exploration of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration is that the Bible does not provide a technical explanation of its epistemological origin. Scripture merely states that it was produced by God without specifically addressing the issue of the process through which it came into being.⁴ Even though biblical teachings about Scripture clearly state its divine origin, no theory about revelation and inspiration is found in either Old or New Testament. Consequently, the exegetical-biblical approach that conservative Protestant theology usually follows in developing its doctrines may not suffice for rendering a satisfactory interpretation

⁴Benjamin B. Warfield's attempt at deriving the theory of verbal plenary inspiration from the biblical doctrine of Scripture has been criticized, according to Peter M. van Bemmelen, because it "is an unwarranted deduction negated by testing that doctrine by the biblical phenomena" (*Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sunday and Warfield* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988], 308). Van Bemmelen concludes that this criticism "does not necessarily mean that the doctrine of inerrancy is unbiblical, but it certainly does raise the question whether a Biblical doctrine of inspiration in regard to its mode, extent, and especially in regards to its effects can be derived by means of a purely inductive method" (*ibid.*).

of revelation-inspiration.⁵ Persistence in addressing the issues involved in the doctrine of revelation and inspiration only from a biblical-exegetical perspective will confirm its essential limitation.

It is likewise possible to affirm that since the biblical doctrine of Scripture does not include a theoretical clarification of its epistemological origin, the discipline of biblical scholarship and its proper methodology seem to be of little help when the interpretation of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration is attempted exclusively from a biblical perspective.⁶ One must move, then, beyond the exegetical-biblical methodology, as currently defined by scholarship, into a biblical redefinition of the systematic approach.⁷

2. *Beyond Apologetics*

When the mindset of the Enlightenment and its critical approach to history became influential within liberal Christian circles, the supernatural role of God became almost obliterated from the epistemological explanation of the origin of Scripture. The conservative wing of evangelical theology, however, did not welcome the new conception of Scripture, because it was considered to be a serious programmatic departure from orthodox Christian teachings.⁸ In order to defend their traditional theological

⁵The epistemological origin of Scriptures is not the only issue that cannot be satisfactorily addressed by means of an exegetical-biblical approach. The full range of doctrines also appears as theological subject matter which, clearly beyond the natural range of exegesis and biblical theology, properly belongs to the field of systematic theology.

⁶For instance, within the Adventist tradition recent discussion on revelation-inspiration has moved mainly within the limits of biblical scholarship, historical research, and apologetics. Alden Thompson's proposal seems to stem from the limitations required by biblical scholarship (see his *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991]). The theological discussion that Thompson's proposal generated seems to work within the same general parameters (see Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson, ed., *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* [Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1992]). An exception to this general trend appears in Raoul Dederen, "The Revelation-Inspiration Phenomenon According to the Bible Writers" (*ibid.*, 9-29), where the systematic approach is also present.

⁷By going beyond biblical scholarship into systematics, I am referring to the methodology that is required for appropriately dealing with theological issues and not to the replacement or complementation of Scriptures by other sources of theological data.

⁸See Norman L. Geisler, "Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 307-334.

conceptions, evangelicals reaffirmed the classical understanding of the origin of Scripture, turning it into an apologetical approach. The traditional doctrine of the supernatural origin of Scripture was reaffirmed as an apologetical tool against modern and postmodern interpretations of Scripture.⁹ According to conservative evangelicalism, God is the author of Scripture, and consequently no error is to be found in it. Scripture is infallible and true because of its supernatural, divine origin. Not only is the Bible without error, but its truth is grounded a priori by reason of its origin. It logically follows that no a posteriori verification of its contents is necessary.

Just as modern philosophy developed out of the epistemological problem of the origin of knowledge, modern theology appears to have begun in a similar way, by questioning the supernatural origin of Scripture. The apologetical context, within which conservative evangelical reflection on the epistemological origin of Scripture has been pursued, has brought a veritable stagnation in the search for a theory about revelation-inspiration which may account for both the phenomena of Scripture and the biblical doctrine of Scripture.

In this respect James Barr may be right when he considers the theological creativity of conservative evangelical theology as "stodgy, apologetic, uncreative," and monumentally dull.¹⁰ Yet, in relation to the specific interpretation of the epistemological origin of Scripture, he himself seems to fall into the same theological stagnation. Modern and postmodern schools of Christian theology seem not to have advanced much beyond Schleiermacher's interpretation.¹¹ In regard to the origin of Scripture, contemporary theology seems to be caught between two alternatives: the classical interpretation that overemphasizes the role of the divine agency and the modern-postmodern trend, which since Schleiermacher has

⁹See René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needham [Chicago: Moody, 1969], 304-305).

¹⁰James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 72, 73.

¹¹*The Christian Faith*, English translation from the 2d German ed., ed. by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1948), § 3, § 4, § 5 and the postscript to § 10. James Barr, who properly criticizes fundamentalism for its lack of creativity, exhibits the same deficiency as he deals with the authority and function of the Bible in Christian theology. Barr only defends the Schleiermacherian conception of the origin of Scripture, and particularly the historical-critical methodology that corresponds to it (*Scope and Authority of the Bible*, 30-58).

almost obliterated the divine agency from the constitution of biblical writings. Neither of the two, however, is able to satisfactorily integrate all the pertinent data. These positions and their limitations will be discussed later.

The bracketing out of the apologetical approach from the area in which the doctrine of revelation and inspiration is to be discussed becomes, therefore, a necessary methodological step to uncover the subject matter to be interpreted, namely, the epistemological origin of the Bible. It follows that an investigation into the way in which the Bible was originated should be carried on within the epistemological realm of investigation rather than within the realm of apologetics, as traditionally done.¹² Moreover, as the issue of revelation and inspiration is explored, apologetical concerns should not be entertained. Finally, the doctrine of revelation and inspiration should not be utilized as the a priori verification of the content of Christian revelation,¹³ but rather as the explanation of the way Sacred Scripture came into existence.

3. *Systematic Theology and Philosophy*

Beyond the exegetical-biblical and apologetical methodologies there is another way, that of systematic theology. The systematic way, however, presents challenges and difficulties of its own, which, unless recognized and adequately solved, lead to theories about revelation and inspiration at odds with both the biblical doctrine of Scripture and Scripture itself.¹⁴ These difficulties derive

¹²Carl Henry's massive enterprise, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (6 vols. [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983]), is a clear example of a reflection on revelation and inspiration undertaken within the area of apologetics.

¹³For most Protestants and evangelicals the authority and truthfulness of Scriptures is decided a priori in the affirmation of its divine inspiration (see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991], 1: 26-35, 48). Pannenberg suggests that the truth of dogmatics is a question that cannot be decided in advance of systematic reflection, but as a result of it (1:50). Without denying the connection between divine origin and authority, we should not, for that reason, eliminate the need for a posteriori theological verification of biblical teachings as a whole as the proper task of apologetics. Prior to that, however, the tasks of epistemological foundation, exegetical-biblical research, and systematic reflection should be performed; otherwise there would be nothing to verify or defend.

¹⁴For instance, Klaas Runia has pointed out that Karl Barth, recognizing the essential limitation of the biblical-exegetical method, went on to impose a dogmatic criterion upon the biblical texts, so "that the texts themselves are not allowed to

from the way in which the relation between theology and philosophy is conceived.¹⁵ Because systematic theology as a scholarly discipline of Christian theology has been openly dependent on philosophical methods, contents, and traditions,¹⁶ it is necessary to deal, albeit briefly, with the way systematic theology and philosophy relate to each other. At least since the time of Justin's *Apologies*,¹⁷ philosophical concepts have been called to assist the constitution of Christian theology, particularly within

speaking first" (*Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962], 137). In other words, Runia is convinced that "the concept of inspiration is not derived [by Barth] from Scripture itself, but Scripture is read in the light of a preconceived criterion" (*ibid.*).

¹⁵In his "The Idea of Systematic Theology," B. B. Warfield does not address this foundational issue (*The Necessity of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Jefferson Davis [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978], 131-165). Perhaps this is the kind of approach Winfried Corduan had in mind when he pointed out that evangelical theologians too frequently carry out the theological task "without taking the proper philosophical roots into account" (*Handmaid to Theology: An Essay in Philosophical Prolegomena* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981], 11).

¹⁶See, for instance, Gerhard Ebeling, *The Study of Theology*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 53-58; John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 21-25; and Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1972), 335-340.

¹⁷While Justin did not "mean to bring Christians and philosophers more closely together" (Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, [New York: Dover, 1961], 2: 188), his conception of an essential continuity between Plato's ideas and those of the Old Testament (*Hortatory Address to the Greeks* 29) and his idea that Christ was the fullness of the same reason used by Socrates (*Apology* 2.10) seem to represent a clear movement away from Paul's warning against "deceptive philosophy" (Col 2:8). Sharing the same apologetical role, Aristides did not hesitate to present himself as a philosopher to the Athenians (Harnack, 2: 177). The apologists of the second century A.D., however, represent only the initial stage (see Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, [Nashville: Abingdon, 1970], 1: 109-110) of what would become a substantial and systematic role in the School of Alexandria, notably in the writings of Clement (*Stromata*, 6.5; see also Gonzalez, 1: 197) and Origen (see G. W. Butterworth, "Introduction" to Origen's *On First Principles* [Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1973], lvii). The role of philosophy as constitutive of the theological task has also its antecedent in the Judaism of Alexandria, in which Philo became the most notable exponent of a thoroughgoing attempt "to interpret Jewish theology in terms of Hellenistic philosophy" (J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4th ed. [London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968], 18-19). Richard Kroner expresses the rather debatable idea that specific contents of Greek philosophical speculation are already present in the Gospel of John (*Speculation and Revelation in the Age of Christian Philosophy* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959], 23-24; cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971], 19-36).

its systematic field.¹⁸ In the writing of influential theologians, such as Origen of Alexandria or Augustine of Hippo, philosophy was already playing an important role in the shaping of Christian theology¹⁹. Philosophy has been called to provide the intellectual framework or system required for the task of doing theology, particularly systematic theology.²⁰ Even today most of Christian theology is built on this unchallenged working assumption. The specific school of philosophy that theology may choose to employ may change, yet the general consensus among theologians seems to indicate that philosophy is still considered to be the provider of the "system" of systematic theology. The Roman Catholic tradition has always recognized openly the need to use human philosophical concepts in the task of doing theology and determining the dogmas of the church.²¹

From the times of Luther, Protestantism has been known for its rather explicit denunciation of philosophy as a contributor to the task of theology,²² which must be grounded solely on Scripture.²³

¹⁸For a brief synthesis of the progressive way in which philosophy was utilized by Christian theology, see Johannes Hirschberger, *The History of Philosophy*, trans. from German by Anthony N. Fuerst (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1958), 1: 290-292.

¹⁹The history of the way philosophy has been permanently related to the development of Christian theology has been analyzed and evaluated by Kroner, among others.

²⁰Avery Dulles explains that "it is impossible to carry through the project of systematic theology without explicit commitment to particular philosophical options" (*The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* [New York: Crossroad, 1992], 119).

²¹Conservative Roman Catholicism has developed on the basis of Aristotle's philosophy as interpreted by Thomas Aquinas and scholasticism (Dulles, 119-133; Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, trans. Peter Heinegg [New York: Doubleday, 1988], 104-106, 182-186). Contemporary Roman Catholicism is challenging the traditional incorporation of the Aristotelic-Thomistic philosophy by exploring other philosophical schools, for instance, process philosophy (see David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* [New York: Harper & Row, 1988], 172-203).

²²Early in his career Martin Luther strongly denounced philosophy, especially that of Aristotle as interpreted by Thomas Aquinas (Sigbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther* [Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1982], 4-7). However, Becker points out that Luther did not dismiss the function of human philosophy per se within the realms of theology but rather its Aristotelic-Thomistic interpretation as adopted by scholasticism (*ibid.*, 7-8). For a contemporary example of rejecting philosophy as source of theology, see Pache, 19-20. In his well-balanced evaluation of Calvin's relation to philosophy, Charles B. Partee reports that "Calvin accepts some of their [classical philosophers'] views and

However, a certain sector of Protestantism has understood that Scriptures are not to be conceived as "the only guide," but rather the "ultimate guide" for the church.²⁴ As a cursory look at Protestant orthodoxy at its best reveals, the denunciation of philosophy did not imply, even for this sector, an absolute rejection of its traditional role.²⁵ On the contrary, philosophy still appears as the main provider of "system" or intellectual framework for the development of Protestant theology.²⁶ On the other hand, some

rejects others" (*Calvin and Classical Philosophy* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977], 15). Calvin's use of philosophy as an aid to the theological exposition of Scriptures (*ibid.*, 21), then, appears selective rather than comprehensive (*ibid.*, 18). Calvin, concludes Partee, selects philosophical ideas for theological purposes "when he feels they serve the truth of Scripture" (*ibid.*, 22).

²³In 1576 the Formula of Concord stated that "we believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (*The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959], 464). Even though the Formula of Concord uplifts the theological role of Scripture as the source of theology, it seems to lean more towards a *prima Scriptura* rather than *sola Scriptura* qualification of its theological role since it clearly remarks that "other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witness to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was reserved in post-apostolic times" (*ibid.*, 464-465); see also Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* [Chicago: Moody, 1971], 156.

²⁴Kern Robert Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

²⁵As tradition, in which philosophical concepts played a constitutive role, was not rejected but rather accepted by Christian theology (e.g., Formula of Concord, [*ibid.*, 465, 503-506]), the actual possibility of a theological usage of human philosophical concepts is neither condemned nor eliminated. Bruce Vawter is of the opinion that "most of the early Protestant theologians had been trained as a matter of course in the scholastic system and accepted its dialectical principles virtually without question. However much, and however often with great justice, Martin Luther ridiculed the language and conclusions of scholasticism, there was always far more that connected him with its method and presuppositions than separated him from them" (*Biblical Inspiration* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972], 76). Vawter further explains that the Reformers "did not substitute another system of thought for the scholastic. That they did not is amply demonstrated by the quite rapid transition of the Reformation into a Protestant orthodoxy of rigid scholasticism" (*ibid.*).

²⁶This is not the place for a detailed comparison of the ways in which the system is provided in classical and Protestant theologies. Suffice it to say that a

sectors within the broad spectrum of Protestant theology, inspired by the *sola Scriptura* principle, try to minimize the influence of human philosophy on theology by reducing the latter to the disciplines of biblical exegesis and biblical theology, to the almost total neglect of systematic theology as an independent discipline within Christian theology.²⁷ Even this more biblically oriented sector, however, sooner or later employs nonbiblical philosophical concepts as it ventures into the scholarly world of theological reflection.²⁸

foundational component of the Protestant theological system is drawn not from philosophy but from divine revelation. Justification by faith, the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls, is called to play a central systematic role together with other components that the classical system of theology derived from philosophy. Thus, Arminius is able to develop an intellectualistic version of Protestantism very close to Thomism, and Norman Geisler is able to call Aquinas "a mature evangelical" (*Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991], 21-23).

²⁷Evangelical theologian Millard J. Erickson represents this sector. He considers the goal of systematics as "pure biblical theology contemporized" (*Christian Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990], 25), whereby "unchanging biblical teachings which are valid for all times" (*ibid.*, 24) are put into an analogical "model that makes the doctrine intelligible in a contemporary context" (*ibid.*, 74-75). Erickson also says that contemporizing is a "major part of the work of systematic theology" (*ibid.*, 75). Another role assigned to systematic theology is to "formulate a central motif" (*ibid.*, 77) to unify each theologian's system. According to Erickson, the central motif, however, only "enables us to perceive a landscape more accurately" and "must never determine our interpretations of passages where it is not relevant" (*ibid.*). Moreover, the task of systematics also includes the arrangement of theological "topics on the basis of their relative importance" (*ibid.*, 78). Systematic theology, thus, is conceived as not being essentially involved in the discovery of truth but rather in the process of its communication. According to Erickson's view, Christian theology should not engage in constructive intellectual activities, but rather should concentrate on the mimesis (exegetical and biblical theologies) and translation (systematics) of biblical texts. The rules for the discovery of truth are, consequently, the rules of exegesis and biblical theology which render a descriptive summary of the theological ideas and positions presented by exegetical theology. This view does not allow systematics to develop ideas other than those produced by exegetical and biblical theologies.

²⁸Erickson clearly states that "in making the Bible our primary or supreme source of understanding we are not completely excluding all other sources" (*ibid.*, 37). He goes on to clarify that such additional sources "will be secondary to the Bible" (*ibid.*). The weakness of Erickson's position is to be found only when it is implemented. In other words, Erickson sets biblical primacy together with the input from other sciences. How we are supposed to work out the primacy of the Bible in the practice of doing theology is not sufficiently explained. It is likely that, sooner or later, the avowed primacy of biblical data will be surrendered to ideas coming from other sources. Erickson clarifies that philosophy may be used but no single system is to be followed (*ibid.*, 53). Philosophy's role in theology is conceived as

It would appear that, by and large, the Protestant tradition of Christian theology has denounced human philosophical ideas selectively and used them pragmatically. Thus, philosophy is not used when it contradicts the basic doctrine of justification by faith, but it is accepted as long as it supports it. Protestant denunciation of philosophy, then, has not involved a total rejection of humanly originated philosophy. On the contrary, Protestant theology²⁹ stands on the basis of principles derived from classical philosophy.

Generally speaking, it seems that mainstream Protestant theology has rejected philosophy as a source while at the same time accepting it as a tool for theology.³⁰ Within this sector of Protestantism, systematic theology is considered possible and works, as did classical theology, on a system provided by humanly originated philosophy. Precisely in this way philosophy becomes a "tool."

In the more biblically oriented sector of Protestantism, however, emphasis on the *sola Scriptura* principle, according to which theology, mission, and life are grounded in the Bible,³¹

sharpening our understanding of concepts, finding and evaluating presuppositions, tracing implications of ideas, and as a tool in apologetics (ibid., 56-57). What Erickson seems to forget is that there is no "neutral" philosophy. Each philosophy and its methodology involve interpretations of foundational principles. Additionally, Erickson still understands presuppositions as if they related only to communication of truth rather than to content. This situation opens a vacuum that sooner or later is filled by a humanly originated philosophical content. For instance, Greek philosophical ideas seem to be ultimately behind Erickson's understanding of the immortality of the soul (ibid., 1183-1184), God's eternity (ibid., 274-275), predestination (ibid., 356-620), and providence (ibid., 394-401).

²⁹We are referring here to the technical level of theological reflection and not to the way in which the believer experiences theological teachings. At the level of the local church the influence of human philosophy on doctrinal content often seems to be nonexistent or even totally absent. To ascertain the degree in which humanly originated philosophy conditions the constitution of doctrines at the level of individual local churches would require a major statistical study.

³⁰According to Robert Preus, Lutheran dogmaticians of the 17th century considered Scripture to be the only source of Christian theology (*The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth-Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* [Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957], 1-4). However, they found no overlap between the realm of theology (supernatural) and the realm of philosophy (natural) (ibid., 10-11). Thus "reason used passively is necessary for gaining and understanding information. In this sense it is a mean (*principium quo*), for only through his reason, or intellect, does man understand" (ibid., 9).

³¹Clark H. Pinnock, "How I Use the Bible in Doing Theology," in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. by Robert K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 18-19.

seems to militate against the very existence of systematic theology as a necessary theological discipline.³² Two basic reasons seem to recommend the dismissal of systematic theology as an independent theological discipline. First, it seems obvious to this sector of Protestantism that if the Bible is the source of theology, exegesis and biblical theology constitute the only required methodology to reach Christian truth. Moreover, since systematic theology has always derived its "system" from some form of human philosophy, the strong suspicion that systematic theology of necessity violates the *sola Scriptura* principle cannot be avoided.

4. *Toward a Biblical Philosophy*

The working and unexpressed presupposition behind the view that sees an unavoidable contradiction between the *sola Scriptura* principle and the existence of a systematic approach to theology is the axiom that systematic theology cannot be produced without the essential contribution of some form of humanly originated philosophy.³³ If such an assumption were true, I agree, no

³²Grant R. Osborne may be taken as example of such a trend when he assigns to systematic theology only the task of contextualizing and organizing biblical theology in current thought patterns for the contemporary situation (*The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991], 267, 309). The proper task of theology is thereby reduced to communicating biblical truth to the contemporary mind. Osborne allows systematics to have a say in what the Bible means in the contemporary setting (*ibid.*, 268-269), but systematics has no role in the constitution of truth. Truth is simply and directly found in the Bible and retrieved by exegetical and biblical theologies. In Osborne's understanding "dogmatic theology collects the material generated by biblical theology and restates or reshapes it into a modern logical pattern, integrating these aspects into a confessional statement for the church today" (*ibid.*, 268). Osborne seems to believe that the retrieval of biblical truth does not require the adoption of a system and, therefore, does not need the role of systematics as theological discipline. To Osborne's credit I must say that he is aware of the problem. The theological tradition from which he derives his preunderstanding, however, does not allow him to go further into a better or more complete conception of the tasks involved in doing theology (*ibid.*, 269).

³³This "unthought" presupposition is explicitly reflected upon and expressed by Winfried Corduan, who introduces his rehabilitation of philosophy as handmaid to theology by remarking that "philosophy permeates systematic theology. The theologian cannot ever get away from the fact that philosophical thinking is an integral part of the way that we understand and disseminate revealed truth. Certain philosophical points need to be made prior to beginning actual theology. But that does not mean that once they are made we are done with philosophy. On the contrary, wherever we turn in theology, we are confronted with the need for clear

systematic theology or systematic approach to Christian theology would be possible while holding, at the same time, the *sola Scriptura* principle.³⁴ In this context my proposal for a systematic approach to the study of revelation and inspiration could be understood as a subreptitious attempt to utilize humanly originated philosophy at the detriment or plain rejection of the *sola Scriptura* principle following the classical, modern, and postmodern trends in Christian theology. My proposal, however, does not attempt such a thing.

Evangelical theologian Donald Bloesch has correctly identified the relation between theology and philosophy as "probably the single most important issue in a theological prolegomenon."³⁵ However, it is far from accurate to say that only human philosophy can provide a system for systematic theology,³⁶ that human

philosophical categories. Thus even when we enter the arena of soteriology we have not outgrown the need for philosophy" (10). I agree with Corduan's description of the systematic function of philosophical presuppositions. I disagree with the seemingly universally accepted idea that the philosophy to be used in Christian theology cannot be grounded in and derived from biblical thought. Corduan follows the generally accepted procedure of selecting the human philosophy that theology will adopt from the starting point of biblical pointers (see, e.g., *ibid.*, 41-59). Thus, the creative philosophical reflection that the discovery of a biblical philosophy requires is methodologically avoided.

³⁴For instance, authors who allow human philosophy to play a "minimal" yet important role in the task of doing theology are forced to reinterpret the *sola Scriptura* principle as involving only the idea of a "superiority of the Bible to other authorities, including ecclesiastical officers, church councils and previous doctrinal formulas" (Richard Rice, *Reason and the Contours of Faith* [Riverside, CA: La Sierra University Press], 93). Thus the *sola Scriptura* principle is abandoned (*ibid.*). In practice, tradition and the experience of the church are added to the Bible as sources of theology. Rice concludes that "the essential task of Christian theology is that of biblical interpretation, in view of the authoritative status of the Bible in the church. But it also involves careful attention to interpretations that have developed in the course of the church's history and to the dynamic experience of the concrete Christian community" (*ibid.*, 98). Rice seems to be correct in claiming that the Reformers' practical usage of theological sources amounted to the *prima* rather than *sola Scriptura* principle (*ibid.*).

³⁵Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 1:35.

³⁶This is the position of classical theology, of which Thomas Aquinas is a widely recognized representative. Within the neoclassical tradition, Pannenberg recognizes that philosophy cannot prove the existence of God, "but it still retains the critical function of the natural theology of antiquity relative to every form of religious tradition, i.e., that of imposing minimal conditions for talk about God that

philosophy provides the tools for conceptual analysis and schemes that lead to a deeper understanding of Christian truths,³⁷ or that human philosophy supplements theology by helping to produce a rational reformulation of biblical truths in order to address the current situation.³⁸ Yet, even the suggestion that an a priori and grounding faith encounter of grace "purifies" our natural reason from sin and allows us to use it for theological purposes³⁹ is not

wants to be taken seriously as such" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:107). Within the classical and neo-classical system of theology, biblical language is considered to be symbolic and metaphoric, but may, nonetheless, contain some conceptual contents. Due to the hidden conceptual element in the metaphorical language of the Bible, this language must be subjected to a "conceptual analysis" which may allow theologians to identify the concepts hidden in the metaphorical language. It is easy to see that within this kind of theological project philosophy is called to determine what concept and metaphor mean. Philosophy also determines what concept and conceptual analysis of metaphoric language are. The minimal results of applying reason to the contents of faith entail a major reinterpretation of the literal meanings of the Bible. Norman L. Geisler, who agrees with the basic philosophical view of classical theologian Thomas Aquinas (*Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal*), and David Tracy, who, agreeing with the classical function of philosophy, replaces the Aristotelian metaphysics of Aquinas with his own understanding of process philosophy (*Blessed Rage for Order*, 146-203), can be considered as belonging, respectively, to the classical and neo-classical theological traditions.

³⁷See, e.g., Vincent Brummer, *Theology and Philosophical Inquiry: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), ix). Kevin J. Vanhoozer, correctly recognizing that both philosophy and theology "are in the business of constructing worldviews," goes so far as to state that "ultimately, we are led to view philosophy and theology themselves as competing research programs working on the problem of life's meaning" ("Christ and Concept: Doing Theology and the 'Ministry' of Philosophy," in *Doing Theology in Today's World*, ed. J. D. Woodbridge and T. E. McComiskey [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991], 135). But competing does not mean conflicting. According to Vanhoozer, "the philosopher plays the role of Aaron next to theology's Moses, providing the language with which to communicate the Word of God to a wondering people" (*ibid.*). At the end, however, philosophy is given at least the traditional minimal role of "conceptual analysis" and "the pedagogical function of leading unbelievers and believers alike to a deeper understanding of Christ and the implications of a Christian worldview" (140).

³⁸Osborne, 296-297. Through the mediation of theological tradition, "deductive reasoning utilizes logic to establish theological models that can be verified on the basis of evidence" (*ibid.*, 298). According to Osborne, in doing theology the philosophical deductive models interact with the inductive data produced by biblical exegesis. This constitutes what Osborne calls a "spiral" through which concepts are refined and brought under the norm of Scripture.

³⁹Bloesch, 58.

enough to prevent philosophical ideas from distorting biblical revelation.

While it should be recognized that neither systematic nor biblical theologies are independent from philosophical issues, they may be developed in independence from human philosophical interpretations. Therefore, a momentous methodological distinction needs to be decisively drawn between philosophical issues and their interpretation. The human discipline we designate as philosophy involves both issues and interpretations. Issues are the problems to be addressed, for instance, God, man, reality as a whole, reason. Interpretations are the way in which these issues have been understood by various philosophical schools throughout the history of philosophy.⁴⁰ Human philosophy provides solutions to the issues on the basis of natural information and the use of human reason and imagination.⁴¹

Both biblical and systematic theologies need to interpret⁴² the same issues as philosophy interprets (God, human nature, reality, reason, etc.).⁴³ Thus, the issues cannot be dismissed. However,

⁴⁰Thus I agree with Paul Tillich when he states that "philosophy and theology ask the question of being" (*Systematic Theology* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951], 1: 22), thus implying that both share the same subject matter. I disagree with Tillich, however, when he goes on to say that "philosophy deals with the structure of being in itself; theology deals with the meaning of being for us" (ibid.), thus implying that philosophy and theology do not share the same subject matter after all, but rather have very different, though mutually complementary, objects of study.

⁴¹David Tracy has suggested the replacement of the Thomistic understanding of reason as agent intellect by a less ambitious "analogical imagination" as the appropriate tool for the constitution of systematic theology (*The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* [New York, NY: Crossroad, 1981], 421, 429-438). This replacement of reason by imagination reveals the extent of Kant's influence on modern and post-modern theological epistemology. The role of imagination in theology and its relation to the Schleiermacherian feeling of absolute dependence stems from Kant's third critique (see *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith [Oxford: Clarendon, 1928], 1: 1-3; 2: 49).

⁴²Tracy summarizes the contemporary view of knowledge by remarking that "to understand at all is to interpret" (*Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987], 9). The idea that biblical revelation involves both historical fact and interpretation has been recognized by Oscar Cullmann (*Salvation in History* [London: SCM Press, 1967], 88-97). Hans Küng, basically agreeing on this point with Cullmann, goes even further and affirms that "every experience already brings elements of interpretation with it" (*Theology for the Third Millennium*, 109).

⁴³See, e.g., Kroner, 13.

theology does not need to follow any humanly conceived interpretation. On the contrary, if biblical thinking is taken seriously, theology should develop an understanding of these issues on the basis of—and in full harmony with—the interpretation they receive in Scripture.⁴⁴ In order to avoid theological distortion, humanly originated ideas should be dismissed in the definition of the system adopted by Christian theology.

The historical way in which the Bible interprets the issues of God and human nature, which play a foundational presuppositional role in the formulation of any theological discourse, has been fatefully forgotten for nearly two millenia. The philosophical formulations on which Christian theology has been cast since then often depart from the biblical interpretation of the issues. When these formulations are discarded, a new and exciting system, not only for approaching the origin of Scripture but also for the constitution of the whole theological enterprise comes into view.⁴⁵

⁴⁴The importance of this point cannot be overemphasized. I am not referring to the kind of study which, for instance, Claude Tresmontant has developed regarding biblical metaphysics. Tresmontant is right about some general issues, such as that the "absence de certains termes métaphysiques n'implique pas une carence métaphysique" (*Études de métaphysique biblique* [Paris: J. Gabalda, 1955], 32-33); that irreconcilable opposition exists between biblical and Greek metaphysics (*ibid.*, 34-35); and that the created world is temporal in nature (*ibid.*, 122). However, he does not follow biblical thinking in the interpretation of reality. On the contrary, Tresmontant follows a methodology which, starting from the identification of some biblical concepts, uses them in a second step as justification for adopting a previously existent metaphysical position presented as the metaphysics of Scripture. The identification of the temporal nature of the phenomenal world of creation allows him to identify Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary cosmology as the inner metaphysical structure of created beings (*ibid.*, 95, 164). While I agree with Tresmontant on his general idea that the Bible speaks to philosophical issues in a way that radically departs from traditional philosophical interpretations, I go beyond him in suggesting that the grounding philosophical problems have received specific solutions in the Bible. Thus, for instance, Tresmontant does not go to the Bible for the interpretation of issues such as 'Being', man, knowledge, and, history. Such an interpretation, as argued in my first article, provides the ground for the interpretation of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration as well as the understanding of the entire range of Christian doctrines. Unfortunately, even evangelicals like Carl Henry, who claims that "divine revelation rationally interprets an objective revelational history" (3:255, 260), believe in cognitive propositional revelation (3:248, 259), hold a verbal plenary doctrine of inspiration (4:160), and do not explore the philosophical conceptuality of Scriptures in order to interpret the philosophical issues and systematic presuppositions necessary for doing theology.

⁴⁵This point is not yet clearly perceived by many within the Protestant evangelical tradition who still think that Calvin's picking and choosing philosophical ideas in service of biblical theology (see fn. 22) is the proper solution to the philosophy-theology relationship (see Bloesch, 264-265).

Scientific faithfulness to the *sola Scriptura* principle should replace any humanly originated interpretation of philosophical issues by one of biblical origin. Thus, it should be possible to envision a systematic theology which, while fully integrating the necessary philosophical issues required for its disciplinary development, may, at the same time, work independently from any human philosophical principles and in total faithfulness to biblical ones.

5. *The Systematic Method: Identifying the Subject Matter*

The systematic methodology I am suggesting here involves three major components: data, subject matter, and system. When applied, this methodology processes the data from the perspective provided by the system, in search of a better understanding of the proposed subject matter. From a scientific viewpoint, the data best qualified to shed light on the exploration of the origin of Scripture come from Scripture itself. And, since such a fact agrees with the *sola Scriptura* principle that provided the ground for a new approach to the doctrine of revelation and inspiration, it now seems necessary to clarify the subject matter to be investigated and the main components of the system as they relate to the subject matter itself.

The systematic approach differs from the exegetical one in that the latter is text-oriented while the former is issue-oriented. In other words, the subject matter that the biblical approach tries to clarify is the text of the Bible and its message, while the systematic approach tries to clarify an issue that belongs to reality itself.

Consequently, when the study of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration is approached exegetically and biblically, the biblical teachings that have been produced in relation to the doctrine of Scripture come into view. The result of such an enterprise is an organized exposition of the biblical doctrine of Scripture.⁴⁶ On the other hand, when the doctrine of revelation and

⁴⁶For an introduction to the biblical doctrine on Scripture, see Alan M. Stibbs, "The Witness of Scripture to Its Inspiration," in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958), 107-118; Pierre Ch. Marcel, "Our Lord's Use of Scripture," in *Revelation and the Bible*, 121-134; Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 19-59; John W. Wenham, "Christ's View of Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, 3-36; and Edwin A. Blum, "The Apostles' View of Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, 39-53.

inspiration is approached systematically, the problem regarding the epistemological origin of Scripture comes under scrutiny. It seems, then, that in order for a systematic methodology to be applied to the doctrine of revelation and inspiration, it is necessary to have a clear picture of the problem, issue, and subject matter to be clarified.

The subject matter in question appears to include the two interrelated, mutually complementary components we call revelation and inspiration. When the word "revelation" is utilized as a technical term,⁴⁷ it refers to the cognitive process⁴⁸ through which the Bible and its manifold contents were originated. When "inspiration" is utilized as a technical term, it refers to the linguistic process through which the content originated through the revelation process as expressed in oral or written forms.⁴⁹ In short, the subject matter of the revelation-inspiration doctrine appears as the twofold, complementary process by which, first, the contents, ideas,⁵⁰ information, and data of Scripture were originated; and

⁴⁷The technical usage of the terms "revelation" and "inspiration" does not derive from biblical exegesis. Their meanings are, however, not unrelated to biblical concepts. Thus, revelation is connected with the idea of contents that are communicated from God to men, while the biblical idea of inspiration is related to the production of Scripture.

⁴⁸Thomas Aquinas considers revelation (prophecy) to be cognitive (*ST Ia. IIa. 171. 1*). However, he did not make a technical distinction between revelation and inspiration. Cf. Claude Tresmontant, *Le problème de la révélation* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 79-98. I use the word "cognitive" in its broadest sense. Liberal Schleiermacherian approaches to revelation, even when recognizing the existence of an original "event" or divine-human "contact" at the root of revelation, do not consider such an "event" in itself to be cognitive. Yet, because it is precisely the revelatory "event" that prompts the writing of Scriptures, it can be loosely described as "cognitive." According to the liberal view, then, revelation, in spite of its non-cognitive nature, may be included in our general definition of revelation as cognitive because of its prompting the writing of the Bible.

⁴⁹The definition of inspiration as the process of "inscripturization" is systematic rather than exegetical. A study of the biblical words *theopneustos* and *pheromenoi* (2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:21) reveals that these words, which following their Latin translation have been traditionally rendered as "inspiration," do not convey the technical meaning that we are suggesting. They rather include both: what we technically define as "revelation" and what we technically define as "inspiration."

⁵⁰In this article I am not using the word "idea" in its Platonic sense, to refer only to the "general, universal, and necessary features" of reality and language. I use the term to indicate the cognitive status of the information. "Idea" refers to and includes any and all possible contents that, once produced in the mind of the writer, may later on be inscripturized in the Bible.

second, the process through which they are transmitted either orally or in a written form.⁵¹ In other words, revelation appears as the issue or problem to be concretely interpreted by any theory of revelation. Thus, it is possible to say that the formal subject matter of revelation appears as the divine-human encounter which may be epistemologically interpreted by any possible doctrine of revelation.⁵²

The creation of the Bible as a written work required a process complementary to revelation, one by which ideas and information originated through revelation were put into writing. The process of putting revealed ideas and information into writing is by nature a linguistic enterprise and is designated as the process of inspiration. As is the case in the process of revelation, the process of inspiration also involves both divine and human dimensions. It seems clear that, except in very specific cases, Scripture was actually written by a human agent. Since I am still describing the formal subject matter that is to be interpreted by any possible theoretical account of the origin of Scripture, no doctrine of inspiration is assumed. To say that inspiration is the process by which revealed ideas and information are put into writing means that the process by which the writing occurs is different from the process by which the meaning and content of Scripture first came into existence in the mind of the prophet or holy writer.

⁵¹Taking their lead from the biblical claim of God's being the author of Scripture, the fathers understood such an authorship in rather literalistic terms under the broad category of inspiration (Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, 25-28). Obviously, this broad conception of inspiration included also the idea of origination of contents, and therefore, of revelation per se. Evangelical theologian Carl Henry distinguishes between revelation (3:248) and inspiration (4:129) in the technical sense suggested here (see also Donald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982], 50). On the other hand, Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix conceptualize the origin of Scriptures by way of a general understanding of inspiration which includes revelation (*A General Introduction to the Bible* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1986], 38-42). When the technical distinction between revelation and inspiration is not utilized as a tool for analysis, the tendency seems to be to conceive the origination of the Bible with God as principal agent and the human author as instrument.

⁵²Divine-human encounters may include a variety of forms. For instance, salvation is to be understood in the context of a divine-human encounter or relationship. In other words, God encounters men and women with different purposes; one of them is to originate Scriptures. In this article I refer to encounter only in the latter sense.

The act of revelation, as a cognitive process in which both God and human agencies are involved, appears as an a priori condition to the act of inspiration (in which also divine and human agencies are involved). In other words, without the cognitive revelation process, the linguistic process of inspiration is empty: it has nothing to transmit in either written or oral form. Without inspiration, on the other hand, the cognitive process of revelation would be fruitless; producing nothing to be communicated in writing or spoken words, it would, therefore, wither away, along with the prophet. Revelation and inspiration, then, are complementary processes always necessarily involved in the theological explanation of the origin of Scripture.⁵³ Furthermore, any interpretation of the revelation-inspiration process finds its ground in the understanding of revelation, rather than of inspiration. This formal "subordination" of the process of inspiration to the process of revelation is due to the inner articulation of the subject matter itself: revelation originates the contents that inspiration puts into writing. The production of the Bible, then, assumes and requires both processes. In this sense, it is possible to say that the whole Bible is revealed and the whole Bible is inspired.

Usually a technical distinction between revelation and inspiration has not been considered as a necessary methodological step to be followed in the investigation of the origin of Scripture.⁵⁴

⁵³Consequently, there is no such a thing as portions of Scripture that are only inspired and not revealed. The origin of all ideas and information as they relate to God must be accounted for before the process of writing (inspiration) is addressed. Thus, the distinction made by Roman Catholic Leonard Lessius (1554-1662) between "textos proféticos o de revelación y textos no-proféticos o de simple inspiración hagiográfica" is insufficient because it reduces the idea of revelation to a prophetic model. It is clear, however, that God has revealed Himself in various ways (Heb 1:1), which certainly include more than the prophetic model (Antonio M. Artola, *De la revelación a la inspiración*. [Bilbao: Ediciones Mensajero, 1983], 119).

⁵⁴Scripture does not draw a technical distinction between revelation and inspiration, as I am suggesting. Scripture tends to speak generally rather than analytically regarding its own origin. Thus, in 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:21 there is no explicit technical distinction between revelation and inspiration as subject matter of an epistemological search. Nonetheless, the cognitive process by which knowledge and information were originated in the mind of the prophet and the linguistic process by which the revealed knowledge and information were put into written form are assumed. Since each process is different, and includes different kinds of activities in which both God and man are involved, it is of paramount importance to approach the analysis of each separately. Unfortunately, theologians have often dealt with the issue of the origin of Scripture without clearly defining the terms or the systematic issues involved (see I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* [Grand

Consideration of both processes under the general designation of inspiration has produced interpretations which, building on the general concepts of divine authorship and human instrumentality, are unable to account properly for the variety of biblical phenomena uncovered by exegetical studies. It follows that complexity and variety in the effect suggest complexity and variety in the cause. Establishing a distinction between the process of revelation and inspiration, therefore, may prove useful in the task of probing the way in which Scripture was produced.

A third related stage may be added to the revelation and inspiration processes, namely, illumination. As a technical term, illumination refers to the process through which God communicates to the individual believer on the basis of already-existent oral or written revelation.⁵⁵ Since illumination is a process that assumes the existence of oral or written revelation and, consequently, does not contribute to its production, it will not be considered in this article.

6. *The Systematic Method: Identifying the Presuppositional Structure*

In order for the methodology to formulate a new interpretation of the revelation-inspiration doctrine to be complete, the philosophical issues involved in the "system" need to be identified. As the philosophical issues necessarily involved in the understanding of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration are identified, the systematic structure on which any interpretation of the doctrine stands will become apparent. The task before us, then, consists in identifying the philosophical issues to be systematically presupposed in any possible interpretation of the origin of Scripture.

Consideration, therefore, needs to be given not only to the issue of the subject matter to be clarified, but also to the inner

Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982], 31-47; and Trembath, 3-7). Artola points out that within the Roman Catholic tradition, prior to Vatican I the terms revelation and inspiration were not satisfactorily defined (120). The same lack of precision seems to appear in Preus's evaluation of Lutheran dogmatists in the 17th century (29-30). The systematic distinction I am suggesting is drawn, within a Thomistic tradition, by Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit (*Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, trans. Avery R. Dulles and Thomas L. Sheridan [New York: Desclée, 1961], 110).

⁵⁵For a recent interpretation of inspiration as illumination, see Trembath, 5-6, and 72-118.

systematic structure that the revelation-inspiration phenomenon itself presupposes. By "systematic structure" I am referring to the presuppositions that are necessarily involved in understanding the way in which the Bible was epistemologically originated.

The systematic structure assumed by the revelation process is rather simple, as suggested in the preceding section. If revelation is the process by which God communicates himself to the holy writer, the systematic structure that revelation involves appears to include the interpretation of God and human nature. Thus, whether the revelation process is to be understood as existential, cognitive, mystical, or otherwise is an issue that depends on the way in which the system presupposed by the revelation process is concretely interpreted. Any doctrine about the way Scripture was originated includes a specific, concrete interpretation of the system, namely, an interpretation of the two agents involved in the revelation process: God⁵⁶ and man. Since the inspiration process also involves the same two agents who are involved in the revelation process, it follows that any possible interpretation of the inspiration process involves the same systematic presuppositions that are required by the revelation process, namely, a specific interpretation of God and human nature.⁵⁷

Furthermore, the systematic structure assumed by the revelation-inspiration process includes a complex ensemble of related concepts, which necessarily play a constitutive role in the understanding of the revelation-inspiration process. Some of these concepts are, for instance, the interpretation of human cognition and language as well as the understanding of divine activity.

Briefly put, the presuppositional structure that is uncovered by the phenomenological analysis of the formal subject-matter of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration includes: first, an interpretation of God and his acts; and second, an interpretation of human

⁵⁶The presuppositional systematic function of the theological-philosophical interpretation of God is widely accepted in theological circles. For instance, we find Gordon D. Kaufman underlining the methodological function of the doctrine of God in Christian theology; he remarks that "the word 'God' appears to designate the last or ultimate point of reference to which all action, consciousness and reflection can lead" (*An Essay on Theological Method* [Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975], 11).

⁵⁷The involvement of "two minds in the process of inspiration, a divine *Auctor*, and a human *Scriptor*" in the inspiration of Scripture has been pointed out by John Henry Newman ("Inspiration in its Relation to Revelation," in *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, ed. J. Derek Holmes and Robert Murray [Washington, DC: Corpus, 1967], 115).

nature along with its cognitive and linguistic functions.⁵⁸ Once these ideas are given actual content by way of interpretation, they become the "system" that is required by the systematic methodology to process the biblical data in search for a clarification of the subject matter itself, that is, of the revelation-inspiration process that originated Scripture.

Different theological schools, sharing different interpretations of the systematic structure employed by the systematic method, are bound to render diverse theories about the revelation-inspiration process, some of which are mutually incompatible. Hence the vast differences that may be found in the various doctrines of revelation and inspiration that have been developed so far by Christian theology.

The systematic method, then, proceeds by clarifying its subject matter from the point of view of a "system" of ideas that play the role of organizing presuppositions. In classical, modern, and postmodern schools of Christian theology the "system" of ideas that serve as organizing presuppositions is taken from various traditions of human philosophy.

Finally, it is important to notice that the uncovering of the systematic structure assumed by the revelation-inspiration process shows that the interpretation of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration is not the ultimate ground for theological discourse. The ultimate ground for theological discourse is provided by the biblical interpretation of the systematic structure itself, as was suggested in the first article.

7. Toward a New Model for the Doctrine of Revelation and Inspiration

In the first article of this series the ground on which a new approach to the revelation-inspiration doctrine should be explored and formulated was uncovered. The ground consisted of the biblical interpretation of both God and human nature, which in this second article were identified as the very components of the formal systematic structure. This structure, presupposed in the systematic methodology, must be utilized in the investigation of the subject matter: the epistemological origin of Scripture.

⁵⁸The systematic function of God and man in theology is universal. As components of the systematic structure of theology, their interpretation becomes a condition for the understanding of most theological ideas and doctrines. The systematic extent of the idea of God as a presupposition of theological thinking is, however, broader than the systematic extent of the idea of man.

As argued in the first article, the biblical interpretation of the systematic structure radically differs from the philosophical interpretation assumed by classical and liberal theologies. Therefore, a systematic methodology which could—beyond the limitations of biblical theology and apologetics—be useful in exploring the origin of Scripture, in search of a new model of revelation-inspiration, seems to be possible.

On the basis of the discussion of the ground (first article) and methodology (present article) required in the interpretation of the epistemological origin of Scripture, the possibility for and way in which a new interpretation could be formulated has come into view. In the process some important specific points are evident.

First of all, it has been shown that any interpretation of the revelation-inspiration process by which Scripture was originated necessarily presupposes a previous understanding about God and man. Since these presuppositions cannot be avoided, they appear as components of a systematic structure within which interpretations of the epistemological origin of Scripture are generated. Second, the main components of the systematic structure required in the conception of theories regarding revelation-inspiration have been understood in various ways by Christian theological traditions, thus producing a variety of explanatory models. Third, in spite of their divergences, the already-existent doctrinal models of revelation and inspiration (thought, verbal-dictation, and encounter-existential theories) work on the methodological assumption that the components of the systematic structure should be interpreted by humanly originated philosophy, and that on such a basis the being and activities of God and man should be conceived as timeless. Fourth, the critical clarification of the various possible models in which the origin of Scripture have been and could be interpreted requires the methodological disassociation of the epistemological and apologetical levels of theological analysis. The traditional lack of proper distinction between these two levels has led to an overemphasis of the apologetical approach. The origin of Scripture should be approached first from an epistemological perspective; and only then, when a proper understanding of it has been achieved, should theology move into the apologetical realm. Fifth, the *sola Scriptura* principle, on which a sector of Protestant theology is built, requires that the interpretation of the systematic structure in question be produced from within biblical conceptuality without resorting to extrabiblical philosophies. Sixth, when the *sola Scriptura* principle is consistently applied to the interpretation of the systematic structure of revelation and inspiration, the biblical conception about God and human nature

as temporal-historical realities capable of direct interrelation replaces the classical and liberal traditions, which do not have room for such a dynamic understanding of God's being and actions.

8. *Conclusion*

From the perspective gained through the preceding analysis, the methodology for a new approach to revelation and inspiration, to be developed in faithfulness to biblical conceptuality, has been uncovered. Moreover, the presuppositional systematic structure that conditions the formulation of any revelation-inspiration model has been exposed. The possibility that such a systematic structure could be interpreted otherwise than Christian theology has chosen to do so far has also become apparent.

The possible new interpretation of the revelation-inspiration doctrine, made feasible by the ground and methodology pointed out so far, is not to be generated by the creative imagination of daring theologians, but rather by the patient and scientific hearing of the available data, namely, by hearing what Scripture says about itself and considering what Scripture shows us to be. In a time when Christian theology is searching for new paradigms that may better help to understand and express the Christian identity to the world, a critical examination of the ideas that have preconditioned Christian theology for centuries and a search for yet-undiscovered treasures of biblical truth seem to provide a way full of theological promise, not only for the specific doctrine of revelation-inspiration, but for the entire system of Christian theology as well.

A practical question remains. Is it really necessary for Christian theology to involve itself in the area of presuppositions and system so far studied by philosophy in order to produce another interpretation of revelation and inspiration? Moreover, does the way one interprets the origin of Scripture make a real difference in one's theology? Is it not acceptable to adopt any theory as long as one is able to maintain the full authority of the Bible? The possibility that Christian theology could approach the study of revelation and inspiration in search of a model yet to be theologically and technically formulated seems to follow from our analysis of both the ground and the methodology involved in thinking and clarifying the many issues in the epistemological inquiry about the origin of Scripture. The question of the practical necessity for undertaking such a task will be considered in the third and final article of this series.