

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION: THE CLASSICAL MODEL

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The ground and methodology on which a new approach to the doctrine of revelation and inspiration can be developed have already been explored.¹ The question now before us is whether a new theoretical interpretation of the epistemological origin of Scripture is necessary.² Would not it be more practical and effective to choose one of the many available interpretations?³ In order to answer the question

¹Fernando Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Ground for a New Approach," *AUSS* 31 (1993): 91-104; id., "Revelation and Inspiration: Method for a New Approach," *AUSS* 31 (1993): 171-194.

²Dissatisfaction with available interpretations has been present among theologians, particularly during the last three centuries. For instance, William J. Abraham states that "it is no exaggeration to claim that contemporary Evangelical theology faces a crisis as regards its doctrine of inspiration. For some time it has been felt that its account has been inadequate" (*The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1981], 1). He faces the evangelical crisis of understanding the origin of Scripture by developing what he calls a "genuine alternative" that is "intellectually viable and religiously valuable" (109; see also 9, 58-75). Still within the general parameters of the evangelical tradition (7, 109-118), Abraham's proposal attempts to make room for a consistent application of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation, which he considers "well established as an academic discipline and too relevant to our recovery of the past to be ignored or rejected" (5). The approach that I suggest calls for the construction of a new model from the very foundations of its systematic basis. Abraham is correct in perceiving the inadequacy of existing theories, but his proposal does not go beyond either the classical evangelical or liberal models already in existence.

³For an introduction to the many theories produced throughout the history of Christian theology see Avery Robert Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (Herder and Herder, NY: 1969); James Tunstead Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge, Engl.: Cambridge University Press, 1969); James I. Packer, "Contemporary Views of Revelation," in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1958); Peter Maarten Van Bemmelen, *Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield* (Berrien

about the necessity of a new approach, an analysis of the models already in existence is required. In this article my purpose is to provide an epistemological description of the classical model of revelation-inspiration. The liberal model will be explored subsequently in another article.

1. *Theological Models*

At the outset, a word is in order regarding the nature of models considered as technical tools for the analysis and comparison of ideas. Models, says Ian Barbour, are "imagined mental constructs invented to account for observed phenomena"; they are used "to develop a theory which in some sense explains the phenomena."⁴ Avery Dulles and David Tracy not only have worked very effectively with theological models but also have clarified what these are. Models, explains Dulles, attempt to uncover "structural features of systems," and are ideal, simplified, and schematic accounts of a much more complex reality.⁵ Tracy explains that "a widely accepted dictum in contemporary theology is the need to develop certain basic models or types for understanding the specific task of the contemporary theologian."⁶ In theology, the essence of models—that which makes their usage worthwhile—consists in showing the structural articulation of the main components involved in the interpretation of any given doctrine.⁷ Thus, models are useful tools that help to identify the general characteristics of any theological position, school, or trend.

Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987); René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation: Including a Commentary on the Constitution "Dei verbum" of Vatican II* (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1966), 87-309, Abraham, 111-113; Avery Robert Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 21; Robert Karl Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible: Theories of Inspiration, Revelation, and the Canon of Scripture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 6-62; and Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972).

⁴Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 300.

⁵Dulles, *Models*, 25, 30.

⁶David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 22. For further literature on models, see, e.g., Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (New York: Harper, 1961); Ian Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); and id., *Christian Discourse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁷Tracy, 23.

Models have their limitations, however. For instance, they do not "provide an exact description of particular historical phenomena."⁸ And furthermore, their truth status cannot be proved.⁹ No particular theologian, therefore, will fit exactly the type or model that he or she represents.¹⁰ Moreover, some theologians are very difficult to classify as representing any given model; others even mix components that belong to several models.¹¹

It is extremely important to distinguish properly between "system," "paradigm," and "model" so as to give precision to the analysis and avoid unnecessary confusion. "System" refers to the undergirding presuppositional structure that I explored in my second article.¹² "Paradigm" refers to the methodology that any discipline needs in order to function properly as a science.¹³ Finally, the concept of model refers to the specific way in which a theological doctrine is articulated in its essential features. Thus, any particular model necessarily presupposes a scientific paradigm and a philosophical system.

Since there are various ways in which both the presuppositional philosophical system and the scientific methodological paradigm can be interpreted, models for theological doctrines can also be conceived in sundry ways.¹⁴ For instance, Robert Gnuse speaks about strict verbal,

⁸Ibid.

⁹Dulles, *Models*, 29.

¹⁰Ibid., 26.

¹¹Ibid., 29.

¹²Canale, "Method," 190-192.

¹³Thomas S. Kuhn has called attention to the term "paradigm" by using it as a tool to help him interpret the historical development of factual sciences. According to Kuhn, paradigm "stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community" (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970], 175). Hans Küng applied Kuhn's idea of paradigm to the study of theological development (*Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*, trans. Peter Heinegg [New York: Doubleday, 1988], 123-226). See also Hans Küng, "Paradigm Change in Theology: A Proposal for Discussion," in *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy, trans. Margaret Köhl (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 3-33. Unfortunately, the concept of paradigm as used by both Kuhn and Küng does not properly distinguish between the philosophical foundations of the sciences and their methodological structure. In other words, no distinction is made between system and paradigm.

¹⁴Dulles, *Models*, 26-27.

limited verbal, non-textual, and social theories of inspiration,¹⁵ whereas Carl Henry refers to evangelical, liberal, and neo-orthodox approaches.¹⁶ Speaking specifically about revelation rather than inspiration, Dulles distinguishes five different models: doctrinal, historical, experiential, dialectical presence, and new awareness.¹⁷ Also speaking about revelation, Miikka Ruokanen notes three models: propositional, non-propositional, and non-propositional with new divinely originated information;¹⁸ he also discerns two models of inspiration, namely, the direct-instrumental and the integrated-content theories. As a final example, we may note that Abraham recognizes four models of inspiration: dictation, natural intuition, illumination of human natural powers, and dynamic control of the free human agent by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

In the task of identifying the most dominant models of revelation-inspiration produced throughout the history of Christian thought and of presenting a broad description of my suggested new model, I will use as analytical tools the methodology discussed in my second article and the interpretations of the ground (the presuppositional structure or system) presented in my first article.

A model of inspiration-revelation should provide as clear an explanation as possible of the issue at hand; namely, the epistemological origin of Scripture. Specifically, it should supply an understanding of the way in which God and man interacted in the construction of meaning and information; or in other words, how they originated the total content of Scripture. It should also supply an understanding of the process of putting that content into the form of a written text. The description of a theological model, then, includes the following: first, an examination of the presuppositions of the underlying philosophical system; second, an analysis of revelation as the epistemological origin of the content of Scripture; third, an examination of the linguistic process of inscripturization; and fourth, an evaluation of the results when applied to Scripture as the source of theological data.

¹⁵Gnuse, 22-23, 34-41, 42-49, and 50-68, respectively.

¹⁶Carl Henry, "Divine Revelation and the Bible," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John Walvoord (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 256-269.

¹⁷Dulles, *Models*, 27-28.

¹⁸Miikka Ruokanen, *Doctrina Divinitus Inspirata: Martin Luther's Position in the Ecumenical Problem of Biblical Inspiration* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1985), 19-23.

¹⁹Abraham, 3.

2. *Presuppositional Structure of the Classical Model*

The presuppositional structure of the classical model encompasses the general metaphysical and epistemological principles of Greek philosophy as developed by Plato and Aristotle and adapted to Christianity by Augustine and Aquinas.²⁰ Concretely, it includes metaphysically the principle of realism,²¹ and epistemologically the principle of "illumination" (Augustine's terminology)²² or "intellectualism" (the Aristotelian-Thomistic expression).²³ Moreover, reality is conceived not only as independent from the cognitive subject, but also as timeless in nature.²⁴

²⁰I am aware that this is a simplification and generalization of a much more complex historical development. Such simplification and generalization is required here, however, by my purpose of outlining the main features of a model, in this case the classical model.

²¹Aquinas' position differs from idealism, transcendentalism, and materialistic realism. In it the basic characteristic of reality is changelessness, which is at the center of the reality of things in what is called the second *ousia*. Johannes Hirschberger explains that in addition to concrete reality (first *ousia*), "St. Thomas recognized second substance, which denotes that which in many individual things is found to be identical, the common nature (*natura communis*). This coincides with the species or genus. St. Thomas prefers, however, to call it essence or quiddity (*essentia, quidditas*)" (*The History of Philosophy*, 2 vols., trans. Anthony N. Fuerst [Milwaukee, WI.: Bruce, 1958-1959], 1:417). Here again Aquinas "is entirely at one with Aristotle, and by this theory, he along with Aristotle makes it possible for a portion of Platonism to continue to live on" (*ibid.*).

²²Hirschberger presents three main ways in which Augustine's illumination has been understood (1:316-317). It is interesting to notice that Aquinas considered Augustine's position as compatible with his more elaborate intellectualism (*Summa Theologica*, 1.84.5). See also Armand A. Maurer, *Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Random, 1962), 10-12.

²³In Intellectualism, knowledge of reality is produced by the "agent intellect" (*intellectus agens*). The agent, which is located in the timeless soul, has the capability to abstract the timeless essence (second *ousia*) from the concrete reality in which it is given to us (first *ousia*). All human knowledge is structured this way. Sensory perception is considered to be the starting point of knowledge, but is always of the timeless essence, never the temporal historical reality. For an introduction to Aquinas' intellectualism, see Hirschberger, 1:435-439; Guillermo Fraile, *Historia de la Filosofía*, 3 vols. (Madrid: B.A.C., 1965-1966), 2:979-1005; and Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 86-90. For an introduction to intellectualism as a general epistemological theory of knowledge, see Johannes Hessen, *Teoría del Conocimiento*, 9th ed. (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1969), 61-64.

²⁴In the classical system, timeless (ultimate) reality is conceived to be analogical. Consequently, the characteristic of timelessness pertains properly to God, and only in various degrees of analogy to the rest of reality. See my *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 185, n. 1. Aquinas put it in the following way: "Eternity, in the

In this model, divine activity belongs to a world of timelessness; divine and human knowledge, likewise, pertain to the same world of timelessness. Even when the intellect is "active" in abstracting or seeing the independent timeless reality that is given to it within the concrete temporal reality, it nonetheless is passive in regard to the content of the knowledge that it achieves. Intellectualism (and much more so Augustine's "illumination") conceives of knowledge as basically caused by the presupposed timeless reality or essence that determines the scientific content formed in the human mind. The classical model of the origin of Scripture, built on the basis of this philosophical structure, was already generally accepted during the patristic period,²⁵ and is shared by both conservative Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions.²⁶

3. *Revelation in the Classical Model*

As indicated above, the process of revelation has two components: divine activity and human activity. At this juncture, we must consider their function and use within the "classical model" and what constitutes their essence and content in this model.

true and proper sense, belongs to God alone; for eternity, we said, follows upon unchangeableness (*immutabilitatem*)" (*Summa theologica*, 1.10.3), and eternity is timeless (Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, 1.15.3; *Summa theologica*, 1.10.2 ad 3; 1.10.4; 1.10.4 ad 2 and 3; 1.10.3; 1.10.1). For a commentary on Augustine's timeless conception of God, see William Thomas Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 5 vols., 2d ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969-1975), 2:88-93.

²⁵Vawter remarks that the Fathers' view of Scripture was influenced not only by the Hellenistic culture but also by Palestinian Judaism, which had already assimilated Greek culture (35-36). He concludes that "the fact remains that it was among men with very little of the Biblical sense of historical religion that the Church's doctrine of inspiration was destined to be discussed" (36). About two centuries earlier than Augustine, Origen appears to have shared the classical view. According to Enrique Nardoni, Origen believed that revelation (he called it "divine illumination") "operates in a double way. On the one hand, it energizes the natural faculties of the prophets" ("Origen's Concept of Biblical Inspiration," *The Second Century* 4 [1984]: 14). "On the other hand, it operates by offering an apprehensible aspect of the divine mystery" (15).

²⁶*Ibid.*, 76. It is beyond the scope of this article to describe the specific views of sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers, a topic which would require a complete study in its own right. I should point out, however, that Ruokanen's volume about Luther (see n. 19, above) is instructive on the subject. In this article, the Protestant tradition will be represented by the views of certain present-day conservative Christian scholars, especially Carl F. H. Henry.

Divine Activity

The concept of revelation as the origin of biblical content developed slowly. Thomas Aquinas' synthesis brought to technical expression the basic trend of classical thought.²⁷ For him, revelation was the result of God's action on the human intellect, by which God might "disclose new ideas or species to the mind of the prophet by direct action upon the senses, the imagination, or by reordering existing ideas or species in an original way, or by direct action upon the intellect."²⁸ In other words, revelation "is normally communicated to the prophet by the supernatural gift of representations (sensible, imaginative, or intelligible), accompanied by an illumination of the judgment enabling the mind to understand and exploit them."²⁹

Thus, revelation requires two actions of God upon the prophet or writer. First, he has to generate the content; and second, he has to enable the prophet to think (judge) at higher-than-natural level of reason demanded by the supernatural content itself.³⁰ Such enabling, when given to the active intellect, does not destroy it, but rather elevates it.³¹

Degrees of revelation are recognized, however, since some of the means through which God reveals his transcendent truth are more effective and excellent than others.³² This, in turn, leads proponents of this model to the conclusion that most of the Bible's contents have originated, not from supernatural revelation, but rather from the human

²⁷*Summa theologica*, 2a2ae, 171-174.

²⁸J. T. Forestell, "Bible, II (Inspiration)," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967-1989), 2:384. See also John Scullion, *The Theology of Inspiration* (Notre Dame, IN.: Fides, 1970), 36. For an in-depth study on Aquinas' doctrine of revelation, see Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*", trans. Avery Dulles (New York: Desclee, 1961); Pierre Benoit, *Aspects of Biblical Inspiration*, trans. J. Murphy-O'Connor and S. K. Ashe (Chicago Priory, 1965), 44-64. According to Charles Joseph Costello, Augustine conceived that truths were communicated to the prophets "either through their sense faculties, or directly through the intellect" (*St. Augustine's Doctrine on the Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1930], 11). See also Vawter, 40.

²⁹Benoit, 44.

³⁰Aquinas, *Summa theologica* 2a-2ae, 171.1, ad 4. Scullion points out that for Aquinas, this elevation of the mind was inspiration and that consequently "Thomas did not discuss scriptural inspiration as we understand it" (36).

³¹*Ibid.*, 2a-2ae, 171.2.

³²*Ibid.*, 2a-2ae, 174.2.

writers, whose active intellects were especially enabled or illuminated to judge properly the kind of things accessible to every person.³³

Human Activity

In the formation of the actual content of revealed truth, the classical model assigns to the human participant a passive, receptive role. Aquinas, again, states this characteristic with unmistakable clarity. Since revelation is an action of God directed to the prophet's intellect, it does not destroy that intellect; rather it elevates and utilizes it, so that the human involvement in revelation actually occurs within the prophet's intellectual faculty.³⁴ It seems clear that at this point Aquinas' system or presuppositional structure takes over, for he views the intellectual activity of the human recipients as contributing nothing to the creation of the content of the revealed truths. These truths are caused only and totally by God, who in various ways and degrees impresses them on the minds of the prophets.³⁵ In order to receive these truths, the prophets' intellectual capabilities are ontologically heightened by a supernatural act of God, as we have already noted. In fact, without such heightening, the normal intellect of the prophet would be unable to receive the supernatural, timeless truths that revelation conveys.

The Essence or Nature of Revelation

By now the essence or nature of revelation according to the classical model has become apparent. Revelation is cognitive. As stated by Aquinas, "Prophecy first and chiefly consists in knowledge."³⁶ But although truth is timeless, it is given to human knowledge within concrete temporal realities that are initially processed through sensory perception. If in this life, natural truth is to be abstracted by the active intellect from the data provided by sensory perception, this process is

³³Ibid., 2a-2ae, 174, ad 3. Also see Benoit, 44.

³⁴ST, 2a-2ae, 173.2. See also n. 32, above.

³⁵Ibid., 1.79.2. The passive understanding of man's activity in revelation was already present in Origen. Nardoni remarks that the communication involved in revelation "is made by 'a spiritual impression' on the spiritual sense of the prophet's mind. This impression stimulates the spiritual sense and determines the character of whatever the prophet has perceived" (15).

³⁶*Summa theologiae*, 2a-2ae, 171.1.

even more evident in the case of supernatural revelation, which is supposed to convey divine timeless truth.

It should be observed, however, that inasmuch as sensory perception works on natural data provided by concrete realities existing in space and time, the intellect in its abstractive function is supposed to eliminate the historical aspects and to concentrate only on the timeless ones. The latter are conceived to be the immutable eternal truths revealed by God in either natural or supernatural revelation.

The Content of Revelation

According to the classical model, the specific content of the supernatural knowledge generated by God in the intellect of the prophets has been interpreted in various ways. Aquinas, for instance, considered that the content of revelation includes potentially the total sum of absolute truth as it eternally exists in God. In the divine intellect, he says, "originally and virtually, all being pre-exists as in its first cause,"³⁷ and "the principle of things pertaining to supernatural knowledge, which are manifested by prophecy, is God Himself."³⁸ Prophetic knowledge, under the form of teaching, is a likeness of the eternal timeless knowledge of the divine intellect. Thomas thus specifically isolates God as the actual content of revelation.

Theology by definition, however, deals only with that part of eternal truth which is not accessible through sensory perception and the natural intellect. In other words, revelation is properly predicated of those aspects of divine knowledge that we cannot access through our natural reason (our sensory perception and active intellect), and theology deals with either natural or supernatural truths insofar as these relate to divine salvation. "It was necessary for the salvation of man, that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation," says Aquinas, who then goes on immediately to explain that it was also indispensable that truths which are necessary for salvation should be revealed by God. This is so, even when such truths may be accessible to human reason, for reason is able to discover truth about God only "after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors."³⁹

³⁷Ibid., 1.79.2.

³⁸Ibid., 2a-2ae, 171.2.6.

³⁹Ibid., 1.1.1.

Thus, the content of revelation is knowledge about salvation, and this pertains to divine things that in their nature and in their fullest meaning are timeless. It would seem to follow, therefore, that not all parts of Scripture, having been written within a historical frame of thought, are relevant as sources for theology. And moreover, since supernature is defined as timeless by the presuppositional structure, history cannot be in itself the content of revelation. It is, at best, revelation's vehicle *in via*.

In this context, it is important to notice that history is not considered by Aquinas as being even a means of revelation. He clearly summarizes his view about the means by which God conveys supernatural knowledge to the heightened intellect of the prophet by saying that "prophetic revelation takes place in four ways, namely, by the infusion of an intelligible light, by the infusion of intelligible species, by impression or co-ordination of pictures in the imagination, and by the outward presentation of sensible images."⁴⁰ Thus, actual history is not considered by Aquinas as a vehicle of revelation, much less as a source of it.

John Henry Newman, agreeing with Aquinas' concept of theology as the supernatural science of salvation, and taking seriously the statements about the origin of Scripture made by Trent (1545-1563) and the first Vatican Council (1870), seriously maintained that the content of inspiration reached only things that pertained to "faith and moral conduct."⁴¹ This statement is broader than the more specific position by Aquinas.

A variation within the classical model is presented by the more recent theory of propositional revelation championed by the conservative wing of American Evangelicalism.⁴² Carl F. H. Henry stresses that God reveals himself verbally and historically.⁴³ However, when speaking about the verbal and historical features of revelation,

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 2a-2ae.173.3; 2a-2ae.174.1.

⁴¹John Henry Newman, *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, ed. J. Derek Holmes and Robert Murray (Washington D.C.: Corpus, 1967), 108-109. For an overview of Newman's thought and his influence on Catholic thought, see J. D. Holmes and R. Murray, "Introduction," in *ibid.*, 3-96.

⁴²The evangelical theory of propositional revelation belongs to the classical model because the presuppositional structure on which it stands is borrowed from classical catholic thinking.

⁴³*God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983), 3:268-269, 3:261-271, 480. Henry specifically agrees with the classical realism-intellectualism of Augustine and Aquinas (*ibid.*, 3:168-169).

Henry refers to means rather than to content. Like Aquinas, Henry believes that the essence of revelation is cognitive. "Revelation in the Bible," he declares, "is essentially a mental conception: God's disclosure is rational and intelligible communication. Issuing from the mind and will of God, revelation is addressed to the mind and will of human beings."⁴⁴

For Henry, the content of revelation is God himself, especially his salvific purposes for humankind.⁴⁵ This supernatural knowledge is given to human beings within human history through the means of nature, historical events, internal divine disclosure to conscience and reason (elements of general revelation), and Jesus Christ (the consummation of special revelation).

When Henry speaks of the Logos, he views the historical Jesus of Nazareth as only the vehicle through which the eternal Logos, who is equal to God, is revealed to human knowledge.

The central and unifying element in the biblical doctrine of the Logos of God is transcendent divine communication mediated by the eternal Christ. The word of God is personal and rational, and the truth of God, whether given in general or in special disclosure, including the climactic revelation of the Logos in Jesus of Nazareth, can be propositionally formulated. All divine revelation mediated to man is incarnational, inasmuch as it is given in human history, concepts and language.⁴⁶

Henry's understanding of this "incarnational" or historical nature of revelation is further clarified by his remark that "justification by faith, or any other scripturally revealed truth, is historical revelation, in the sense that it was divinely revealed at a certain place and time."⁴⁷

It seems clear from the foregoing quotations that for Henry historicity does not belong either to the essence or to the content of what is being revealed, namely, supernatural divine truths. It should be added, however, that he, like Aquinas, believes that natural reason needs

⁴⁴Ibid., 3:248; see also 1:200.

⁴⁵Ibid., 3:170, 269.

⁴⁶Ibid., 3:173.

⁴⁷Ibid., 2:321.

to be elevated in order for it to be able to receive these supernatural truths.⁴⁸

The Bible, says Henry, presents both natural and supernatural revealed truths. And once again, he sets forth his view in language that reminds us of Aquinas:

Special scriptural revelation normatively sets forth the propositional content of general revelation, and does so as the framework of God's saving revelation. Scripture confronts fallen man objectively and externally with a divinely inspired literary deposit that states the intelligible components of God's ongoing general revelation in nature and history, and conveys as well the propositional content of God's redemptive revelation."⁴⁹

Thus, for Henry, what the prophet receives from God through historical means is "cognitive truths" and these he puts into propositional form as Scripture is written. But biblical statements as a whole must not be identified with propositional revelation, for what Scripture contains is, rather, "a body of divinely given information actually expressed or capable of being expressed in propositions."⁵⁰

⁴⁸See, e.g., *ibid.*, 1:201, 3:171, and 4:119.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 3:460.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 3:457. Henry is aware that the Bible presents a God who freely and actively intervenes in human history (*ibid.*, 2:251). He is correct in affirming that Jesus' cross and resurrection must be understood as belonging to human spatio-temporal history (*ibid.*, 2:289, 321). But, one may ask, how can an eternal (timeless) transcendent being act in history and time? According to Henry "the answer given by biblical theism is that God acts by predestination" (*ibid.*, 6:48). But, one should not forget that within the content of Henry's theological tradition predestination involves "more than simply a temporal and historical election" (*ibid.*, 6:78); "what the Bible affirms is God's pretemporal, superhistorical eternal election" (*ibid.*). In other words, the existence of the universe is grounded "on the eternal plan of the unchanging God who is free to decree as he pleases and who in his 'good pleasure' decrees a space-time matrix that by his willing becomes as necessary as God himself" (*ibid.*). Moreover, since "God's decree is preceded logically by his intrinsic self knowledge, unless it be the case that his decree and his self-knowledge are identical or that the decree is part of his self-knowledge" (*ibid.*), and since "the external universe is itself God's implementation of his purpose" (*ibid.*), it follows that Henry agrees with Plato's basic ontological structure according to which historical reality is the temporal duplication of the eternal one. The order of divine causes and activities, then, are not performed from within the temporal order but rather from the timeless one.

Thus, Henry's thesis attempts to integrate the historical activity of God and the historical Jesus Christ as presented in Scripture with the theoretical structure of the classical model of revelation. As a result, Jesus Christ is called to play a central role, but only as a means of making eternal truth accessible to human cognitive limitations. Since Henry shares the classical presuppositional structure, the full force of the biblical conception of reality is still shackled in his system.

Ronald Nash holds a more moderate view of propositional revelation, since he recognizes that "*some revelation is propositional*, that some revelation conveys cognitive information." Moreover, he also points out that "some revelation is personal and noncognitive." Nash, then, appears as an example of a theologian who mixes views belonging to two main models, namely, the classical and the liberal (the latter of these, as will be seen in my next article, emphasizes a non-cognitive personal ground for revelation).⁵¹

4. *Inspiration in the Classical Model*

The interpretation of revelation—the way in which the contents of Scripture are epistemologically originated—is not enough to explain the origin of Scripture. The linguistic process of writing, or inscripturization, must also be addressed. Consequently, the classical model developed, besides a doctrine of revelation, an interpretation of inspiration.

An analysis of the classical model of inspiration requires at least three procedures. These are, first, the examination of the specific divine and human involvement in the process of inscripturization,⁵² second, the characterization of the essence of such a process; and finally, a brief mention of the main theoretical variations regarding the content and scope of inspiration.

The Role of Divine Activity in Inspiration

The classical model of revelation-inspiration has interpreted God's involvement in the writing of Scriptures by following one of three possible patterns, namely, dictation, primary causality, and creation-providence.

⁵¹Ronald Nash, "Southern Baptists and the Notion of Revealed Truth," *Criswell Theological Review* 2 (1988): 376-377.

⁵²See, e.g., Newman, 115, and Abraham, 2.

The dictation pattern has been advocated since early in the history of Christian theology.⁵³ According to this pattern, God is the writer of the entire Bible, which "is deposited ready-made in the mind of the human writer."⁵⁴ The latter needs "only understand the words materially and be able to write them correctly, nothing more."⁵⁵ Very few theologians, however, seem to have understood God's involvement in the writing of Scripture in this extreme form of mechanical dictation.⁵⁶

The primary-causality pattern takes inspiration to be a divine action *ad extra*, with Aquinas as its classical exponent. It views God's action of inspiration as a supernatural charismatic gift by means of which the "Holy Spirit moves and elevates the faculties of the sacred writers of the Bible."⁵⁷ As a consequence, the Bible "is ascribed to God the principal author and man the secondary or instrumental author."⁵⁸ The precise theological explanation of God as the principal author is made by way of "the philosophical principles of instrumental causality,"⁵⁹ and this primary-secondary cause pattern involves a sort of coordination between God as the primary agent and the prophet as his instrument.⁶⁰ In the writing of Scripture, the human instrument "does

⁵³For a good historical survey of advocates of the dictation pattern, see Luis Alonso Schökel, *The Inspired Work: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature*, trans. Francis Martin (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 66-72.

⁵⁴John Barton, "Verbal Inspiration," *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, Philadelphia: Trinity Press International (1990), 720.

⁵⁵Schökel, 68.

⁵⁶Within the Roman Catholic tradition, notable proponents of mechanical dictation are Dominic Bañez, C. R. Billuart; within the Protestant tradition, the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, Johann Gerhard, and Quenstedt (see Schökel, 68-69). However, according to Forestell, "no one today would hold that God dictated the words of Scripture in an audible manner to the ear of the sacred writer" (2:384).

⁵⁷Charles H. Pickar, "The Bible," in *The Summa Theologica*, 3 vols., by Thomas Aquinas, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, NY: Benzinger, 1948), 3:3105.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Forestell explains in less technical terms the concept of instrumentality: "an instrument, such as a saw or a trumpet, cannot produce any effect unless it is used by a carpenter or a musician. When so used, it produces an effect proper to its own nature; a saw is designed to cut wood, a trumpet to make music. The effect, however, surpasses the proper causality of the instrument even though the latter receives and conditions the action of the principal agent" (2:383-384).

not act on his own, but in virtue of an action communicated to it by the principal agent."⁶¹

In this model, the prophet is God's passive instrument, not only "in regard to the internal mental conception of the writing, but in regard also to the literary form and external expression of the book."⁶² But even though this pattern emphasizes God's authorship of Scripture, the notion of human instrumentality may account for the existence of biblical imperfections. This pattern thus has room for certain imperfections, including literary defects, because they "are not ascribed to God, but to the human authors of Scripture."⁶³ The imperfections and literary defects are caused by the limits proper to the essence of the human instrument. The foregoing pattern has been officially adopted by the Roman Catholic church.⁶⁴

The providence pattern is utilized to explain God's activity in the writing of Scripture as a specific case of his sovereign providential government of the world. On the basis of this pattern, modern Evangelicalism rejects the mechanical dictation pattern of divine action in inspiration.⁶⁵ Millard Erickson states that even in what B. B. Warfield regarded as the most diluted form of Calvinism, it is possible to

⁶¹Pickar, 3:3105.

⁶²Ibid., 3:3107 and 3105. Also Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a-2ae, 173.4; 3.62.2 ad 1.

⁶³Pickar, 3:3105.

⁶⁴In its third session (April 24, 1870), the First Vatican Council promulgated the "Dogmatic Constitution concerning the Catholic Faith," which, in its second chapter states that the Roman Catholic church holds the Bible "not because, having been put together by human industry alone, they were then approved by its authority; nor because they contain revelation without error; but because, having been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and, as such, they have been handed down to the Church itself" (Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, from the 30th ed. of Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum* [St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1957], 1787). On November 18, 1965, the Second Vatican Council promulgated its "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," which, upholding the traditional view of Trent and other authorities, states that "in composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted." Therefore, "since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation" (Walter M. Abbott, ed. *The Documents of Vatican II*, trans. and ed. Joseph Gallagher [New York: Guild, 1966], *Dei Verbum*, 3:11).

⁶⁵See Abraham, 4.

maintain that God became the author of Scripture by carefully "directing the thought of the writers, so that they were precisely the thoughts that he wished expressed."⁶⁶ According to this view, which Erickson shares, God renders certain, but not necessary, the outcome of any free action by determining the external circumstances that influence them.⁶⁷ Kenneth S. Kantzer points out that Calvin's view of divine activity in inspiration does not make the prophet "an instrument which simply passes on words mechanically given to him. Rather, because of God's sovereign control of his being, he is an instrument whose whole personality expresses itself naturally to write exactly the words God wishes to speak. Only in this large and comprehensive sense are the words of Scripture dictated by God."⁶⁸

The Role of Human Activity in Inspiration

In the classical model, human contributions are kept to the minimal possible level. Not only in the origination of truth but in the very writing of Scripture, God is the main, or principal, overshadowing cause or author.⁶⁹ The activity of the Holy Spirit is experienced by the writer as a gift that heightens the natural capabilities and transforms the prophet into a suitable instrument for the specific activity of writing Scripture.⁷⁰ Most classical thinking allowed no active role or specific contribution on the part of the human element in the instrument. This human agent was conceived essentially as a passive tool, used by the Holy Spirit in the historical process of writing Scripture.⁷¹ The passivity of the human instrument refers to the total dependence of the human

⁶⁶Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 216, 359.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 357-359.

⁶⁸Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 141.

⁶⁹For a study of human involvement in inspiration written from within the conservative Evangelical tradition, see Gordon R. Lewis, "The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 229-264.

⁷⁰See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2a-2ae, 174.2 ad 3. Cf. Eugene F. Klug, "Revelation and Inspiration in Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology," *The Springfielder* 26 (1962): 17-18.

⁷¹See Barton, 720; also Abraham, 3.

agent on the divine cause, entailing no material absence of human activity in the actual process of writing.

There is, however, a track of classical thinking that allows human activity a small amount of room in the formation of the sacred text, such as in gathering material and conceiving the literary plan of the book.⁷² Of course, even these tasks are viewed as being performed under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, a matter that I have already explained. The passive nature of the human role in the process of inspiration is, in fact, a basic feature in all subvarieties of the classical model of revelation-inspiration.

The Essence of Inspiration

The essence of inspiration is difficult to identify. In general terms, however, I would suggest that inspiration is the connection that occurs between God's power, will, and knowledge, and man's limited cognitive, volitive, and literary capabilities in order to produce a verbal or written account of divine revelation. "Inspiration is a supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles," declares Henry, "whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of the oral and written proclamation."⁷³

On this ontological basis, the relationship between divine and human activities in the writing of Scripture is described, for instance, as "concurive," "simultaneous," "confluent," and/or "harmonious."⁷⁴

⁷²See Costello on Augustine's remarks on the human activity of man (220-222). Costello, however, clarifies that Augustine tended to emphasize either the divine or the human activities without providing proper ways to put both concepts together in a harmonious theological theory (18), and he portrays Augustine as affirming that God wills the order of the book. This, then, transforms the activity affirmed for the human agent into something superfluous. According to Schökel, Roman Catholic theological manuals (it seems he is speaking of late theological developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) move further away from even Augustine's most generous statements regarding man's activity. These manuals affirm, e.g., that the process of writing Scripture was "not under a special supernatural influence" but was "carried out with the aid of a certain divine assistance which guarantees that the terms are apt and that there is no error. This assistance does not consist in a physical motion acting directly on the executive faculties" (180). Though leaning somewhat towards the classical model of revelation, this relatively recent development seems to be a clear departure from the essentials of the classical model of inspiration.

⁷³Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:129.

⁷⁴Various of these terms are used interchangeably by evangelical scholars, but "concurive" is often identified with J. I. Packer, who says, "We are to think of the Spirit's inspiring activity, and, for that matter, of all His regular operations in and upon

Defining the essence of inspiration in terms of such concepts eliminates dictation, thus allowing room for consciousness and freedom on the part of the writer. However, the classical understanding of the essence of inspiration is unable to overcome two fundamental shortcomings: first, that God as author and primary cause in the production of Scripture reduces the human contribution to its minimal possible expression; and second, that the relationship between divine and human activities occurs in a more-or-less mechanical and non-personal mode.

The Content of Inspiration

It should not surprise us that there are many and subtle variations of opinion regarding the actual content of inspiration. In general, however, it is possible to identify interpreters as following one or the other of two main patterns. Some affirm inspiration for the totality of Scripture while others limit the scope of inspiration to some portions of Scripture. The first pattern, affirming full plenary verbal inspiration, is espoused by persons who tend to explain the epistemological origin of Scripture by way of a theory of inspiration. The second pattern, affirming limited verbal inspiration, is advocated by persons who are inclined to connect inspiration with the classical model of revelation.

It should also be noted that both the dictation and the plenary-verbal theories of inspiration affirm that inspiration reaches the totality of Scripture. They differ in the interpretation of the way in which the divine activity in inspiration is conceived. The former supports dictation, and the later adopts either the primary-cause or the sovereign-providence pattern.⁷⁵

human personality, as (to use an old but valuable technical term) *concurrentive*; that is, as exercised in, through and by means of the writer's own activity, in such a way that their thinking and writing was *both* free and spontaneous on their part *and* divinely elicited and controlled, and what they wrote was not only their own work but also God's work" (*"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958], 80); Costello, 18; and Randall Basinger and David Basinger, "Inerrancy, Dictation and the Free Will Defence," *EQ* 55 (1983): 178. Regarding the meaning and significance of the various terms, see also R. A. Finlayson, "Contemporary Ideas of Inspiration," in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. by Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 1958), 223.

⁷⁵For an introduction to the dictation theory, see Vawter, 59-61; Forestell, 385; Klug, 15; Kantzer, 137-139; Gnuse, 49; Abraham, 116; Packer, 95; Barton, 721; and Costello, 12-16. Regarding the Verbal Plenary theory, see Gnuse, 10-11, 27; Klug, 14, 16; Newman, 150; Kern R. Trembath, *Evangelical Theories of Biblical Inspiration: A Review and Proposal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 8-27; Barton, 720-722; Nash, 381;

5. *Implications for Theology*

The interpretation of revelation-inspiration is not inconsequential for the development and constitution of Christian theology. On the contrary, after it is theologically formulated, the interpretation of the revelation-inspiration doctrine plays the foundational role of being the epistemological presupposition that defines the scope and nature of Scripture as theological data. But in what way does the classical model determine the scope and nature of the biblical writings as theological data? On this question, there appear to be two views. One emphasizes the process of writing (inspiration), and the other emphasizes the process by which supernatural ideas are originated in the mind of the prophet (revelation).

When the epistemological origin of Scripture is primarily understood in reference to the writing process, the full verbal plenary theory of inspiration affirms the whole Scripture to be the word of God at face value. Consequently, all the words of the Bible are equally considered as supernatural revelation from the timeless and changeless God.⁷⁶ The entire scope of Scripture is inerrant supernatural revelation, not only in its spiritual or doctrinal-salvific content, but in every historical detail. Gnuse puts it this way:

The words of Scripture may be considered absolute truth and used without fear for the articulation of theology and Church practice. The treatment of textual statements in this fashion implies that the text is propositional revelation from God to man. For if God is truthful, and Scripture is revealed by God, then it must be true in all its parts. If God is perfect, and God is revealed in the Bible, the Bible must be perfect. Since not lying entails total and absolute accuracy, and common sense tells us that the accuracy is the same for all people

and Henry, "Divine Revelation," 257. For information on the limited verbal inspiration approach, see, e.g., Gnuse, 34-41; Scullion, 27-28; Finlayson, 223-224; Ruokanen, 9-17, 33, 35-36; 72-74; 115; Costello, 27; and Dulles, *Models*, 41.

⁷⁶See Gnuse, 23, and Forestell, 386. The latter points out that "in the 20th century, apart from some fundamentalist sects, the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy is generally abandoned because of modern Biblical criticism. Where inspiration is still mentioned, no attempt is made to explain its nature or its effects."

everywhere, then Scripture must be accurate in all its details.⁷⁷

Thus, Scripture in its entirety qualifies as a source of theological data. The nature of Scripture in this role, however, is determined by the timeless omnipotence of God, who through the Holy Spirit overshadows the human agency and overrides all human limitations, errors, and sins. Consequently, in this view of divine inspiration, Scripture is viewed as having divine objectivity, perfection, accuracy, and inerrancy. The approach is structurally flawed, of course, in that it is doubtful that a proper account of the epistemological origin of Scripture can be rendered without direct and explicit reference to the origination of ideas and information.⁷⁸

When the epistemological origin of Scripture is primarily understood in reference to the cognitive process by which supernatural ideas were originated in the minds of the biblical writers, Scripture is conceived to include both supernatural and natural contents (limited verbal inspiration).⁷⁹ Timeless truths are incarnated in temporal human words.⁸⁰ The whole of Scripture is inspired,⁸¹ but only part of it is revealed.⁸² Revelation is that intellectual timeless truth that God reveals to the charismatically empowered reason of the prophet, who, with the additional supernatural assistance of inspiration, consigns such truth into verbal or written form. In this view, only those portions of Scripture that are at the same time revealed and inspired are considered proper

⁷⁷Gnuse, 25.

⁷⁸Regarding the need to integrate the accounts of revelation and inspiration in any model that may properly set forth the epistemological origin of Scriptures, see, e.g., Finlayson, 223-224.

⁷⁹Limited verbal inspiration is the position traditionally maintained by the Roman Catholic Church: Trent (1546) (Denzinger, 783), the First Vatican Council (1870) (Denzinger, 1787), and the Second Vatican Council (1965) (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," 2:11, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, 118-119). See also Newman, 150-151.

⁸⁰"Historic Evangelical Christianity considers the Bible as the essential textbook because, in view of this quality [inspiration], it inscripturates divinely revealed truth in verbal form" (Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:129). See also Schökel, 87.

⁸¹"No distinction of inspiration exists between parts of the Bible. All are inspired, although not for the same immediate purposes" (Henry, "Divine Revelation," 257).

⁸²*Summa theologica*, 2a-2ae, 173.2; Klug, 16; Scullion, 40; Schökel, 55; Forestell, 384.

sources of theology.⁸³ Unfortunately, due to the historical constitution of biblical thinking, this view, as Scullion points out, recognizes that "precious little, of what a writer records has been revealed to him, much is of purely human origin." And thus, revealed supernatural teaching "will not be expressed in every sentence the sacred author writes. Indeed, the greater part of what he writes will not be revelation in the strict sense at all." The "idea, the judgment, the doctrine, that God wishes to convey will emerge from a thousand phrases of minimal importance. And it is this that merits their being considered revelation in the broad sense."⁸⁴

One important epistemological-methodological consequence of doing theology under the second view in the classical model of revelation and inspiration, then, is that a very reduced portion of Scripture qualifies as the source for theological reflection. Thus, the *sola Scriptura* principle, if maintained, cannot be qualified by the *tota Scriptura* principle, and a "canon within the canon" is necessary to determine which specific portions of Scriptures can play the role of sources for theology. The selection will be determined, of course, by the actual content of the specific concepts that each classical-model tradition happens to choose as central for the constitution and defense of the doctrinal convictions of the community.

6. Conclusion

The question about whether the formulation of a new model for the explanation of the epistemological origin of Scripture is necessary requires, as a first step, the exploration of existing, generally accepted models. In this article I have described from an epistemological

⁸³Aquinas opens his *Summa Theologica* by clearly stating 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," and he closes his first article by concluding that "it was therefore necessary that, besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation" (1.1). Even though Augustine believed in verbal inspiration so as to state that "these sacred books, are the works of God's way in leading the believer to the understanding of eternal truths. We must study "Scriptures—explained Augustine—, which adapt themselves to the backwardness of infants, whom they nourish in the first place by humble belief in the historical deeds accomplished in the temporal order for our salvation, and subsequently strengthen in order to lift them up to the sublime understanding of things eternal" (ibid.). Consequently, "a man who is resting upon faith, hope and love, and who keeps a firm hold upon these, does not need the Scriptures except for the purpose of instructing others" (*On Christian Doctrine*, 1.39.43).

⁸⁴Scullion, 30, 39.

perspective the broad characteristics of the classical model. The epistemological description of the liberal model of revelation-inspiration and the evaluation of both the Classical and Liberal models will be treated in my next article.