REVELATION AND INSPIRATION:
THE HISTORICAL-COGNITIVE MODEL

FERNANDO L. CANALE
Andrews University

This article attempts to sketch, in broad strokes, a preliminary outline of a revelation-inspiration model which, developed in faithfulness to the *sola Scriptura* principle, might yield a viable alternative to the classical and liberal models discussed in previous articles.[1] My preceding assessment has shown that in addressing the epistemological origin of Scripture the classical and liberal models do not properly integrate biblical claims with the phenomena of Scripture. Let me underline, once again, that I am not challenging the internal coherence or viability of either the classical or the liberal models. They provide coherent explanations of the epistemological origin of Scripture. Their shortcomings surface in relation to their external coherence with the fact they try to explain, namely, Scripture itself. The classical model has difficulties integrating the phenomena of Scripture, while the liberal model finds it impossible to accept the claims of Scripture on divine revelation and inspiration literally.[2] In this respect both models seem to fall short of formulating a theoretical explanation of the epistemological origin of Scripture in which the full scope of the claims of Scripture about itself—the so-called doctrine of Scripture—and the phenomena of Scripture—actual characteristics of Scriptures as they are given to us—are properly accounted for without contradiction.

Because of this and other reasons presented in the concluding remarks of my last article, it seems that in spite of the almost

---

[1]Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Ground for a New Approach," *AUSS* 31 (1993): 91-104; "Revelation and Inspiration: Method for a New Approach," *AUSS* 31 (1993): 171-194; "Revelation and Inspiration: The Classical Model," *AUSS* 32 (1994): 7-28; and "Revelation and Inspiration: The Liberal Model," *AUSS* 32 (1994): 169-195.

[2]For instance, see James D. G. Dunn's critique of the evangelical understanding of the classical model which leans toward explaining the origin of Scripture on the basis of inspiration ("The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture [Part 1]," *Churchman* 99 [1982]: 104-122).

unchallenged authority that the classical and liberal models exercise today over Christian theology, there is room for yet another model. Christian theology does not need to feel imprisoned or predetermined by traditional views. A new explanation for the epistemological origin of Scripture may still be explored, developed, and evaluated. The possibility of such an alternate interpretation will be examined in this article, following the methodology delineated in my second article, beginning with the ground discovered in the first article and adopted in the analysis of the classical and liberal models. Because of the subject matter under consideration, this article will follow the style of a critical essay, appropriate to the task of theological inquiry.

1. *The Nature of the Issue*

As the exploration of an alternate model of revelation-inspiration is undertaken, it should be brought to mind that the issue under scrutiny is the epistemological origin of Scriptures and not their veracity, accuracy, inerrancy, or interpretation. The goal that an epistemological theory of revelation and inspiration strives to achieve is precise and modest. The epistemological investigation of the origin of Scripture seeks to uncover the a priori conditions under which the cognitive origin of the phenomenon under scrutiny can be properly and coherently conceived as possible.[3]

Scripture is a given fact. We have direct access to it. The question is not about the existence, veracity, or accuracy of its statements, or even the defense of the biblical claim that its words are the words of God (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21; 1 Thess 2:13). The difficulty, rather, is whether Scripture's claim to be the concepts and words of God is possible. This is the problem to be clarified by an epistemological approach to revelation and inspiration.

Our endeavor raises, first of all, the issue of method: How should the matter be examined, and on what basis could we arrive at viable conclusions? As already argued in my second article, the method to be followed here is systematic. Thus, the answer to the question about the methodology to be followed in this probe is simple. The systematic method basically involves the identification of the subject matter to be clarified and the presuppositions required for its clarification. I have already recognized the subject matter of our inquiry as the study of the conditions of the possibility that the words of man which we find in

[3]Here I am not using the term "a priori" in the Kantian sense of independence from sensory perception, but rather in the broader analogous sense of "anteceding the fact or issue under consideration."

Scripture may be at the same time the words of God. Next, the presuppositions that condition the interpretation of the epistemological origin of Scripture need to be ascertained from the contents of Scripture, thus following the *sola Scriptura* principle. On that basis, a determination regarding whether the biblical claim is possible or not could be reached; as well, a working description of the general design of the model could be made.[4] Specifically, the conditions for the possibility of Scripture's claim that its humanly uttered words in their entirety are the words of God (2 Tim 3:16) depend on the interpretation of the presuppositional structure. In short, the possibility and the actual configuration of an alternate model of revelation and inspiration are determined at the level of the presuppositional structure.

After the Kantian epistemological revolution at the root of modernity and postmodernity, the question before us regards the possibility of conceiving the whole cognitive content of Scripture as originated in God. Is it possible to affirm that the cognitive contents of Scripture are the word of God without automatically subscribing to the classical model and its limitations vis-a-vis the *sola Scriptura* principle?[5] Or, should Christian theologians capitulate to the uncritical assumption that the only viable alternative is the acceptance of the liberal conviction, according to which the epistemological origination of Scripture stems from human imagination?[6]

[4]This methodology is not new. It is the same that Kant followed in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1990), 12-15. By this methodology, Kant developed the study of epistemology into an independent philosophical discipline (15).

[5]A recent representative of this theological approach is Thomas Oden's consensual theology (*The Living God* [San Francisco: Harper, 1992], ix).

[6]Pannenberg's cogent and scholarly conceived theology represents a prominent example of a neoclassical systematic approach built on the conviction that Scripture and theology epistemologically originate in the human imagination, through which the religious experience of the divine has been and still is put down in writing (*Theology and the Philosophy of Science* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 301-310; *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 1:165-187). For a comprehensive study of Pannenberg's view on the epistemological origin of Scripture, see Frank Hasel, "Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of Its Origin, Nature, and Use" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1994), 107-112. See also Bruce L. McCormack, "Divine Revelation and Human Imagination: Must We Choose Between the Two?" *SJT* 37 (1984): 431-455; and David J. Bryant, *Faith and the Play of Imagination: On the Role of Imagination in Religion* (Macon, GA.: Mercer University Press, 1989).

2. *The Presuppositional Structure*

It is impossible to address revelation and inspiration as an epistemological problem if one maintains, against the testimony of Scripture, that human beings alone are the originators of its cognitive contents. God's activity is the necessary condition that must be assumed for revelation-inspiration to become an issue in need of theological clarification. The epistemological question already pointed out consists in whether God's activity could be conceived as cognitively reaching human beings, thus making possible Scripture's claim regarding its own origination. Once God's cognitive activity is considered, the essential characteristics of the cognition involved in the origination of Scripture must also be elucidated.

The answer to the question about the possibility of cognitive revelation-inspiration receives a negative answer in the liberal model.[7] The classical model, on the contrary, gives a positive answer: Cognitive revelation is possible. A problem with the answer of the classical model lies in the way the essence of cognition is conceived. As God's activity and man's cognitive capabilities, necessary for receiving God's revelation, operate in the realm of timelessness, the practical outcome is a restricted and ambiguous theory of revelation-inspiration. The limitation can be seen in the fact that, according to the classical model of revelation, most biblical contents are originated by man, very few by God (revelation). The ambiguity can be observed in relation to inspiration, which comes to the rescue of the limited range of revelation. When the human writer puts into words contents that have not been originated by God (revelation), the classical theory maintains that God, in one way or another, through the Holy Spirit, controls the human process of writing (inspiration), miraculously turning it into his own cognitive verbal expression. God is supposed to supernaturally inspire Scripture without interfering with human freedom and initiative. So, according to the classical model, God does not originate all the contents of Scripture (revelation); but on the other hand, God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit originates the entire content of Scripture. This is not the time to analyze these problems and the unabated attempt to answer the many ways in which the limitations and ambiguities of the classical model continue to surface. I basically agree with the answer provided by the classical model to the question about the possibility of revelation, but feel uncomfortable with the

[7]Canale, "Revelation & Inspiration: The Liberal Model," *AUSS* 32 (1994):171-173, 194.

intellectual foundation on which it is built, namely, the timelessness of God's actions and human cognition. For this reason I suggest the need to overcome this source of limitations and ambiguities. To do this requires nothing less than a foundational reinterpretation of the understanding of the presuppositional structure.

The ground for suggesting a new model, therefore, rests on the possibility that the presuppositional structure may be interpreted in a different way. Such a reinterpretation should be instrumental in yielding not only a positive answer regarding the question about the possibility of revelation-inspiration, but also a new understanding of the essence of the cognition involved in revelation-inspiration. Only then could the limitations and ambiguities of the classical model be overcome. The ground I am referring to has already been uncovered in the first article of this series. Briefly, it consists in replacing the timeless conception of God's nature and actions with a temporal-historical one.[8]

The temporal-historical conception of God's being and actions radically departs from the classical and the liberal models. In accordance with Scripture, this component of the presuppositional structure entails God's ability to relate to humankind in general, and biblical writers in particular, directly and univocally within space and time.[9] I am not implying that it is possible to conceive the being of God as univocal to our space and time.[10] Equivocity and analogy are also needed.[11] Here I

[8]This is not the place to discuss further all the theological ramifications of changing from a timeless to a historical-temporal understanding of God's being and action. Such a task would entail a total revision of traditional, modern, and postmodern traditions in the philosophical, methodological, and theological levels.

[9]A team of evangelical authors has recently explored the possibility of thinking theologically about God on the basis of biblical concepts (Clark Pinnock and others, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994]). Generally speaking, as far as it challenges tradition and attempts to formulate the Christian doctrine of God by integrating more biblical concepts, the book moves in the right direction. Especially enlightening is John Sanders' chapter ("Historical Considerations"), in which the development of the classical philosophical-biblical synthesis of the understanding of God is clearly outlined. Unfortunately, the book falls short of harmoniously incorporating all biblical data (notably, in the case of divine foreknowledge) or grasping the radical theological implications involved in the biblical criticism of tradition.

[10]Process philosophy has been openly critical of the timeless conception of God. Alfred North Whitehead conceives God as open to the world and, therefore, to time. Whitehead's view of God assumes an univocal understanding of time specifically as he deals with the consequent nature of God (*Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* [New York: Macmillan, 1929], 523-524). Charles Hartshorne seems to follow the same view, as he affirms that ". . . the divine awareness is concretely new each moment" (*The Logic of Perfection* [LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1962], 262). See also Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine*

am maintaining only that when, following Scripture, one conceives God to be a historical temporal transcendent being, He is *at least* able to relate to human history and cognition univocally, that is, directly within the level of reality and cognition which properly belongs to human beings, namely, to our time and space.[12] On the ground laid by this interpretation there appear to be no impediments to thinking of God along the lines presented in Scripture, as able to talk, speak, and act directly within the sphere of space and time. On this base a positive answer to the question about the possibility of revelation-inspiration can be formulated and a model for understanding the epistemological origination of Scripture built.

The second component of the presuppositional structure, namely, humanity and its cognitive capabilities, is also to be conceived temporally and historically. Thus, another fundamental condition for the possibility of revelation-inspiration is met. The divine-human process through which the contents of Scripture were generated demands that the originating and receiving minds meet and work within the same level of reality.[13] In what pertains to the human component of the presuppositional structure, the historicist interpretation of knowledge followed by most modern and postmodern scholars comes closer to the biblical way of thinking. The limitation and inadequacy of the liberal model is not due to its conception of reason, but rather to

Relativity: A Social Conception of God (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 79; and Charles Hartshorne and Creighton Peden, *Whitehead's View of Reality* (New York: Pilgrim, 1981), 34, 73-79. An analogical conception of time in which equivocity and univocity are simultaneously integrated in the conception of the divine being seems absent in process philosophy.

[11]Pannenberg remarks that "in the history and development of the concept of analogy as an instrument for the extension of knowledge a core of univocity is thus a decisive premise even though analogous relations might be observed" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:344, n.14). In dealing with the concept of God the three modes of predication— univocity, equivocity, and analogy—have to be harmoniously utilized as they are in Scripture.

[12]According to Scripture, God's temporal-historical being is seen as acting in the lower level of human temporality. However, this scriptural conviction does not forfeit God's capability to be, to act, and to relate to human beings at other levels of temporality which would be either analogical or equivocal to human conception of time.

[13]Emilio Betti properly remarks that communication between two minds by the means of "meaning-full" forms assumes a "congenial disposition" ("Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*," in *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique*, ed. Josef Bleicher [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980], 84-85). It is obvious that a "congenial disposition" can occur only when both minds share the same level of reality and knowledge.

its inability to get rid of the timeless conception of a God that, being unable to act historically in human history, is also incapable of acting within the cognitive and linguistic levels of humanity.[14]

Summarizing, the liberal model conceives human nature in a way that comes closer to Scriptures than the classical understanding. At the same time, liberals specifically deny the possibility of a cognitive interpretation of revelation-inspiration. This denial logically seems to follow from simultaneously adhering to a temporal-historical conception of human nature and to the classical timeless conception of God. It is not difficult to realize that if God and humanity are placed in different, incompatible levels of reality, cognitive communication between them becomes logically and ontologically impossible.

Consequently, the historicism of modernity and postmodernity allows room only for human and natural agents to work and interact within the closed continuum of history. According to this trend of thought, the basic ground of meaning and understanding is supplied by history conceived as the material expression of the formal category of tradition.[15] Recently, Delwin Brown has formulated a postmodern conception of tradition which he calls "constructive historicism," which is the process through which human traditions are transmitted and modified.[16] This position directly results from the negative answer to the possibility of revelation and inspiration upheld by the liberal model and, consequently, is incompatible with the model I am proposing.

The model grounded on the historical-temporal understanding of God's being and cognitive acts of revelation and on the temporal-historical view of the human agent as cognitive receptor of the divine activity could be designated as the "historical-cognitive model" of revelation-inspiration. The model I am suggesting is "historical" because the ontological nature of the agents involved in the generation of Scripture, namely God and man, is temporal-historical. Likewise, the essence of the knowledge produced by the revelation-inspiration process is also temporal-historical. The model I am outlining is "cognitive" because the historical interpretation of the ontological and epistemological levels of the presuppositional structure provides the

[14]Pannenberg's theology is a clear and explicit example of this kind of limitation. See *Systematic Theology*, 1:384-396.

[15]Within a Heideggerian tradition, Hans-Georg Gadamer has argued in favor of the epistemological role of history as tradition (*Truth and Method* [London: Sheed & Ward, 1975], 245-274).

[16]Delwin Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 111-150.

necessary condition for knowledge to be generated by the divine being and received by the human agent. On this account the historical-cognitive model overcomes the limitations of the liberal model, which does not allow for a divine origination of cognitive contents, and of the classical model, which allows only for a timeless origination of revealed contents. Starting at the level of the presuppositional structure, therefore, the historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration decidedly departs from both the classical and the liberal models.

3. *Revelation in the Historical-cognitive Model*

Earlier in this series it has been argued that the task of interpreting the epistemological origin of Scripture involves the exploration of: (1) the process by which contents were originated in the mind of the biblical authors, and (2) the process through which these contents were expressed in either oral or written forms. It has also been asserted that, within this process, revelation corresponds to the origination of biblical contents, while inspiration corresponds to their oral and written expression.[17] However, the actual detailed configuration of a model of revelation-inspiration rests on the interpretation of revelation made possible by the interpretation of the presuppositional structure. Within this methodological context I turn now to the description of how the main features of revelation would be understood according to the historical-cognitive model.

Divine Activity

The question at this point is: How did God proceed in the origination of the cognitive contents we find today written down in Scripture? The key to the answer, resounding from Scripture, is given to us in the introduction to Hebrews: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times [πολυμερῶς] and in various ways [πολυτρόπως]" (1:1, NIV).[18] The phenomenological analysis of the phenomena of Scripture clearly confirms the variety of

---

[17]Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: Method for a New Approach," 186-190.

[18]All biblical quotations are from the NIV. Johann Albrecht Bengel remarks that "*in many portions* refers to the matter, *in divers manners* to the form" (*Bengel's New Testament Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981], 2:574). Richard Charles Henry Lenski further specifies that "the first [adverb] refers to quantity—so rich the varied contents; the second to quality—so rich the variety of form" (*The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966], 30). See also Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament* (Bowling Green, KY: Renaissance, 1976-1985), 16:80-81; and *EDNT*, 3:131, 133.

biblical revelation.[19] Variety, then, is a main characteristic of the historical-cognitive model. Allow me to underline this point by way of a brief reference to the classical and liberal models in relation to their corresponding presuppositional structures. When God is conceived in a timeless way, variety in the mode of communication cannot be properly predicated of his action. Neither can the divine action be conceived as occurring "in parts," involving both division and temporal succession.[20] For this systematic reason the classical and liberal theories of revelation conceive Scripture in its entirety as produced by the *same* kind of divine activity. No variation in the divine mode of acting is contemplated, since variation is only a human reality. The same applies to the classical understanding of inspiration: God always proceeds in the same way, without variation. Unlike this conception, the temporal-historical view of God's being and actions allows the historical-cognitive model to conceive of God as acting and communicating directly throughout human history in a variety of ways, at different times. Briefly put, the variety of Scripture is not merely due to the actions of the human agent, but primarily generated by the sundry activities of the divine One. The historical-cognitive model of revelation and inspiration recognizes that God was capable of acting in various patterns as he engaged in the process of generating Scripture.

What are some of the ways, modes of action, or patterns that God used in the epistemological constitution of Scripture? The classical model recognizes only one pattern of revelation: the intellectual disclosure of knowledge. God's activity was reduced to the cognitive level, intellectually conceived according to the Platonic-Aristotelian

[19]Even from a liberal perspective this is unmistakable. Paul Ricoeur identifies five different types of biblical writings: prophetic, narrative, prescriptive, wisdom, and hymnal discourses ("Herméneutique de l'idée de révélation," in Paul Ricoeur and others, *La révélation* [Brussels: Facultés Universitaires Saint Louis, 1977], 17-34.

[20]Consider, for instance, how the timeless eternity and simplicity of God affect Augustine's conception of the Word of God: "So you call us to understand the Word, God with you, O God, which is spoken eternally, and in which all things are spoken eternally. Nor is it the case that what was spoken is ended and that another thing is said, so that all things may at length be said: all things are spoken once and forever. Elsewise, there would already be time and change, and neither true eternity nor true immortality. . . . Therefore, no part of your Word gives place to another or takes the place of another, since it is truly eternal and immortal. Therefore you say once and forever all that you say by the Word, who is coeternal with you" (*Confessions* 11.7.9). It is apparent that Augustine's conception of God's timelessness and the concurrent simplicity of his Being totally destroys the idea that the Bible is actually the word of God in its specific and direct meanings. If God speaks all things "once and forever," the historical newness of biblical revelation is displaced to the level of historically and culturally conditioned utterances.

tradition. According to this pattern of revelation, God allowed eternal, timeless truth to be intellectually grasped by biblical writers. That action constituted the ground and content of propositional revelation. This position entails the view that not all contents of Scripture were epistemologically originated by God's action. On the contrary, large portions of Scripture were generated through the normal human process of intellection. Recognizing that not all excerpts of Scripture are revealed, inspiration is needed to safeguard the divine character of Scripture as a whole. Scripture would be partially revealed and totally inspired. The liberal model also recognizes one pattern or mode of divine revelation. Revelation is the existential, noncognitive, divine-human encounter. Its content is always the same. Variety comes only from the human side. The whole content of Scripture is generated by human beings. Of course these human beings have been "supernaturally touched," yet God's divine touch happens in the existential rather than cognitive or linguistic level. God does not originate nor provide the contents of Scripture. In this specific epistemological sense, then, the liberal model recognizes that no section of Scripture is either revealed or inspired.

God's revelation, as it pertains to the cognitive origin of the contents of Scripture, belongs to the area of communication between two minds. According to Emilio Betti, the mind that originates the communication produces a variety of "meaning-full forms."[21] When the human mind initiates the origination of meaning-full forms, these may include "from fleeting speech to fixed documents and mute remainders, from writing to *chiffres* and to artistic symbol, from articulate language to figurative or musical representation, from explanation to active behaviour, from facial expression to ways of bearing and types of character."[22] Since in revelation the divine mind is capable of

---

[21]Emilio Betti explains that "meaning-full forms" (*sinnhaltige Formen*) are "to be understood in a wide sense as an homogeneous structure in which a number of perceptible elements are related to one another and which is suitable for preserving the character of the mind that created it or that is embodied in it" ("Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*," 54). In his groundbreaking treatise on interpretation, Betti refers to "meaning-full forms" as "forma rappresentativa." "Forma" is understood in the most general way as "di rapporto unitario di elementi sensibili, idoneo a serbare l'impronta di chi l'ha foggiato o di chi lo incarna (es.: il viso di una persona)." While "rappresentativa" is understood "nel senso che attraverso la forma debba rendersi a noi riconoscibile, facendo appello alla nostra sensibilità e intelligenza, un *altro spirito* diverso dal nostro e tuttavia intimamente affine al nostro" (*Teoria Generale della Interpretazione* [Milano: Dott. A. Giuffrè, 1990], 62).

[22]Betti, "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*," 53. See also Betti, *Teoria Generale della Interpretazione*, 60.

functioning not only according to the patterns proper to its own divinity, but also according to the lower ontological and epistemological levels of the intended recipient, it is logical to assume that any meaning-full form that can be produced by a human mind can also be created by the divine mind.[23] Furthermore, because of his divine nature God is able to create meaning-full forms in patterns that fall outside the range of human cognition and action. Even then, however, God produces these forms of cognitive communication within the realm in which human cognition works: historically, within space and time. Thus, revelation assumes God's condescension and his ability to work directly within the lower level of human, historical cognition.[24]

Human perception of God's activities and their patterns of meaning-full forms will always be limited, both for the original prophet[25] and for any subsequent interpreter of prophetic utterances. Thus, it is impossible to reach full awareness of all the patterns in which God is able to act or has already acted in the epistemological origination of Scripture. Likewise, any attempt to determine with precision and finality which divine actions have contributed to the generation of the contents of each portion of Scripture seems futile. However, a proper understanding of revelation-inspiration requires the acknowledgement that various different divine activities may contribute to the origination of any passage of Scripture.

The identification of the main patterns utilized by God in the generation of Scripture cannot be rationally deduced from his nature but rather described from the phenomena of Scripture.[26] Some of the meaning-full forms utilized by God in the generation of Scripture are explicit in Scripture. For instance, we discover God presenting himself in history to human beings (theophanies; Exod 3:1-15; John 1:1-14), writing (Exod 31:18; Deut 9:10), speaking (Exod 20:1; Rev 19:9; Gen

[23]The liberal model recognizes that revelation is an act "from mind to mind," yet in revelation God does not act within the human level of cognition. The mind-to-mind encounter is not "a body of information concerning certain things about which we might otherwise be ignorant" or "information about God, but the very God Himself" (Jack W. Provonsha, "Revelation and History," *AUSS* 2 [1964]: 111-112). See also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:241.

[24]The concept of God's condescension is not new. For an exploration of divine condescension in the context of the doctrine of revelation-inspiration see Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 31-52.

[25]When employed without qualification, I use the term "prophet" as synonymous with "biblical writer," not in the specific sense of the writer of predictions.

[26]By the expression "phenomena of Scripture," I am referring to the actual cognitive-linguistic contents of Scripture as we know them.

15:1; 20:3), giving visual representations (Isa 6:1-3; Ezek 43:3; Dan 7:2; Acts 10:9-17; 16:9; Rev 9:7), historically acting in history (Isa 43:18-19; 46:11; Dan 2:21), and acting in relation to the life experience of an individual (Lam 3:1; Prov 1:7; Eccl 1:12;17).[27] All these divine activities produced, historically in history, meaning-full forms that communicated cognitive contents from the mind of God to the mind of the biblical author or prophet. These meaning-full forms are the epistemological origin of the ideas, contents, and information supplied to the mind of the biblical writer in the process of revelation, and also of the content of what he expresses in oral or written form.

From what has been described thus far it seem reasonable to infer that God's production of meaning-full forms, as depicted in Scripture, allows for at least five main patterns of revelation. In order of decreasing cognitive specificity these are: theophanic, direct writing, prophetic, historical, and existential.[28] No single pattern can, by itself, account for the richness and manifoldness of biblical revelation. Moreover, it is likely that in producing Scripture, God employed additional patterns which could be discovered through a careful phenomenological analysis of Scripture. Let me reiterate, variety in Scripture is not primarily caused by limitations in the human agent, but rather intentionally produced by the various patterns of divine revelatory activity.[29] The multiplicity of patterns utilized by God in producing meaning-full forms allows the historical-cognitive model of

[27]These biblical references are only a sample of biblical passages speaking to each divine activity.

[28]Studying the Gospel of Luke, George E. Rice came to the conviction that the Bible was produced by two patterns or models, the prophetic and the "Lucan" models of inspiration (*Luke, a Plagiarist?* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1983], 9-16). Rice's view challenges the classical approach that recognizes only one pattern of divine activity. Moreover, since Rice was not attempting to explain the epistemological origination of Scripture as a whole, but rather to contest the idea that the Gospel of Luke was produced only by way of the prophetic pattern, his conclusion does not preclude our contention that additional patterns have been involved in the generation of Scripture.

[29]Abraham J. Heschel explores the prophetic experience from an Old Testament perspective. His study attempts to penetrate into the biblical view of the prophet's activity. Heschel, however, does not deal with the divine role in the origination of prophetic discourse with the detail, specificity, and faithfulness to biblical data I expected. In this matter, he seems to be under the influence of the liberal model. Heschel appears to be somewhat ambiguous on this facet of the prophetic experience. On one hand, he explicitly argues against the liberal idea of poetic inspiration (*The Prophets* [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 145-169; for the poetic nature of biblical language see Ricoeur, "Herméneutique de l'idée de révélation," 41-42). On the other hand, by the end of the book, Heschel's conclusions sound very much like those of the liberal model (265-268).

revelation-inspiration to extend the divine activity of revelation to the whole range of Scripture.

Human Activity

God's generation of meaning-full patterns does not per se originate either the actual contents or the letter of Scripture. Meaning-full patterns are concrete vehicles utilized to communicate divine meaning. Communication unavoidably requires more than the divine production of meaning-full patterns. Meaning must not only be originated but also received. The reception of meaning is performed by the human nature of the biblical writer, notably involving his cognitive capabilities. For the communication of meaning to occur, both communicator and receptor must work within the same cognitive parameters. After this necessary condition for the possibility of revelation is met, the role of the human receptor in relation to the constitution of the meaning received is to be ascertained.

First, then, let us consider the requirement according to which both the originator and the recipient of the meaning-full forms must work within the same ontological and epistemological level for cognitive communication to occur. The presuppositional structure of the historical-cognitive model I am proposing understands man's capabilities to be essentially temporal and historical. There is no timeless agent intellect[30] as assumed by the classical theory. Reason is not capable of reaching the realm of timeless truths.[31] According to Scripture, human nature is not the timeless substance, commonly known as soul, in which the rational capabilities are grounded.[32] As modernism and postmodernism also reject this position, they only come to recognize what was assumed all along in Scripture. Since, as explained above, God is capable of originating and constituting the meaning-full forms and patterns of revelation historically in history, that is, within the very same realm in which human reason normally functions, the basic condition for the cognitive communication between originating and receiving minds is met.

[30]See Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Classical Model," 14, 20, 22, 26.

[31]In this respect the historical-cognitive model follows the broad interpretation of human reason accepted by modernism and postmodernism. I am not suggesting, however, that the historical-cognitive model subscribes to any particular philosophical interpretation of reason. Rather, I am saying that in their interpretation of the cognitive capabilities of man, modernism and postmodernism have come closer to the scriptural position than the classical model.

[32]On this issue see, for instance, the concise but clear study by Oscar Cullmann: *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

From this, an important consequence follows. In the reception of the divinely originated meaning-full patterns, the reason of the receiving agent, the prophet, does not require the supernatural elevation of its powers. The historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration, then, does not require the charismatic elevation of reason's faculties by the supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit.

Even though in general terms it agrees with the liberal model on the understanding of human cognition, the historical-cognitive model differs from it even more than from the classical model because here a cognitive communication is accepted, whereas in the liberal model no cognitive communication is even possible. Departing from both the classical and liberal views, the historical-cognitive model accepts the biblical conception, according to which the communication involved in revelation-inspiration occurs not only within the cognitive but also within the temporal-historical level of reality, thereby not requiring a supernatural elevation of human reason either in revelation or inspiration.

Let us now turn briefly our attention to the role that the human receptor plays in the process of revelation. Is the process of reception totally passive, thus adding or contributing nothing to the meaning-full patterns received? Or is the reception also active, contributing to the very generation of the revealed ideas or contents? If the prophet's mind is active, not only in receiving, but also in contributing to the understand-ing of what is being transmitted, what is the nature of his contribution?

Once the historical characteristics of the human receptor are recognized, a pivotal feature of the function of human cognition comes into view, namely, the content and origination of the rational a priori. A phenomenological description of the role of human cognition reveals that the apprehension of any given object involves not only a receptive, passive function, but also a creative, active one.[33] The same dynamics are present in the reception of meaning-full forms created by another mind.[34] Both the receptive and creative operations of reason are related to the a priori categories brought by the cognitive agent to the event of

[33]This receptive-creative activity is a general characteristic of human knowledge (Nicolai Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* [Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1941], 1.5.c.6). Abraham J. Heschel perceives that "the prophet is responsive, not only receptive" (*The Prophets*, 137). Thus the general characteristic of human cognition remains the same, even in the prophetic experience.

[34]Betti, *Teoria generale della interpretazione*, 65,

revelation.[35] Without a priori categories the human mind cannot receive and process any meaning-full form. Thus, it is a matter not of whether the prophet had a priori categories, but rather of identifying their nature, origination, and content.

In the classical model, a priori categories are timeless possessions of the nature of reason.[36] They are not originated in history. Their content is formal rather than material, not provided by the life experience of the individual (*Lebenswelt*); it is rather an ensemble of general abstract principles, on the basis of which human reason is able to function.[37]

In the historical-cognitive model, however, the a priori categories are not grounded in timeless being or reason, but rather in the historical experience of the prophet with God's previous revelations in the *Lebenswelt*.[38] These previous revelations may include what other biblical prophets have said and written and even personal revelations given by

[35]It is important to draw as clearly as possible the distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics. In this article epistemology refers to the study of the way human knowledge functions. Consequently, epistemology includes both theory of knowledge and philosophy of sciences. Hermeneutics is a closely related but somehow more limited enterprise. Hermeneutics studies the way we know other human beings indirectly through their multifarious expressions (see Bleicher, 90). Hermeneutics, then, studies the way we know the productions of the human mind, while epistemology works with the human understanding in general and in relation to the objects of the world. There is a great deal of overlapping between epistemology and hermeneutics because epistemology produces human expressions which the development of any science needs to include.

[36]This is not the appropriate place to discuss the categories or their origination. Suffice it to say that, following Aristotle, the grounding of timeless categories in the classical model is ontological rather than epistemological as in Kant (*Metaphysics* 5.7; 7.1; 9.1; *Critique of Pure Reason*, 60-67).

[37]After enumerating the various nontechnical and technical connotations given to the term "category," José Ferrater Mora explains that in the traditional opinion, maintained not only by scholastic thinkers but also by modern historians of philosophy, "las categorías expresan *flexiones* o *casos* del ser y pueden, por consiguiente, ser definidas como *géneros supremos de las cosas, suprema rerum genera*" (*Diccionario de Filosofía* [Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1965], 1:265. Even though Aristotle hesitated to define the precise number of categories, he recognizes all sorts of categories, as many as the connotations we can find in the entity (οὐσία) (*Metaphysics* 5.7), yet the number of categories is not infinite (*Posterior Analytics* 1.22.15 [83b]).

[38]Even in philosophy there is an increasing recognition that categories come from previous experience in historical-natural reality (Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations* [New York: Humanities, 1970], 6, 8, §60).

God to the prophet in his or her past experience.[39] The a priori categories necessary for the reception and interpretation of the given object or meaning-full form come from the past into the present and future.[40] This movement corresponds to the flow of meaning in temporal reason.[41] In other words, the a priori categories that the prophet needs in order to understand what is being communicated by way of the meaning-full forms created by God originate in the past life experience of the prophet. This past experience is directly instrumental in enabling the prophet to receive the meaning God is communicating in the present by way of the meaning-full patterns of revelation.[42] However, the historical origination and content of the a priori categories, which the prophet brings to the cognitive event of revelation, are not to be identified with changing human culture, as is done in the liberal model.

Since concrete human experiences are never identical, the actual content of the a priori categories in the mind of biblical authors varied greatly. This brings up the issue of whether theological pluralism is to be recognized at the very inception of biblical contents. Were the meaning-full forms originated by God interpreted by cultural,

[39]Heschel sees the prophet as *"homo sympathetikos"* (88). The prophet has a "sympathetic solidarity with God" (91). I think that Heschel's *"homo sympathetikos"* describes the prophetic a priori, yet a complete epistemological account of the origination of Scripture requires that the prophet's "sympathetic solidarity with God" should include not only feelings but, primarily, the presuppositional structure and doctrines generated by previous revelations.

[40]Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 9.

[41]Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls this historical conception of the cognitive a priori "thickness" (*Phenomenology of Perception* [Atlantic Highlands: New Press, 1964], 433. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper, 1962), 2.5.75 and 76. Cf. William E. Reiser, "An Essay in the Development of Dogma in a Heideggerian Context: A Nontheological Explanation of Theological Heresy," *Thomist* 39 (1975): 475. Contrary to the past-to-present-and-future movement of historical reason, the historical-critical method of exegesis interprets the past in terms of the present (Ernest Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, *Zur religiösen Lage, Religionphilosophie und Ethik* [Tübingen: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1922], 729-753; Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], 1:107, n. 3).

[42]This dynamic was utilized by Jesus himself when after the resurrection he undertook the task of explaining the events of his crucifixion and resurrection (Luke 24:25-49).

historically conditioned categories, as maintained by the liberal model?[43] As I will return to the concept of historical conditionality of biblical writings in the next section, suffice it to say that the historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration does not see the historical generation of the prophet's a priori categories as leading to either a theological pluralism or an acceptance of the historical conditionality of biblical writings.

The concrete history of the biblical author chronologically and logically precedes the process of revelation-inspiration. That history shapes both what the prophet is and the content of his or her cognitive categories. However, the historical existence and experience of the prophet is always chronologically and logically preceded by divine revelation already in possession of the community of faith either in an oral or written form.[44] In other words, the category-forming history of the prophet is not independent but rather dependent on God's previous revelation.[45] It is not by chance that Isaiah, seemingly working within the historical-cognitive model, clearly stated that in evaluating claims to supernaturally originated discourse the criteria are unmistakable: "To the law and to the testimony! If they [mediums and spiritists] do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (8:20). The assumption, very logical indeed, is that God does not contradict himself in the communication of revelation through his prophets. In other words, an accurate evidence that a prophet is introducing privately originated ideas becomes apparent when his or her spoken or written words contradict previously stated divine revelation.

A God who is able to act historically in history is, for that precise reason, also able to influence the historical development of the prophet and his or her cognitive categories without forcing freedom and independence. The prophet experiences providential, divine guidance in

[43]By "theological pluralism" I mean the idea that in Scripture we find different theologies not always compatible among themselves. A classical example of this may be Luther's difficulty to integrate James' theology with Paul's. James and Paul, it is suggested, just had incompatible views on the role works play in salvation. Hence, theological pluralism in Scripture.

[44]"The inspiration of the prophet is distinguished, not only by an awareness of its source and of a will to impart the content of inspiration, but also by the coherence of the inspired messages as a whole (with their constant implication of earlier communications), by the awareness of being a link in the chain of the prophets who preceded him, and by the continuity which links the revelations he receives one to another. The words that come to him form a coherence of closely related revelations, all reflecting the illumination and the sense of mission shed by the call. There is both a thematic and a personal unity of experience" (Heschel, 169).

[45]Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:206.

the development of his or her a priori cognitive categories. This divine education—a concrete, historical form of education, understood in the broadest possible meaning of the word—embraces the whole life span of the prophet. On this ground, it is possible to understand that even when no two prophets interpret the divinely originated meaning-full forms with the same a priori categories (life experience), no theological pluralism follows because the variety in the content of their a priori experiences is not systematic or doctrinal, but rather cultural and personal.[46]

A specific distinction between the kinds of a priori categories the prophet brings to the event of revelation needs to be drawn. The historical experience of any human being includes a variety of different facets which cannot be compressed into an undifferentiated whole. Among the many aspects included in the life experiences of any human being, five play a decisive role in the cognitive process. In order of importance, the five levels always present in the prophet's a priori are: presuppositional structure, doctrinal conceptions, sociocultural idiosyncrasies, personal life experiences, and individual personal traits. All of them are always present in the constitution of meaning, including the specific experience of the prophet receiving and interpreting divinely originated meaning-full forms.

Because of the logical and chronological priority of revelation over the life experiences of the prophet and the historical involvement of God in the development of the prophet's historically generated a priori categories, it is reasonable to assume that biblical writers developed,

---

[46]See note 41 above. Hans Küng, quoting Ernst Käsemann's view that in the New Testament "we have to confirm the presence not just of considerable tensions but often too of irreconcilable theological contradictions" (*Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche? Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen I* [1960], 218, in Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View* [New York: Doubleday, 1988], 66), recognizes the existence of a "partially manifest incompatibility of the theological positions in the New Testament" (ibid.). James Dunn seems to come close to this same position as he concludes that a comparison of thought patterns in the New Testament reveals that they by no means "always complemented each other; on the contrary, they not infrequently clashed, sometimes fiercely" (*Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry Into the Character of Earliest Christianity* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977], 372; cf. ibid., *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* [London: SCM, 1975], 359). Without in any way denying the diversity that Käsemann, Küng, and Dunn perceive in Scripture, one wonders whether viewing theological contradictions and clashes in Scripture is not due to replacing the biblical interpretation of the presuppositional structure with philosophical and scientific principles. When theology is interpreted on the basis of the biblical interpretation of the presuppositional structure, it is possible to see how the diversity present in Scripture does not involve competing or contradicting theological positions.

through the divinely guided historical process of education, a common understanding of the first two facets of the a priori—the presuppositional structure and doctrinal teachings. At the same time, they differed greatly at the sociocultural and personal levels. In this way we can explain the general theological harmony throughout Scripture and at the same time the rich diversity of concepts and manners of expression present in Scripture. Thus, the a priori condition for the understanding of God's historically generated meaning-full forms was developed not in isolation from God, but rather under his direct and pervasive influence. In this way the a priori categories required for a harmonious and noncontradictory understanding of God's multifarious patterns of revelation were worked out in the life and mind of the prophet.

Awareness that the human agent was not only a passive receptor but also an active contributor in the generation of the revealed content as explained above might have been one reason for Peter's somewhat enigmatic clarification that πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται (2 Pet 1:20).[47] Because the human agent is actively involved, not only receiving but also interpreting the divinely originated meaning-full form patterns of revelation, Peter makes clear that such a contribution does not involve the private, independently originated, subjective opinions of the biblical writer. As already explained, the a priori categories through which the prophet received and interpreted the meaning-full patterns generated by God are grounded in previously given and consciously accepted revealed contents.

The Essence or Nature of Revelation

According to the historical-cognitive model, the essence of revelation is cognitive. Revelation is the communication of knowledge from God to humankind through the prophet. In this general sense the historical-cognitive model agrees with the classical model, yet the former departs from the latter in the way the essence of knowledge is interpreted. According to the historical-cognitive model, the nature of the cognition involved in revelation is temporal and historical.[48]

---

[47]A. C. Thiselton presents a brief description of scholarly interpretations of this Petrine statement ("ἐπιλύω," *NIDNTT* 1:578-579).

[48]The temporal-historical understanding of knowledge is not restrictive but rather inclusive of all human experiences, including personal feelings and moods (see Heidegger's discussion of mood as state-of-mind [*Being and Time*, 172-179]). David Tracy describes the broad way in which I am using the word "cognition" here in reference to the concept of understanding. To know (cognition) is to understand, and to understand is to interpret. In its broad sense interpretation includes experience, understanding, deliberation, judgment, decision, and action (*Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987], 9). Thus interpreted, human cognition is able to

The historical-cognitive conception of the essence of revelation logically follows from the preceding interpretation of the divine and human activities involved in the process of revelation outlined above. It seems clear that the essence of revelation as cognition corresponds to the essence of human rather than divine cognition. The lower is not capable of the higher but the higher is capable of the lower.

The traditional concept of God's condescension applies here. Adaptation to the parameters of human cognition is possible because, according to the historical-cognitive model, God is able to act directly within the lower level of space and time. Through his condescension, he is able to enter into and share directly in the characteristics of space and time, both ontologically and epistemologically. God's revelation, then, is produced by acquiescing to the main characteristics of human cognition, as it is interpreted historically. At the same time, this entry of God into the lower level of human cognition becomes the very ground for the essence of revelation as cognitive event. As Heidegger puts it, human cognition originates when past experience and openness to the future coalesce into a moment of vision.[49] In the case of the prophet, God, by his continuous and direct historical presence and activity within the spatial-temporal parameter of human history, sets the concrete historical content of the prophet's past recollection and future openness. Thus, in the moment of vision, the prophet, through the possession of previously originated categories, receives and interprets the meaning-full forms created by God.

It follows that the mode of cognition involved in the epistemological origination of Scripture is not divine and, therefore, absolutely perfect, but rather human, including all the limitations and imperfections of the human mode of cognition.[50] It is important to underline that here I am referring to the mode of the revealed contents and not

include the personal and existential aspects of the divine-human encounter. The sometimes-called "incarnational" understanding of revelation does not happen without, but rather within, the general realm of human experience. And human experience is never independent from knowledge.

[49]"Only an entity which, in its Being, is essentially **futural** so that it is free for its death and can let itself be thrown back upon its factical 'there' by shattering itself against death—that is to say, only an entity which, as futural, is equiprimordially in the process of **having-been**, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its own throwness and be **in the moment of vision** for 'its time.' Only authentic temporality which is at the same time finite, makes possible something like fate—that is to say, authentic historicality" (Being and Time 2.5.74, emphasis original).

[50]As an example of a partial description of the essential limitedness and incompleteness of historical cognition, see Edmund Husserl, Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), 137-138.

to the contents themselves. Neither the truth nor the divine origination of biblical contents is contradictory to the affirmation of the human mode of cognition through which biblical revelation was generated.

If one accepts that the mode in which the epistemological origination of biblical contents took place is that of human cognition as historically interpreted, a further departure from the classical and liberal models is inevitable. The process of revelation that brought Scripture into existence can no longer be conceived as historically conditioned. The essence of revelation rather resides in its historical constitution. Thus, I come back to a rather complex issue mentioned in the first article of this series. A rigorous exploration of its intricacy would lead us far beyond the purpose and limits of this essay. However, since this distinction belongs to the essence of revelation according to the historical-cognitive model, a preliminary clarification is in order.

The historical consciousness developed in Western philosophical and scientific circles since the Enlightenment has influenced Christian theology to the point that, without much technical explanation, the historical conditionality of Scripture is accepted as an irrefutable fact by both classical and liberal theologians. When the contents of Scripture are conceived as historically conditioned, the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation appears to be better suited to a scientifically sound and theologically rewarding reading of Scripture. Let us inquire briefly into the meaning of historical conditionality.

The classical and liberal models view the contents of Scripture as historically conditioned. The understanding of what "historically conditioned" means requires a clear awareness of the epistemological configuration of both models. At this point a review of my description of classical and liberal models may prove helpful.[51] On this basis a brief explanation describing the theological position encapsulated in the "historically conditioned" qualification of Scripture may suffice for comparison with the "historical constitution" of Scripture espoused by the historical-cognitive model.

A condition differs from a cause in that the latter has the positive sense of being that on the basis of which something happens or comes into being, while the former has the negative undertone of being that without which something would not come to pass.[52] This definition means that both the cause and the condition need to be present to produce a given result.

[51]See Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Classical Model," and "Revelation and Inspiration: The Liberal Model."

[52]Ferrater Mora, 1:329.

Classical and liberal models of revelation-inspiration designate the temporal-historical level of reality as condition, while the timeless activity of God—cognitive or existential—is given the role of cause. The classical Platonic dualistic epistemology is at work here setting the parameters of this distinction. Plato, in a very subtle way, is still exercising his influence in classical and modern theology by imperceptibly determining the interpretation of the presuppositional framework of both models. In short, the temporal and historical do not belong to the essence of revelation-inspiration, but only to the process of its expression, which does not form part of the content of revelation.[53] Viewing Scripture in this light requires that the historical level be methodologically disregarded in order to accede to the imagined ultimate cause or meaning, which always stands beyond the historical realm.[54]

In conceiving the essence of revelation-inspiration to be historically constituted, the historical-cognitive model departs from the historical conditionality of Scripture. The historical constitution of biblical thinking and contents logically follows from the interpretation of divine and human activities. To put it briefly, meaning is constituted, generated, and originated within the parameters proper to the nature of human thought when historically interpreted. When the essence of the mode of knowledge in which the epistemological origination of biblical thinking came to pass is understood historically, exegetes and theologians do not need to look beyond the apparent historical meanings of biblical words by imagining the existence of a timeless referent beyond the text and thereby replacing interpretation with imagination.

The historical constitution of meaning came to pass as God, in his wisdom and love, making use of his power, reached into the lower level of human historical reality and cognition (divine condescension). Once

[53]Theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann think that prophets used the ideology and scientific information available to them as external vehicles for the expression of timeless, transcendent revelation. Within this frame of mind, Bultmann argues that the concept of λόγος in the prologue to the Gospel of John could not have been taken from the Old Testament, but rather from Gnosticism and its Platonic antecedent (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971], 19-36). In this view, biblical data are freely borrowed from the culture of the times, the only available historically conditioned vehicle to express in human words the revelation of the timelessly conceived God.

[54]Even in scholars committed to the exegetical discovery of truth in the text of Scripture, the acceptance of the historical conditionality of Scripture leads to its historical relativity and, consequently, to the relativity of its authority; see, for instance, James Dunn, "The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture," *Churchman* 96 (1982): 212-214.

within this level, God originated meaning-full forms that were grasped by the historical cognition of the prophet, which included his or her a priori categories. From the conjunction and contribution of both divine originator and human receptor the content of revelation came to existence in the mind of the prophet. The result was a historically constituted revelation which, through the additional process of inspiration (see below), became a historically constituted text. The referent of a historically constituted text is always found within the general parameters of space and time. All the intelligibilities captured within the historically constituted text, including the limitations and contributions of the human agents, are the content of revelation and the source of theological data.

The Content of Revelation

The historical-cognitive model of revelation maintains that the epistemological origination of biblical contents was produced by the conjunct activity of God and man. God originated various patterns of meaning-full forms within the historical parameters proper to human existence and knowledge. Chosen men and women received and simultaneously interpreted the God-given meaning-full forms by means of the necessary a priori categories which were historically generated and shaped by the prophet's willful reception of God's prior revelations. Thus conceived, *revelation is at the inception of all biblical contents. The whole content of Scripture is revealed by God.*

This affirmation is possible when the idea of God's cognitive activities is broadened from one fixed pattern to include a variety of patterns which, in their ampleness, are able to account for the divine origination of the entire Scripture. At the same time, the idea of variety in revelatory patterns entails variety in revealed contents and ideas. It is not difficult to see that the historical-cognitive model calls for a broad variety in the thought content and issues addressed in Scripture. The content of Scripture, therefore, cannot be understood in the singular but in the plural. We do not have "a content," but rather an amazingly rich "variety of contents." Likewise, the contents of Scripture do not refer to eternal timeless truths or existential encounters, but rather address the historical reality of God in direct relation to creation and sinful human history. Notably, the contents of Scripture include the multifarious aspects of the truths God conveyed in biblical revelation, including the whole historical development, unfolding from creation to new creation.

Finally, the written content of revelation, which coincides with the entire extent of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, is to be seen as

a *brief summary of revelation*. The classical and liberal models view Scripture as an exaggerated enlargement of an otherwise very simple and succinct essential cognitive or existential content. According to these theories, much of Scripture does not directly belong to the essential content of revelation. John seems to disagree with these theories. At the end of his Gospel he states the obvious: "Jesus did many other things as well" (John 21:25). These many other things are not recorded in John's Gospel, but were known either by John or other disciples. John clearly understood that the range of meaning-full forms created by the theophanic-historical pattern of Jesus' life overflowed the capability of thinking and writing of all possible writers. John continues: "If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written." Undoubtedly, these books would include both the "acts of Jesus," which constituted the meaning-full forms given to the disciples, and the interpretation unavoidably originated by their reception. Scripture is, therefore, a compact synthesis of revelation. Instead of searching for an essential meaning behind the words of Scripture, openly disregarding the compressed summary of revelation given in the whole of Scripture, theologians and believers should be attentive and submissive to its whole content as historically generated, conceived, and expressed.

4. *Inspiration in the Historical-cognitive Model*

Throughout this series of articles, inspiration has been defined as the process by means of which the contents generated by revelation were given an oral or written formulation. The fact that human authors were directly involved in the production of Scripture is uncontestable. However, Peter reminds us that ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι (2 Pet 1:21). Totally agreeing with Peter, Paul reaffirms the basic Christian idea that God did not leave the prophets to write by themselves. On the contrary, because πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος (2 Tim 3:16; cf. 2 Pet 1:21), God is to be recognized as directly involved in the writing of Scripture. Since the term "God-breathed" involves a general concept which "does not imply any particular mode of inspiration," the mode or pattern of divine intervention in the writing of Scripture remains open to theological inquiry.[55]

The Role of Divine Activity in Inspiration

The interpretation of the role played by the divine agency logically and methodologically depends on the previous grounding revelation

---

[55]"Γραφή," *NIDNTT*, 3:491.

event. In other words, according to the historical-cognitive model, the interpretation of inspiration is founded on the process of revelation rather than on a direct intervention of God in the process of writing, which would thus bypass or minimize revelation. The process of inspiration is subordinated to the process of revelation and its cognitive outcome. Thus, God's role in inspiration is never his first and sole intervention in the process of generating Scripture. The process of writing is not one through which contents are originated, but rather they are communicated to a larger audience. Inspiration releases revelation from the cognitive confines of the mind of the prophet into a new ontological realm, namely, that of the written word.[56]

Having restated this working distinction, I must point out that the process of writing simultaneously involves the process of thinking. It is impossible to write without at the same time being engaged in thinking. The thinking that occurs while one writes is not always memory-driven, but involves also the creation and generation of new ideas and contents. Consequently, it seems that it is not always possible to draw a clear line of demarcation between revelation and inspiration. In other words, sometimes revelation and inspiration may occur simultaneously. Yet, the essence of their processes is different: That of revelation is cognitive, while that of inspiration is linguistic.

Because the historical-cognitive model acknowledges God's direct involvement in the generation of the contents of Scripture as a whole, the process of writing does not need to add, modify, or upgrade what has already been constituted through the process of revelation. On the contrary, God's contributions to the process of writing may be conceived as including two main patterns: (1) a general historical supervision pattern embracing the entire Scripture and (2) an occasional, remedial, corrective, historical-intervention pattern.

Through his omniscience and omnipresence God is directly aware of everything, including the thought process and linguistic activities of the prophets. Divine awareness and specific knowledge of what is going on in the mind of the prophet and in his or her linguistic operations correspond to the general historical supervision pattern of God's inspiration. It represents a nonintrusive yet direct overview of the entire process of writing Scripture. This pattern is the necessary condition for

[56]Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 106-110; José Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Toward a Theory of Reading as the Production of Meaning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 16-17.

the various occurrences of the occasional direct remedial-corrective pattern.

God's specific historical interventions in the process of proclaiming divine revelation in an oral or written form are designed to ensure three things: (1) that the prophet remains God's representative, not replacing God's contents with his or her own interpretations or ideas; (2) that the prophet is assisted in finding the most fitting way to communicate revealed truth; and (3) that, on the basis of the simultaneity of writing and thinking, new ideas are originated during the actual process of writing. Only in notable circumstances did God's occasional intervention totally overrule the prophet's discourse.[57] Generally, however, God's occasional interventions had the purpose of enhancing the linguistic expressions of the prophet.

Because of the absence of biblical reflection or examples of the way biblical prophets experienced divine guidance in the moment of writing, it seems advisable that caution should be exercised in what we affirm on this issue. Because of this fact, it seems logical to conclude that any attempt to analyze the biblical text with the purpose of identifying God's historical interventions in the process of inspiration, as well as the occasions on which they took place, will render only fruitless speculative results. Additionally, it is probable that even the prophet was not specifically aware of God's occasional supernatural intervention, which might have been perceived, from the human viewpoint, as natural occurrences in the process of writing: for instance, remembering something, understanding an already-possessed information in a new light, or even coming up with a specific pivotal expression in the flow of thought.

God's occasional, direct, remedial-corrective interventions, however, should not be conceived as ways by which God overrode the essential characteristics of the human modes of cognition and language so as to eliminate their limitedness, indeterminacy, ambiguity, impreciseness, or inaccuracy. Overriding the essential characteristics of the modes of human cognition and language would render impossible God's willful condescension to communicate within human parameters.

[57]A clear, and even extreme, example of God's occasional specific intervention in which the prophet's initiative was totally overridden appears in the case of Balaam (Num 22-24). In this incident God had to override the complete discourse of the prophet because of his rebellious intention. The prophet was aware of both God's general, permanent historical supervision and his pattern of occasional interventions. Balaam knew that his purpose was so contrary to God's expressed will and intention that drastic divine intervention was unavoidable (Num 22:38).

On the basis of the grounding process through which God generated the whole contents of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21) and of the two interrelated patterns of God's contributions to the process of inspiration—God's permanent historical supervision and occasional direct historical interventions—the historical-cognitive model maintains that the whole of Scripture is revealed and inspired.

As in the case of revelation, inspiration also results from God's multifarious historical activities. In proposing that God's involvement in the process of writing Scripture followed at least two major patterns, the historical-critical model departs from the classical model, which conceives inspiration under only one pattern of divine activity, a uniform, constant, and charismatic intervention intended to elevate the linguistic-cognitive capabilities of the writer.

The Role of Human Activity in Inspiration

The process of writing Scripture followed all the general modes and patterns proper to human speech and language, thus harmoniously corresponding to the cognitive essence, modes, and patterns of revelation. Additionally, the actual writing of Scripture necessarily integrated the characteristics corresponding to the specific languages employed. Not only did divine activities cover the entire scope of the literary production of Scripture; direct and constant human activity was also continuously present throughout the same process. Thus, the historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration maintains that the inspiration of Scripture is, in its entirety, a divine-human process. It is possible to state, then, that Scripture is fully divine and fully human.[58]

As in the case of revelation, the historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration does not require a charismatic supernatural elevation of human writing capabilities to make prophets "super writers," thus overcoming the normal limitations of human language and writing. God speaks to us directly in human language and by means of a human book. The words of the prophets, in their entirety, are the words of God; yet the words in which God speaks to us are human and, therefore, involve the limitations of the human modes of language

---

[58]The analogy between the incarnation of Christ in a human body and that of God in Scripture is of little help in understanding either incarnation. Affirming the analogy between Christ and Scripture as incarnations of God requires that the same interpretation of the presuppositional structure be utilized in both. In the case of Scripture the fully divine and fully human nature belong to the epistemological realm. In the case of Christ, the same affirmation corresponds to the deeper, grounding, ontological level. For a brief discussion of the way Karl Barth utilized this analogy and its repercussions for his understanding of Scripture, see Frank Hasel, "The Christological Analogy of Scripture in Karl Barth," *TZ* 50 (1994): 41-49.

and writing. God speaks to us in various ways, all of them embedded within the characteristics and limitations of human thought and language. That is precisely the only way in which he could and can speak to us. The production of Scripture required that the divine intelligence, belonging to a higher ontological level and working within a higher epistemological mode, should enter the lower level in which the recipient of the divinely originated process of communication functions. Therefore, the thought patterns of God and his divine, transcendent, perfect language are not represented in Scripture.[59] However, due to the fact that God generated Scripture through the interrelated process of revelation-inspiration, in spite of their humanly limited modes the historically originated contents of Scripture are directly, in their plain historical meaning, the word of God.

The Essence of Inspiration

The essence of inspiration consists in the historic-linguistic process by means of which the cognitive contents generated by the divine-human process of revelation were put into writing. Consequently, the essence of inspiration also involves the harmonious working together of the divine and human agencies. This "working together" of God and prophet, present in both revelation and inspiration, is to be conceived along the lines of historical interrelations or, in biblical terminology, "κοινωνία."[60]

This personal, historical understanding of the way in which the divine and human agents work in the inspiration of Scripture significantly departs from the supernatural charismatic conception of the classical model. It is true that by way of conceiving inspiration as the "concursive," "simultaneous," "confluent," and/or "harmonious" coming together of divine and human activities the classical model did its best to recognize and accommodate the contribution of the human agency. However, the predestinational mode in which the divine activity was understood systematically affects the claims made regarding inspiration. A timeless God who is conceived to act—inspire—according to the general pattern of predestination or primary cause unavoidably reduces

[59]Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 1:21-22.

[60]I am referring here to κοινωνία in one of its basic connotations, that of sharing in a close personal relationship, understood in the sense of the related verb κοινωνέω—"to share, have a share in, participate in," which gives the idea of possessing together, having a share, joining oneself to someone else (J. Schattenmann, "κοινωνία," *NIDNTT,* 1:639, 644). This is the biblical designation for divine-human communications in their most general connotation.

the real scope of human contribution in inspiration to its minimal possible expression and, at the same time, practically eliminates the personal nature of the "working together" proposed by the historical-cognitive model.

The Content of Inspiration

According to the historical-cognitive model, inspiration is co-extensive with revelation. Since the content and information of Scripture are originated through the divine-human process of revelation, the content of inspiration corresponds to the content of revelation. The content of inspiration, therefore, involves the whole of Scripture and the words in which they are expressed. It follows, then, that all the words of Scripture are the direct result of the combined and interrelated process of revelation and inspiration. All the words of Scripture are revealed and inspired. In this way the historical-cognitive model understands Paul's conviction that πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος (2 Tim 3:16).

5. Implications for Theology

The historical-cognitive model has broad consequences for the way in which Scripture should be understood as source of theological data. Some of the most salient implications relate to the nature, scope, exegetical methodology, theological interpretation, and subordinate and limited role of extrabiblical sources of theological data.

The nature of theological data is linguistic-cognitive and historical because God is understood to communicate directly within the level of general and personal history. In other words, the nature of Scripture as source of theological data is linguistic-cognitive and historical because God, acting historically in human history, has generated its cognitive content utilizing the modes, characteristics, and limitations of human cognition and language.

The first implication leads to the affirmation of the *tota Scriptura* principle as the second ramification of the historical-cognitive model. This repercussion refers to the scope of theological data vis-à-vis the total content of Scripture. Since God is directly involved in the entirety of the processes of revelation and inspiration, it follows that Scripture in its entirety becomes cognitively and linguistically the source of data for the constitution of Christian theology. Besides, the historical-cognitive model provides no foundation for any attempt to differentiate between levels, hierarchies, or degrees of inspiration or revelation within Scripture. There are no privileged or "more authoritative" sections of Scripture. Consequently, no canon within the canon is to be allowed to

produce an a priori dogmatic selection of relevant theological data. Any canon within the canon directly violates the *tota* as well as the *sola Scriptura* principles.[61] Variety of content and literary form becomes an integral part of the biblical data on which theology is to be built.

The first two consequences require the formulation of an exegetical methodology that would allow Christian theologians to access the historically constituted meaning of the whole Scripture. The historical-grammatical and historical-critical methodologies depend on the same interpretations of the presuppositional structure that are at the foundation of the classical and liberal models, respectively. Therefore they are ill-prepared to process the entirety of scriptural data in their historically constituted essence.[62] A new exegetical methodology should be conceived in harmony with the presuppositional structure of the historical-cognitive model. Therefore, it should be built along the lines of a historical, phenomenological approach to the text of Scripture.[63]

[61]Thus, even the suspicion that Paul had some sort of unconsciously formulated canon within the canon for the Old Testament, as E. P. Sanders suggests, seems hasty and motivated by a classical Protestant interpretation, not properly canceled out before approaching the text (*Paul, the Lay, and the Jewish People* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 161-162).

[62]In this regard a distinction between methodology and procedure is to be drawn. The historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods are demoted from methods to procedures because the presuppositional structure on which they traditionally functioned has been reinterpreted. As procedures they are necessary to reach the meaning of the text but do not determine it by themselves. Due to the reinterpretation of the presuppositional structure from a timeless to a temporal-historical ground, the historical-critical method is not only demoted to the lower level of procedure, but it also suffers a reinterpretation of its reach and purpose. In dealing with history the guiding ground is the historical activities of God in history as interpreted by Scripture and not the scientific hypothetical reconstruction of the cultural milieu. Thus the method turns into procedure. And as the procedure works on a different interpretation of the intellectual ground, the secular study of history does not become the criterion for the historical interpretation of Scripture. It is probable, then, that it would be best to talk about a historical-scholarly procedure rather than historical-critical procedure.

[63]This methodology needs careful discussion. It necessarily includes going to the facts on which theology is to be built. Edmund Husserl calls these facts "things." Among the various facts that are given to us, he includes human products which involve hermeneutics (*The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970], 138). In the case of theology, the facts are the products of revelation-inspiration, namely, all the words and meanings of Scripture. Besides going to the facts themselves—Scripture, exegesis, and theology—we have to take a second step: philosophical-scientific ἐποχή (ibid., 135). In this phase exegetes and theologians cancel out all previously inherited theories interpreting the data which could prove to be hindrances to the understanding of Scripture. This second facet leads to a third, which allows the exegete and theologian to discover and describe the general

This is not the place to formulate or even sketch this necessary alternate exegetical methodology. Suffice it to say that to recognize or even accept the historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration will make no noticeable change in Christian theology if the exegetical methodology is not reformulated.

The development of Christian theology necessitates not only the possession of revealed and inspired data and the appropriate exegetical methodology to interpret them, but also the formulation and utilization of a priori categories, which in this series of articles I have identified as presuppositional structure. Inner coherence should drive Christian theology to conceive and formulate its presuppositional structure, employing a biblical rather than philosophical or scientific interpretation.[64] If biblical authors utilized a biblically originated interpretation of the presuppositional structure, rather than depending on extrabiblical religious, philosophical, or scientific conceptions, why should we do otherwise? In determining the general hermeneutical patterns for the interpretation of Scripture (exegesis and biblical theology) and the system for the development of Christian teachings (systematic theology), it would be advisable to employ the same biblical presuppositional structure. The paradigmatic shift from a philosophical or scientific interpretation to a biblically grounded interpretation of the presuppositional structure entailed in the historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration makes possible the development of Christian theology on the basis of the *sola Scriptura* principle.[65]

Finally, an additional implication of the historical-cognitive model affects the roles that related sciences—such as philosophy, factual and human sciences, and tradition—may be called to play in Christian theology. A secondary, subordinated role is directly called for by the *sola* and *tota Scriptura* principles and can be designated as the *prima Scriptura* principle. Briefly stated, philosophy, science, and tradition are not to be conceived as data on which Christian theology should be built

presuppositional structure assumed by the biblical writers (ibid., 139). This third step is needed for the development of exegesis and theology as sciences.

[64]The basic contents of the biblical presuppositional structure have been identified and utilized in the conception and formulation of the historical-cognitive model of revelation-inspiration suggested in this article.

[65]Only this paradigmatic shift at the presuppositional-structure level can answer or even reverse Pannenberg's assessment that the Scripture principle is in crisis, and that a theology "concerned only with the special aspects of revelation and thus only with the interpretation of Scripture, regardless of the results attained by other sciences from their presuppositions," is an "illusion" ("The Crisis of the Scripture-Principle in Protestant Theology," *Dialog* 2 (1963): 308.

or its methodologies and presuppositional structure determined. Extrabiblical sources are to be approached critically.[66] Aristotle expressed the need to be critical of tradition by politely stating that "piety requires us to honour truth above our friends."[67] In a secondary sense, however, there may be times and opportunities in which some facts resulting from the activities of philosophy, science, and tradition might become useful for the theological task. Yet, the utilization of such information must always be subordinated to a criticism and reinterpretation of its meaning by way of the application of the *sola* and *tota Scriptura* principles. In the development of Christian theology, then, extrabiblical materials can be incorporated only on the basis of the *prima Scriptura* principle.

6. *Conclusion*

In this series of articles exploring the epistemological origin of Scripture I have purposely attempted to be concise. Consequently, I could not address all the related issues in the length and detail that a full development of the revelation-inspiration doctrine requires. My purpose has been to probe the main characteristics involved in the principal models of revelation-inspiration developed throughout the history of Christian theology in order to explore the possibility for and profile of an alternate approach.

Two models, very carefully and technically developed, have been already formulated. Generally speaking, Christian theology seems satisfied with these generally accepted models. At the same time, these divide Christian theology into classical and liberal camps. Our brief consideration of each model pointed out that neither is able to coherently and completely reconcile and include the basic data for any doctrine of revelation-inspiration, namely, the claims of Scripture about its divine origin and its obvious humanness, as revealed by the phenomena of Scripture.

I initiated this series designed to explore the issue of revelation and inspiration from an epistemological perspective by asking whether theological scholarship should be satisfied with already-existing theories about revelation and inspiration, or whether there would be room for the development of a new understanding of the way in which the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures were originated.

[66]In other words, additional sources are integrated by first being canceled out (philosophical-theoretical ἐποχή); then, by reinterpreting their meaning made to fit the new presuppositional structure present in the facts (Scripture) themselves.

[67]*Ethica Nicomachea*, 1, 6, 1096a, 10.

Our probing into the issue seems to provide the following answer: Besides the already-existent classical and liberal models of revelation and inspiration, there is room for an alternate model, namely, the historical-cognitive model. The possibility and framework of an alternate model reside in what had already made possible the existence of the other two competing models: the fact that the presuppositional structure on which theological models are constructed can be interpreted in different ways. The classical and liberal models differ in the philosophical bases chosen for the interpretation of their respective presuppositional structures. The historical-cognitive model, departing from the classical and liberal, defines the interpretation of its presuppositional structure from biblical thought. This step leads to a viable integration of the various patterns of biblical revelation and inspiration.[68]

As the specific contour of the historical-cognitive model was roughly depicted in this article, some readers may be wondering what is "new" in it. They may find themselves thinking that what has been presented as a "new approach" is only the old traditionally held belief. I am not claiming originality in suggesting a historical-cognitive model. I have not created the model but only recognized it in Scripture. Many others might also have recognized it simply because it is there. I hope, however, that a careful reading of this series might have led such sympathetic readers to the realization that there is a broad theological difference between what many believe when they read Scripture and go to church, and the technically conceived and formulated content of the classical and liberal models. The historical-cognitive model, in faithfulness to Scripture, basically tries to express in the technical realm of epistemology the belief that follows from a consistent phenomenological, prescientific reading of Scripture.

The succinct presentation of the epistemological possibility and characteristics of the historical-cognitive model does not suffice to draw viable conclusions regarding the issue of inerrancy or accuracy of Scripture. Unfortunately, recent emphasis on the issue of scriptural inerrancy has taken precedence over the investigation of issues that need prior clarification. For instance, additional development of the model—as well as grounding reflection on the nature of truth, error, accuracy, and exactness— is required before any attempt at even exploring this issue can be undertaken.[69] After

[68]See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:229.

[69]The issue of inerrancy of Scripture is epistemological. It questions the truth and accuracy of Scriptures. Dismissing inerrancy on the perfunctory basis that it requires the harmonization of Scripture (thereby conflicting with exegesis), that it carries with it the danger of bibliolatry, that it is pastorally disastrous (James Dunn, "The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture [Part 1]," 116-117), and that it is not a biblical teaching (Dunn, "The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture [Part 2]," 221) seems

this is done, the full revelation-inspiration doctrine needs to be developed from an analysis of the claims and phenomena of Scripture. Certainly the historical-cognitive model would depart from the way this issue has been understood by either the classical or liberal model. I suggest that this longer, more painful route be taken before hasty conclusions on the accuracy of Scripture are drawn.

Through a brief but careful exploration of the classical, liberal, and historical-cognitive models, two basic facts have become apparent. In the actual task of doing theology it is not possible to adopt the three models at the same time. Theologians must choose. Besides, it has become apparent that each model will generate and justify widely differing theologies.

Which model should Christian theology adopt? From a rational viewpoint it is impossible to make an absolute choice. Many choose on the basis of tradition or philosophical considerations. In my opinion, Christian theology should seriously consider switching from the classical and liberal models to the historical-cognitive because the latter flows directly from the biblical interpretation of the presuppositional structure and, in so doing, is able to harmoniously integrate both the claims and phenomena of Scripture. Having said that, let me assure Christian theologians sharing different views that, from a rational perspective, I consider the historical-cognitive model to represent a viable alternative to the classical and liberal models. Yet, by the same token, I hope those subscribing to the classical and liberal models could come to the point of realizing that, from a rational perspective, their positions are, likewise, viable alternatives to the historical-cognitive approach. If scholars and theologians presently working under the classical and liberal models are willing to concede this first step, it is possible that they may also come to the point of perceiving the way in which the historical-cognitive model is able to overcome the limitations of the classical and liberal models. The overcoming takes place by finding and systematically utilizing the biblical interpretation of the presuppositional structure of the revelation-inspiration doctrine. Thus, the cognitive aspect of the classical model is kept but reinterpreted according to a historical understanding of reality and cognition emphasized by the liberal model. As a result the historical-cognitive model not only exhibits inner rational coherence, but also grounds external coherence with the claims and phenomena of Scripture.

---

insufficient. A grounding epistemology, developed within the parameters of the presuppositional structure of the historical-cognitive model, is required before any judgment on the accuracy of Scripture could be made.