

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

A *Status Quaestionis*

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This essay examines a representative sampling of recent literature on the doctrine of inspiration. My essay is divided into four sections. The first section summarizes briefly James Burtchaell's 1969 monograph *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1810*. Burtchaell's book does two things: it displays the enormous intellectual effort that Catholic scholars put into trying to understand biblical inspiration, and it argues that inspiration has been vastly overblown. The book is thus helpful not only for surveying Catholic positions on this topic from 1810–1965, but also for appreciating why so little has been done since 1969 by Catholic scholars. The second section explores contemporary evangelical Protestant positions on inspiration, because debate about the doctrine (and the related doctrine of inerrancy) has continued and even intensified in recent decades among evangelical Protestants. I set the stage in this second section by summarizing the position of the nineteenth-century Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield, which remains influential, and then I turn to some important interventions from the early 1980s and from the 2000s.

The third section identifies the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, as a promising point of departure for contemporary Catholic reflection on inspiration. I argue that *Dei Verbum* exhibits the fruitfulness of the 1810–1965 period, by means of the identification of central principles that the doctrine of inspiration should affirm (even if *Dei Verbum* is unable to resolve the contested details). I also examine the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), which follows *Dei Verbum* while emphasizing spiritual exegesis, and the Pontifical Biblical Commission's "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" (1993), which sidelines the doctrine of inspiration. Lastly, the fourth section describes the approaches of two contemporary scholars who are attempting to reinvigorate the nearly dormant Catholic discussion of inspiration: Denis Farkasfalvy and Scott Hahn. These authors agree upon the importance of inspiration for Scripture's quasi-sacramental function, but they disagree about inspiration's relationship to inerrancy, among other matters.

A Once Vibrant Theological Discussion

Although dated by its late-1960s anti-authoritarian posture, Burtchaell's *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1810* includes a wealth of scholarly reportage. Among the extraordinary range of scholars whose views on biblical inspiration Burtchaell surveys, we might note here the Jesuits Giovanni Perrone, Joseph

Kleutgen, Johann Baptist Franzelin, Louis Billot, Augustin Bea, Roderick MacKenzie, John McKenzie, Karl Rahner, Norbert Lohfink, Luis Alonso-Schökel, and René Latourelle; the Dominicans Thomas Pègues, Marie-Joseph Lagrange, Vincent McNabb, Paul Synave, Pierre Benoit, and Yves Congar; and other well-known figures such as Johann Sebastian von Drey, Johann Adam Möhler, Johann Evangelist von Kuhn, John Henry Newman, Heinrich Denzinger, John Acton, Friedrich von Hügel, Alfred Loisy, and George Tyrrell. Burtchaell's conclusion registers disappointment: "I am first of all led to feel that this has been an unhappy controversy. There was far too much ink spilled upon it; too many men struggled for too many years to such meagre advantage. . . . Scant parturition has come forth from so many mountains in labor."¹ Burtchaell blames the usual suspects: deference to ecclesial authority, acceptance of biblical inerrancy, and failure to appreciate that God and humans are not competitive causes.²

In setting forth his constructive position on inspiration, Burtchaell emphasizes ambiguity, development of doctrine, and the claim that "no ancient statement or document ever quite puts forth the truth adequately for contemporary needs."³ Doctrines of infallibility or inerrancy should be understood dynamically rather than statically, so as to allow the Church room to maneuver. Burtchaell describes the Bible as "the chief record of the faith's gestation," and the documents that comprise it are those that were found to serve the liturgical use of the community and to help the community define itself over against competing communities.⁴ Eventually, as he explains it, the biblical canon arose as the collection of "those past writings which represent the mainstream of development from Abraham to Christ, and through Christ to wherever a particular Church stood."⁵ The various texts of the Bible record the religious situation of believers at various eras and the paths open to believers in these eras. Ultimately these canonized texts trace the "route from paganism to Christ," and in this dynamic way they "inerrantly" display "the ability, not to avoid all mistakes, but to cope with them, remedy them, survive them, and eventually even profit from them."⁶ Burtchaell concludes with the following definition of biblical inspiration:

Inspiration is a charism that in no way interferes with a man's methods or mind as he writes or edits, but causes that he produce a composition which, in combination with others, can

1 James Tunstead Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration Since 1810: A Review and Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969), 281.

2 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 281.

3 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 296.

4 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 301.

5 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 303.

6 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 303.

serve the Church with an undeviating, or inerrant, reflection of how the faith grew from nothing to Christ.⁷

This definition raises numerous questions: Why would a “charism” of inspiration be needed for humans over the ages to write such texts? How could such texts err if all they do is to document the development of religious belief over time, culminating in belief in Jesus? If the charism of inspiration merely ensures that a set of texts emerges that faithfully records the development of religious opinion among some groups of educated Jews, then “inspiration” is extrinsic indeed, and the “inspiration” of the Bible consists simply in that its path ends with the earliest believers in Jesus. The Bible would have God as its “author” only in the sense that God ensured that the biblical record, despite its twists and turns, ended with testimony to faith in Jesus. Only the texts about Jesus would be directly related to Christian faith today. The other parts would be relevant for teaching us how to rise gradually from false worship. The Old Testament thereby loses much of its place as Christian Scripture. Indeed, Burtchaell’s proposal exemplifies the “scant parturition” about which he complains.⁸

On the grounds that the antecedents of post-Vatican II “liberal theology” are found in the creative but suppressed theological work of the nineteenth century, however, Burtchaell argues that “one glaring fault of the contemporary discussion is precisely its deracination from the past.”⁹ The desire to fill this lacuna explains his detailed historical survey. I will summarize briefly the leading theories of inspiration that Burtchaell documents.

He begins with the “Tübingen School” of the early nineteenth century. Drey and Möhler conceived of inspiration as a charism that ensured that the authors of Scripture, and the Church as a whole, would find the right words by which to communicate the ideas that God sought to teach. Each human mind reshapes what it learns, so as to communicate this learning to others. Divine inspiration elevates the human mind for the task of communicating divine truth. Their student Franz Anton Staudenmaier takes this further by arguing that only the doctrinal

7 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 304.

8 As Robert Jenson, correcting his previous avoidance of the doctrine of inspiration, observes: “Christian exegesis of the Bible, and specifically of the Old Testament, does not itself work without something like the old doctrine of inspiration. . . . It was—I have now come to see—a function of the old doctrine of inspiration to trump the created author and first readers with a prior agent, the Spirit, and prior readers, the whole diachronic people of God, preserved as one people through time by that same Spirit.” “A Second Thought about Inspiration,” *Pro Ecclesia* 13 (2004): 393–398, at 393, 396. Lacking the agency of the Holy Spirit uniting the people of God over the centuries, reading the Old Testament christologically seems eisegetical—in which case, as Jenson says, “we should, in my judgment, acknowledge what our modern uneasiness suggests, and openly do what we have long done covertly: use the Old Testament not really as Scripture but as religious ‘background’ for the New Testament”; at 396. This is in fact what Burtchaell does.

9 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 304.

teachings of Scripture are inspired. Similarly, another student of theirs, Johann Evangelist von Kuhn, argues that while the content and essence of Scripture are divine, the matter and form are human. The position of these thinkers differs from earlier Catholic doctrines of inspiration, such as the view that inspiration consists in divine assistance and preservation from error, the view that a book can become inspired Scripture upon receiving the Church's later approval, and the view that the Holy Spirit supplied each word of the Scriptures to the human writers.

Burtchaell gives significant attention to Blessed John Henry Newman, the best known representative of the "partial inspiration" theory, according to which only Scripture's doctrinal and moral teachings are inspired.¹⁰ This view is rejected in Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893).¹¹ The mid-nineteenth century was dominated by a view of biblical inspiration that found its ablest exponent in the Jesuit Johann Baptist Franzelin and that Burtchaell calls "content inspiration." According to this view, God inspires the human authors so that they teach the saving truths (*res et sententiae*) that he wishes to communicate: "God has

10 For a fuller account of Newman's theology of Scripture, see Jeffrey W. Barbeau, "Newman and the Interpretation of Inspired Scripture," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 53–67; Jaak Seynaeve, *Cardinal Newman's Doctrine on Holy Scripture According to His Published Works and Previously Unedited Manuscripts* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1953).

11 Leo XIII teaches that "it is absolutely wrong and forbidden either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture or to admit that the sacred writer has erred. As to the system of those who, in order to rid themselves of these difficulties, do not hesitate to concede that divine inspiration regards the things of faith and morals, and nothing beyond, because (as they wrongly think) in a question of the truth or falsehood of a passage we should consider not so much what God has said as the reason and purpose which he had in mind in saying it—this system cannot be tolerated. For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; and so far is it from being possible that any error can coexist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and unchanging faith of the Church, solemnly defined in the Councils of Florence and of Trent, and finally confirmed and more expressly formulated by the Council of the Vatican. These are the words of the last: 'The books of the Old and New Testament, whole and entire, with all their parts, as enumerated in the decree of the same Council (Trent) and in the ancient Latin Vulgate, are to be received as sacred and canonical. And the Church holds them as sacred and canonical not because, having been composed by human industry, they were afterwards approved by her authority; nor only because they contain revelation without errors, but because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their author.' Hence, because the Holy Spirit employed men as his instruments, we cannot, therefore, say that it was these inspired instruments who, perchance, have fallen into error, and not the primary author. For, by supernatural power, he so moved and impelled them to write—he so assisted them when writing—that the things which he ordered, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could not be said that he was the author of the entire Scripture." Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* [The God of All Providence], Encyclical Letter on the Study of Scripture (November 18, 1893), 20, in *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Dean P. Bécharde (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 37–62.

supplied the formal components of the sacred books on his sole responsibility.”¹² God assists rather than inspires the human authors as regards the “material” components of Scripture, that is, the words and expressions (*signa, verba*) that do not directly impinge upon the saving truths. This position gives significance to the cultural milieu and human creativity of the biblical authors, while affirming God’s authorship (by inspiring and assisting) of the entire Scriptures.

After the publication of Leo XIII’s encyclical on Christian philosophy, *Aeterni Patris* (1879),¹³ another view of biblical inspiration emerged, one that is most closely associated with Marie-Joseph Lagrange’s early work on the topic and that Burtchaell describes as “plenary inspiration.” Indebted to Aquinas’s theory of instrumental causality, Lagrange argues that since the human author and God are non-competitive causes, both are fully authors of Scripture. There is no need, therefore, to distinguish God’s sole responsibility for Scripture’s truths from the human author’s contributions. All Scripture is inspired, because God inspires the human author without compromising the human author’s freedom and historicity. God wills to teach what the human author wills to teach. In willing to teach something as true, the human author makes a judgment of truth; thanks to God’s inspiration, this judgment is infallible. Frequently, however, the human author presents material without making a judgment of truth. In such cases, inspiration ensures that the material is suitable for the particular purpose that the human author intends. In the years before Vatican II, Lagrange’s position is extended by Pierre Benoit, especially with respect to distinguishing between the biblical author’s speculative and practical judgment (the intention to teach something as true requires only the former).

In later work for which he incurred ecclesial sanction, Lagrange suggests that the Old Testament is largely a record of primitive and transitional beliefs rather than true teaching inspired by God. Among the leading figures of the modernist crisis, von Hügel understands Scripture as witnessing to the progressive development of understanding that continues in the Church. Even Jesus’s teaching, von Hügel thinks, is marred by its cultural limitations. For his part, Loisy, prior to his excommunication in 1908, repudiates the view that God is the author of Scripture except for in the sense that God is the author of all things. Loisy supposes that to grant that God is the author of Scripture is to establish Scripture as the norm of human reason and thereby to place an ancient and largely mythological roadblock in the way of human intellectual progress.

12 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 99.

13 Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris* [The Eternal Father], Encyclical Letter on the Restoration of Christian Philosophy (August 4, 1879), in *Restoration of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Pauline, 1997).

Burtchaell describes a variety of positions set forth in the late 1950s and the 1960s. In his *Inspiration in the Bible*,¹⁴ Karl Rahner focuses the doctrine of inspiration not on the human authors but on the Church. The first generation of the Church has the task of producing the norm of faith for all future generations. Only this first generation possesses the power to accept or reject writings as testifying to Christ. The Scriptures of Israel are not definitively inspired until they are accepted by the apostolic Church as witnessing to the Church's authentic "prehistory and prefaith."¹⁵ In his founding of the Church, and not before, God is the author of the books of Holy Scripture. Inspiration thus has to do with the final form of the Church's faith rather than with the Holy Spirit's presence to individual authors in the process by which they teach saving truth.

Yves Congar responds to Rahner by emphasizing that the apostolic Church receives rather than constitutes the Scriptures. The apostles receive mission and authority from Christ, and their writings participate in their personal charism. The Church's faith is inconceivable absent the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the apostles and prophets, and so it would be a mistake to associate inspiration solely with the apostolic Church's certification of the whole Bible as the definitive record of her faith.

With regard to the relationship of inspiration and inerrancy, the views of two contemporaries of Rahner and Congar deserve mention. Norbert Lohfink argues that inerrancy belongs not to authors or books but to the whole Bible, which, when read as a whole (the Old Testament in light of the New), expresses the truth that God wills to convey to humankind. Luis Alonso Schökel holds that earlier theories of inspiration focused too strictly upon propositional truth. Just as we come to know a person by becoming familiar with the variety of his or her modes of self-expression, so too the inerrant truth of the Bible becomes known to us not through propositional fragments but through the dialogic reality of the literary whole. This emphasis on personal disclosure, on encounter with God, and on the inability of propositions to exhaust the mystery of revelation appears, Burtchaell observes, in a number of other authors publishing on this topic in the 1960s.¹⁶

The Evangelical Protestant Debate

In his writings on biblical inspiration, B. B. Warfield emphasizes that for the authors of the New Testament as well as in the view of Jesus himself, the Holy Spirit is the primary author of Scripture whose relationship to the human authors is one of "concurrent" action. The inspiration of the human authors and the inspiration

14 Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, trans. Charles Henkey and Martin Pamer, 2nd ed. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964).

15 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 253.

16 See also Maurice Blondel, "History and Dogma," in Blondel, *The Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma*, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru and Iltyd Trethowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 221–287, esp. 280–281.

of their writings are two sides of the same coin, because the words of Scripture are “the utterances of the Holy Ghost,” who is the “responsible author” of every word.¹⁷ Thus Scripture is “the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says.”¹⁸ It follows that Scripture is inerrant and trustworthy in all particulars. Warfield criticizes efforts to distinguish between inspired and uninspired words of Scripture, and he also rejects the position, arising from Schleiermacher, that only those words are from God which resonate with the interior spiritual consciousness of the believer. In Warfield’s view, it is clear that “the writers of the New Testament books looked upon what they called ‘Scripture’ as divinely safeguarded in even its verbal expression, and as divinely trustworthy in all its parts, in all its elements, and in all its affirmations of whatever kind.”¹⁹ Warfield holds, in short, that the first task is to understand “the doctrine of inspiration taught by the Bible as applicable to itself” and then test this doctrine by inquiring into the accuracy of the books of Scripture, where the doctrine will be found vindicated.²⁰

I move from Warfield’s writings to two books published by notable evangelical scholars in 1982, during a period that saw a flurry of evangelical scholarship on this topic. In his *Biblical Inspiration*, I. Howard Marshall begins, like Warfield, by arguing that the New Testament authors and Jesus consider the Scriptures to be the authoritative Word of God. He then describes seven ways of understanding the meaning of biblical “inspiration”: the prophetic or dictation theory of inspiration; the view that Scripture is merely human eloquence; the view that the Bible is inspired only where it is spiritually inspiring; the view that the Bible is simply the

17 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1948), 295. See the somewhat different edition of this book published as *Revelation and Inspiration* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1927).

18 Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 106. Warfield remarks in passing, “The allegorical interpretation which rioted in the early days of the Church was the daughter of reverence for the biblical Word; a spurious daughter you may think, but none the less undeniably a direct offspring of the awe with which the sacred text was regarded as the utterances of God, and, as such, pregnant with inexhaustible significance”; at 109.

19 Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 115.

20 Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority*, 223; compare at 222 where Warfield notes regarding inerrancy that “if in the midst of this marvel of general accuracy there remain here and there a few difficulties as yet not fully explained in harmony with it,” one can reasonably assume that these difficulties will eventually be resolved. For a similar approach see Roger Nicole, “Induction and Deduction with Reference to Inspiration,” in *Standing Forth: Collected Writings of Roger Nicole* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2002), 151–158. See also Nicole’s defense of Warfield (and of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy). “The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture: J. D. G. Dunn versus B. B. Warfield,” in *Standing Forth*, 159–222. Originally published in 1983, this essay responds to Dunn’s “The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture,” *Churchman* 96 (1982): 104–122, 201–225. Nicole’s essay also includes a significant critique of the exegetical and theological positions that characterize Dunn’s *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1975) and *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980).

written record of divine revelation; the theory that this record of divine revelation becomes revelation for us when the Holy Spirit enables it to speak to us today (Karl Barth); the theory that the Holy Spirit inspires the gradual composition of the Bible rather than inspiring the biblical text itself (Paul J. Achtemeier);²¹ the view that God inspires the human authors in the same way that a good teacher inspires his students to be able to spread his teachings in a broadly truthful but fallible manner (William J. Abraham); and the view that the Holy Spirit works concursively with the human authors in the literary process of the composition of the Scriptures (Warfield, J. I. Packer).

Marshall accepts this last position as the best one. He observes that “alongside and within this general concursive action of the Spirit in inspiring normal human forms of composition in the biblical books, we can trace special actions of the Spirit in bringing special revelations to prophets and apostles.”²² Beyond affirming this concursus, however, we cannot explain further the mysterious union of the two levels of agency. Marshall then explores whether inspiration requires

21 Marshall is commenting on the original 1980 edition of Achtemeier's book; a second edition appeared in 1999 as Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999). Indebted especially to G. C. Berkouwer's *Holy Scripture: Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), Bruce Vawter's *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), and Rahner's *Inspiration in the Bible*, Achtemeier rejects what he calls the “prophetic model” of inspiration, according to which “God inspired the author of a given book in the Bible to write down what God wanted written,” with the result that Scripture is a unity because of the divine authorship (Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 19; see also 25, 62–63, 85–89). In Achtemeier's view, the prophetic model has been discredited “by scholarly discoveries made over the past few decades about the way Scripture was produced” (at 63), specifically by the reality that “Church and Scripture grew up alongside each other—the traditions shaping the life of the Church, and the Church interpreting and reshaping the traditions in the light of its own proclamation of those traditions” (at 78), so that the Bible “reflects the life of the community of Israel and the primitive Church as those communities sought to come to terms with the central reality that God was present with them in ways that regularly outran their ability to understand or cope” (at 79; compare at 100–101). On the basis of the fact that some biblical books include words by numerous authors and redactors, Achtemeier holds that the model of inspired individual authors no longer works. After examining the various New Testament passages that are typically drawn upon to formulate the doctrine of biblical inspiration, Achtemeier locates “inspiration” largely in the community of faith and in the providential process by which the books were written and given final shape (at 102), while appreciating the role of those individuals who contributed “to the formulation and reformulation of tradition in specific situations” (at 116). As he puts it, “It is therefore in the interrelationship of the three components of Scripture—tradition, situation, and respondent—that the inspiration of Scripture is to be located. Inspiration thus describes more the process out of which our Scriptures grew than simply the final result in canonical form. This of course is not to disparage in any way that canonical form” (at 118–119). He goes on to define biblical inspiration “as the continuing presence of the Spirit with the community of faith as it preserved and renewed its traditions in response to the new situations into which God led it” (at 126). Taking issue with Marshall's formulation of Achtemeier's view, Achtemeier observes that “it is not the ‘inspiredness of the resulting book’ that is at issue . . . but the inspiredness of what that book contains!” (at 125, n. 5).

22 I. Howard Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 43.

that Scripture be “inerrant” or only “infallible,” that is, fully trustworthy for the saving purposes for which God inspired it. After providing a nuanced account of the ways in which biblical passages can be true (with attention to language and genre), he examines a set of exegetical problems that “inerrancy” faces. Can the trustworthiness of the Bible for accomplishing its saving purposes be affirmed without also affirming that the Bible has no historical errors? Although here he parts ways with Warfield and Packer, Marshall argues that “infallibility” occupies a salutary middle position between inerrancy and liberal skepticism, because Scripture’s infallibility allows for some historical error but not for much.²³

Marshall’s position is in part a response to “The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” set forth by the International Council of Biblical Inerrancy in 1978. The Chicago Statement teaches that Scripture is “without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.”²⁴ This position is advocated by John Woodbridge in his *Biblical Authority*, published in the same year as Marshall’s book. Woodbridge focuses upon refuting the historical claims made by the evangelical scholars Jack Rogers and Donald McKim in their *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*.²⁵ Somewhat like Marshall, Rogers, and McKim suggest that the Bible possesses infallibility in matters pertaining to salvation but makes historical and scientific errors. On their view, the Bible is inerrant only in the sense that the biblical authors never intended to deceive.

In his book’s introduction, Woodbridge comments, “Within the last two decades or so, evangelical Christians have become especially uneasy due to their

23 See also Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), in which Davis, a philosopher of religion, defends biblical “infallibility.” More recently, Davis describes his understanding of the Bible’s truthfulness in the following manner: “We mean that our attitude toward the Bible is such that we believe what it says, we trust it, we lay ourselves open to it. We allow our rational structures and beliefs to be influenced by it. Such an attitude will include but not by any means be limited to accepting the truth (in the paradigmatic sense) of the assertions that we find in it. (What they are, obviously, will have to be interpreted.) It also means taking questions in the Bible (‘Should we sin the more that grace may abound?’) as legitimate and probing questions addressed to us. It also means taking biblical exhortations (‘Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good’) as exhortations addressed to us that we must heed. It also means taking poetic sections from the Bible (‘We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture’) as powerfully affective expressions of the way reality is.” See Davis, “What Do We Mean When We Say, ‘The Bible Is True?’” in *But Is It All True? The Bible and the Question of Truth*, ed. Alan G. Padgett and Patrick R. Keifert (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 86–103, at 89–90. See also Kevin Vanhoozer, “Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 89–114.

24 Quoted in Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*, 10. Marshall directs the reader to the text of the Chicago Statement as published in J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 139–155.

25 Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

growing awareness that scholars from their own ranks are proposing that the Bible is infallible for faith and practice but that it is susceptible to ‘technical mistakes.’”²⁶ For Woodbridge, the trouble with the supposition that the Bible contains historical and scientific errors is that it challenges God’s authorship: God is truth, and so revelation that truly comes from God cannot be marred by errors. Rogers and McKim advance their argument by trying to show that historically—from the patristic and medieval periods through the Reformation, up until the rise of (rationalistic) seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism—Christians held biblical inspiration and “infallibility” but not biblical inerrancy. Rogers and McKim blame the nineteenth-century Princeton theologians, including Warfield, for contemporary evangelicalism’s emphasis on biblical inerrancy. In response, Woodbridge surveys the patristic, Reformation, Baroque, and nineteenth-century authors treated by Rogers and McKim, and Woodbridge finds that in fact they hold to the inerrancy and infallibility of all the words of Scripture.²⁷

Evangelical Debate Today

This debate over inspiration and inerrancy continues today in evangelical scholarship. I will briefly survey four recent books plus one significant article: Peter Enns’s *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (2005), N. T. Wright’s *Scripture and the Authority of God* (2005), Craig Allert’s *A High View of Scripture?: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (2007), Stephen Chapman’s “Reclaiming Inspiration for the Bible” (2006), and Ben Witherington III’s *The Living Word of God: Rethinking the Theology of the Bible* (2007).

After describing modern biblical scholarship regarding the Old Testament, Peter Enns argues that the “conservative” evangelical response to this scholarship shares an assumption with modern disbelievers in the Bible’s authority: namely, the assumption that “the Bible, being the Word of God, ought to be historically accurate in all its details (since God would not lie or make errors) and unique in its own setting (since God’s Word is revealed, which implies a specific type of uniqueness).”²⁸ He argues that the lesson of the incarnation points in the opposite direction. Just as the incarnate Word is fully human, so also the biblical Word of God is fully human. God inspires the whole Bible in a way that allows for a diversity of portrayals of God. The Old Testament at times insists that there is only

26 John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 14, 20.

27 See also a related essay also originally published in 1982, Roger Nicole’s “John Calvin and Inerrancy,” in Nicole, *Standing Forth*, 103–132. Compare earlier historical studies such as Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1955).

28 Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 47; see also 17, 21.

one God, for example, while at other times it suggests that Israel's God is greater than the other gods. In a polytheistic world, the ancient Israelites' understanding of God developed in a human fashion, eventually arriving at the full affirmation of the truth that there is only one God, the Creator. Similarly, God allows the Bible to portray him at times as all-powerful and completely in charge, and at other times as grieving and changing his mind.

Enns affirms that "the Bible is God's Word, that it ultimately comes from him, that it is what the Spirit of God wanted it to be."²⁹ God inspires the Bible in a way that wills the human messiness of Scripture. Accommodating himself to our historical mode of existence, God reveals himself in a fully historical manner.³⁰ On this view, the Old Testament functions less as a source of timeless doctrine than as a witness to God's gradual self-revelation, culminating in Christ Jesus.³¹ The unity of the Bible is found in Christ, since "it is to him that the Bible as a whole bears witness."³² Indeed, the messiness or fully historical character of the books of the Old Testament bears witness to God's decision to become incarnate historically in Israel. The truth of the Old Testament, as a whole, appears not in its historical facts or its doctrines, but in the apostles' rereading of the whole story in light of what God has done in Christ. The authors of the New Testament do not read the Scriptures with the goal of understanding the intended meaning of the original authors, but instead read them in light of extra-biblical traditions current in the Second-Temple period and with the purpose of showing that Christ and the Church bring the Old Testament story to completion. It is this completion, far more than a historical-critical recovery of the Old Testament's original facts and meanings, that reveals the inspired truth of the Old Testament.³³

29 Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 108.

30 For related discussion of "accommodation," including its role in the Church Fathers, see Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 229–259. See also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 206–212; Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 57–58.

31 See Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 67.

32 Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 110.

33 For a similar view see Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 98. See also John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). Kenton Sparks extends and develops Enns's position, with which he agrees, in *God's Word in Human Words*. G. K. Beale offers an extended critique of Enns's position in Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), especially 25–122. See also, from a perspective in accord with Beale's, D. A. Carson's engagement with John Webster's *Holy Scripture*, Enns's *Inspiration and Incarnation*, and N. T. Wright's *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); Carson, "Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review," *Trinity Journal* 27 (2006): 1–62. Peter Leithart argues that Enns's position falls into a husk and kernel hermeneutics that fails to accord sufficient value to the letter of the text. Leithart proposes that the difficulties identified by Enns should instead prompt us to rediscover Jesus's and Paul's typological interpretation of Old Testament Scripture, on the grounds that texts are not timeless. For Leithart, the way forward is to recognize, with Jesus and

N. T. Wright explores the role of Scripture in God's accomplishment of his saving work. Wright warns against viewing Scripture as simply "conveying information" or as "divine self-communication" or a "record of revelation."³⁴ This view of Scripture imagines an absent God who seeks to give humanity a set of propositions about himself. Rather, Scripture depicts the living God who makes himself powerfully present in and with Israel, in order to heal and renew the entire creation through Christ Jesus and his Holy Spirit. The Bible belongs to this God's work of transforming us into a holy people who have a mission to the world. Although Wright's book is about what it means to speak about the Bible's authority in the context of the salvific authority of God, he notes that "some kind of divine inspiration of scripture was taken for granted in most of the ancient Israelite Scriptures themselves, as well as in the beliefs of the early Christians."³⁵ By his Spirit, God worked through the various authors and editors so as to bring about the books that God intended for his people. Wright explores the Old Testament understanding of the power of God's "Word" and of Israel's status as the hearers of God's Word. The "inner tensions and puzzles of the Old Testament" express the deeper tension of Israel as simultaneously bearing God's Word to the world and standing with the world under the judgment of God's Word. The Old Testament is not primarily a record of facts about the past, but instead is Israel's story of being called by God, a story set forth in various ways over the generations in service to Israel's mission.

In this sense, Scripture's "work" is accomplished definitively by Jesus Christ; he fulfills Israel's story and reorders it around himself, so as to bring it to the whole world. The relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament is best understood not in terms of two sets of facts or propositions but in terms "of the entire storyline at last coming to fruition, and of an entire world of hints and shadows now coming to plain statement and full light."³⁶ The meaning of the Old Testament is revealed in Jesus. Jesus recognizes Scripture as authoritative because it is the story (the divine work) that he himself fulfills. His interlocutors recognize Scripture's authority in a more limited way, and so they fail to understand him when he speaks of Scripture's authority yet (for example) declares all foods clean. The New Testament authors understand that in writing about Jesus's fulfillment of Israel's story, they are writing "Scripture" in the sense of God's Word through which he transforms the world. They understand themselves to be living "under the *whole* Scripture" because Jesus's story is inseparable from that of Israel, as its

Paul (and the Fathers), that texts and events "say new things as they come into relationship with subsequent texts and events"; Leihart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2009), 44; compare 67, 110–11, 138, 207–208.

34 Wright, *Last Word*, 30; compare 39.

35 Wright, *Last Word*, 37.

36 Wright, *Last Word*, 43. As Achtemeier says by way of relativizing the controversy over inspiration, "One gets the impression from Scripture that its chief task is to point away from itself to something or someone who is far more important." *Inspiration and Authority*, 92.

fulfillment.³⁷ Wright urges therefore that every part of Scripture (verse, chapter, book) be read in its biblical, historical, and canonical context. This awareness of context enables us to read the whole Scripture with appreciation for both its humanity and its divinity, the latter being its “inspiration.” Wright suggests that so long as one keeps in mind that the comparison of Scripture’s two dimensions with Jesus’s two natures is an analogy, not a strict identity, the analogy proves helpful for understanding biblical inspiration and “the Spirit’s power at work within the Bible-reading Church.”³⁸

Craig Allert takes up biblical inspiration in the context of his study of how the formation of the New Testament canon should shape our understanding of what Scripture is. Citing the trepidation with which Marshall entered into the debate over inspiration and inerrancy, Allert remarks that a “high view of Scripture” is often assumed to require the inerrancy of each and every word of Scripture (a “verbal plenary doctrine”).³⁹ He connects this view with the position that the books in the biblical canon received their status when the apostles certified them as inspired. Regarding the formation of the canon, Allert argues that in fact the early Church did not conceive inspiration “to be the unique possession of only the documents that later came to be part of the New Testament canon. The Spirit was seen as living and active in the entire community of the faithful and therefore inspiring it.”⁴⁰ The inspiration of the Church by the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from the inspiration of the canonical books of Scripture. In the final chapter of his book,

37 Wright, *Last Word*, 57.

38 Wright, *Last Word*, 130. Wright’s approach is indebted to (among others) William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1998) and Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002). See also David S. Yeago, “The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited,” in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. James J. Buckley and David S. Yeago (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 49–93, at 51 (compare 61–64, 70–71): “Over against both the hermeneutics of critical modernity and its inveterate foe, the Protestant doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration, this essay will suggest that classical scriptural interpretation proceeded from a rich and complex sense of Scripture’s place and role within the economy of salvation; Scripture functions as a quasi-sacramental instrument of the Holy Spirit, through which the Spirit makes known the mystery of Christ in order to form the Church as a sign of his messianic dominion.” Abraham’s “canonical theism” likewise emphasizes the danger of viewing the canon of Scripture epistemologically rather than soteriologically. For Abraham’s approach see also William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981); Douglas M. Koskela, “The Authority of Scripture in Its Ecclesial Context,” in *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*, ed. William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 210–223; and the concerns raised by Mark W. Elliott, *The Reality of Biblical Theology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), 249–255.

39 Craig D. Allert, *A High View of Scripture? The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 11.

40 Allert, *High View of Scripture*, 148. See also Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 102–104.

therefore, he focuses on the implications of his view of canon formation for the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy.

Aiming to critique positions such as Warfield's and Woodbridge's (especially their argument that God's truthfulness is at stake in the doctrine of inerrancy), Allert begins by examining what the Bible teaches about inspiration. Here he focuses in particular on 2 Timothy 3:15–17, 2 Peter 1:19–21, and John 10:35. With respect to 2 Timothy 3:15–17, he notes that Paul appeals first to the trustworthiness of those from whom Timothy has, from childhood, learned the gospel. Only after appealing to the trustworthiness of Timothy's teachers does Paul make his point about the inspiration and profitability of Scripture. This leads Allert to highlight the importance of ecclesial context or tradition for appreciating Scripture's inspiration. He also argues that what Paul means by "sacred writings" and "Scripture" is not yet the biblical canon, or even the canon of the Old Testament. Inquiring into the meaning of "*theopneustos*," he observes that it appears only once in Scripture and so one cannot conclude that it means that "God literally breathed out Scripture."⁴¹ He points out that "the later Christian use of the term was not limited to the Scriptures and could include references to a commentary, a tomb inscription, and a conciliar decision."⁴² Why suppose that Paul intends to suggest that Scripture alone is inspired? Regarding those (such as Warfield) who compare Paul's view to Philo's, Allert cautions against the dictation theory of biblical inspiration.

Allert is not of course denying that God inspired Scripture. He is simply arguing that Scripture does not itself mandate a particular theory of biblical inspiration. Whereas Warfield reads 2 Peter 1:19–21 as implying that God is the source of the whole of Scripture, Allert interprets the passage to be emphasizing the confirmation, in the prophetic books, of what the apostles saw. The passage does not offer an account of inspiration, but instead makes a claim about prophecy and about the eyewitness of the apostles. Likewise, for Allert John 10:34–35 is not a teaching about inspiration, but rather teaches about the authority of Scripture. One can affirm the authority of Scripture without holding to a particular account of the inspiration of Scripture.

After discussing these biblical texts, Allert addresses the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which holds to the view (as we found in Woodbridge) that Scripture makes no errors at all, including scientific or historical matters such as how many times the cock crowed before Peter's denial of Christ. Yet as Allert points out, Article 13 of the Chicago Statement clarifies that the biblical truth "is not negated by a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant

41 Allert, *High View of Scripture*, 154.

42 Allert, *High View of Scripture*, 155.

selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.”⁴³ According to the Chicago Statement, then, the diverse genres of the biblical texts must be taken into account in determining biblical truth, as must be the literary conventions that were standard at the time of composition. The effort to determine biblical truth can become complex, as shown by the response to Robert Gundry’s proposal that Matthew deliberately embellishes historical information in order to make a theological point. Is this error, or is it, on the contrary, inerrant teaching of theological points about Jesus through the genre of midrash? If the latter, does Gundry’s position—for which he was expelled from the Evangelical Theological Society in 1983—in fact uphold inerrancy as defined by the Article 13 of the Chicago Statement (as Gundry argued)?

Allert concludes that what the Bible teaches about inspiration neither mandates a particular theory of inspiration, nor mandates inerrancy as it is commonly understood. Instead, appreciation for the formation of the canon requires a different emphasis: namely, the affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration not only of the biblical authors (and books) but also of the Catholic bishops who collected these books into a biblical canon. Writing as an evangelical, Allert challenges his fellow evangelicals to recognize that inspiration cannot do without the Church; the Bible cannot stand alone.

A somewhat different position is taken by Stephen Chapman, whose work advances Brevard Childs’s project of canonical interpretation against the criticisms of such notable evangelical scholars as Carl Henry. Chapman argues that inspiration should be primarily associated not with the human authors (or editors) but with God’s providential guidance of the canonical process, and therefore with the canonical text of Scripture.⁴⁴ Chapman recognizes the risk that a canonical focus will weaken the ability of the Bible to stand over against the traditions of the Church. He suggests that the Bible’s uniquely authoritative status can be and should be maintained by applying inspiration to the canonical text, rather than to the authors and editors. Although he grants that Childs’s approach values ecclesiology and tradition, he shows that Childs does this without undermining the preeminence of biblical authority.

Chapman includes a lengthy discussion of Carl Henry’s theology of biblical inspiration and inerrancy. Focusing on the inspired authors and their inerrant original autographs,⁴⁵ Henry argues for the decisive role of the prophets and apostles. Comparing Henry’s position to Childs’s, Chapman observes, “The difference is that for Childs the prophetic-apostolic witness is more than simply what individual prophets and apostles originally said and wrote. Their witness

43 Allert, *High View of Scripture*, 161.

44 See Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 104–108.

45 On the original autographs and related topics, see the discussion in Roger Nicole, “The Nature of Inerrancy,” in Nicole, *Standing Forth*, 27–49.

continues to develop and deepen over time, a process reflected in the history of the biblical literature itself, until that witness is acknowledged by the community of faith to be complete."⁴⁶ The historical complexity of the formation of the biblical literature, until its recognition as canonical text, is for Chapman a good thing because it avoids liberal Protestantism's focus on individual experience (in this case of the human authors) and emphasizes instead the authority of the canonical text. History is always interpreted history; divine revelation in history includes this interpretation, and does so normatively in its canonical form. As Chapman points out, 2 Timothy 3:16 has to do with the inspiration of the biblical text, not the inspiration of its authors. Drawing on the scholarship of Peter Enns, Telford Work, and David Yeago, Chapman also argues that the incarnational analogy has value but only when seen in light of the work of the Holy Spirit—a work that takes place in the process of canonical formation through flawed human beings. Chapman concludes: "A canonical account of inspiration keeps the theological interpretation of Scripture focused where it should be—on the text."⁴⁷

In his book on the Bible's inspiration, authority, and truthfulness, Ben Witherington finds that although the Bible contains "imperfections" such as grammatical errors, nonetheless when Scripture teaches on a topic (rather than simply touching upon a topic) it is inerrant. As he puts it, "on the occasions when an author was inspired by God's Spirit to say something specific, they were guided to speak truly without the admixture of error."⁴⁸ On this view, biblical inspiration requires inerrancy when the biblical authors are deliberately making judgments of truth. In this regard Witherington finds Enns's position to be inadequate. Although Enns argues for the coherence of the whole Bible when read in light of Christ, Enns also grants the presence in the Bible of a number of contradictory claims about God and humans. By contrast, Witherington wishes to affirm the coherence, consistency, and unity of the truth claims that the biblical authors (and texts) make about God and humans. An example is whether the authors of some of the psalms intend to teach a henotheistic, rather than monotheistic, doctrine of God. Enns thinks they do, whereas Witherington suggests that when the henotheistic language of

46 Stephen B. Chapman, "Reclaiming Inspiration for the Bible," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Scott Hahn, Robin Parry, Christopher Seitz, and Al Wolters (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 167–206, at 179–180. See also Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1988).

47 Chapman, "Reclaiming Inspiration," 200. See also John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995); Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007); Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

48 Ben Witherington III, *The Living Word of God: Rethinking the Theology of the Bible* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2007), 197. See also Roger Nicole on "The Biblical Concept of Truth," in Nicole, *Standing Forth*, 133–149. As Nicole points out, "The primary New Testament emphasis is clearly on truth as conformity to reality and opposition to lies or errors" (at 142).

certain psalms is properly contextualized, such language can be shown to serve a monotheistic intention.

Even so, Witherington does not suppose that biblical inspiration and inerrancy require a modern standard of historical accuracy. He allows that 1–2 Chronicles, for example, intentionally rephrases and rearranges the earlier 1–2 Samuel. In his view, 1–2 Chronicles can take this liberty in order to make theological and homiletical points because 1–2 Chronicles presupposes that its audience knows 1–2 Samuel, which provides the historical foundation. Witherington similarly does not hold Genesis or other biblical texts to modern standards of historical precision, but he does hold these texts to “ancient standards of historical inquiry and truth telling.”⁴⁹ On these ancient standards, the author of Genesis, for example, intends to convey a historical truth about the existence of Noah and the flood. Since the Bible is inspired, this basic claim regarding Noah’s historical existence is true.

Here the distinction between what Scripture teaches and what it touches also comes into play. Witherington grants that no biblical author intends to teach natural science, so the biblical texts include erroneous cultural assumptions about things such as the rising of the sun or the age of the earth (as implied by the genealogies). But the author of Genesis does intend to affirm the historical existence of Adam and his Fall, and this affirmation is true. In accord with the standards of ancient historiography, the author of Genesis makes historical claims that “are more general and less precise than we perhaps would want to make today, but nonetheless, historical claims are being made.”⁵⁰ Even in the terms of Enns’s incarnational analogy, which Witherington critiques, Christ’s humanity did not include our fallenness, and neither must the Bible include error as regards the historical judgments that the biblical authors wish to make.

Regarding inspiration, Witherington interprets 2 Timothy 3:16 to mean that “the whole Bible is suffused with divine inspiration, while also the whole thing is composed of human words. Some of it is more directly the Word of God (for example, the oracles), some of it more indirectly, but it is always the Word of God in human words.”⁵¹ Since God is speaking through the human authors, their words can mean more than they knew, although this deeper meaning must be consistent with the literal sense of the authors’ words.⁵² Reflecting its composition within an oral culture, the Old Testament already has a high view of God’s presence in the texts of Scripture. In Mark 12:36 Jesus says that the Holy Spirit inspired David’s words in Psalm 110.⁵³ Witherington emphasizes that both the person David and

49 Witherington, *Living Word*, 39.

50 Witherington, *Living Word*, 38.

51 Witherington, *Living Word*, 36.

52 Witherington, *Living Word*, 157–158.

53 Mark 12:36.

the written text are inspired by God. Paul understands his proclamation of the gospel as “the Word of God” rather than as “the word of men.”⁵⁴ This Word of God, Paul continues, “is at work in you believers.”⁵⁵ In the same vein Witherington explores such texts as 1 Corinthians 14:36–37, Acts 1:16, Acts 4:31, Acts 6:7, Acts 12:24, Hebrews 4:12–13, 1 Peter 1:23, and 2 Peter 1:21. He gives particular attention to the theology of inspiration articulated in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, and he concludes that “Paul does not envision any Scripture that is not God-breathed.”⁵⁶

Rather than explaining how inspiration works, Paul focuses on the reality that God is speaking in the words of Scripture and that these words are the word of God, “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”⁵⁷ In order to be profitable for teaching, God’s inspired Word must be true. In Witherington’s view, we can be confident that Paul here has in view essentially the canonical Old Testament books. Witherington adds that the New Testament authors envision a progressive revelation that culminates, in a full and definitive manner, in Christ Jesus.

For Witherington, then, the written words of the Bible all are inspired by God. As to the manner of inspiration, Witherington agrees with Marshall that God does not merely dictate his words through the human authors. He corrects Marshall’s position with respect to the biblical authors’ use of quotations from Persian kings or Greek poets: in this regard, “perhaps God providentially guided the biblical author to choose material which, while not originally part of inspired Scripture, nevertheless was true, and so could be included in a sacred text like Ezra’s.”⁵⁸ Inspiration by “dictation” only accounts for certain prophetic experiences, such as God’s placing words in the mouth of Jeremiah in the context of God’s personal relationship with Jeremiah. In his careful examination of the character of biblical prophecy, Witherington distinguishes between prophetic experience, oral expression, and written corpus. His main point is that inspiration must refer to all three: “The written word is God breathed as well as the oral word, according to the author of 2 Timothy 3:16.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, the Bible does not merely contain inspired Scripture (let alone become inspired Scripture); every word of Scripture,

54 1 Thess. 2:13.

55 1 Thess. 2:13.

56 Witherington, *Living Word*, 9. See also Allen Rhea Hunt, *The Inspired Body: Paul, the Corinthians, and Divine Inspiration* (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1996). Hunt focuses on 1 Cor. 2:6–16, where Paul describes his discourse as inspired by the Spirit. He argues that for Paul the whole community is inspired. His approach builds upon Karl Olav Sandnes’s *Paul—One of the Prophets?: A Contribution to the Apostle’s Self-Understanding* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991). David Yeago underscores the importance of 1 Cor. 2:6–16 for the doctrine of inspiration; see “Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures,” 60.

57 2 Tim. 3:16.

58 Witherington, *Living Word*, 18.

59 Witherington, *Living Word*, 22.

as inspired by God, is God's Word. The Bible does not merely record or witness to revelation; God's Word in Scripture is revelation.

What about the more difficult texts of the Old Testament, such as Psalm 137's blessing of those who kill Babylonian babies? Such texts reflect truthfully the fallen human heart of the psalmist. As Witherington cautions, "moderns seem to assume that when you call something 'the word of God,' then one assumes in every passage it reflects God's character and will, rather than simply being a true revelation about some subject that God wanted us to know about, including our fallible selves."⁶⁰ Inspiration includes God's will that the human author tell the truth about the human condition. Exploring 2 Peter 1:19–21, Witherington explains that God uses the human authors to convey the truth he intends, but without overwhelming their human capacities and characteristics.

Wright's position is insufficient in Witherington's view. As we have seen, Wright focuses on God's authority exercised through Scripture, that is, on how Scripture functions in the saving economy of the triune God as an instrument of salvation rather than simply as a compendium of timeless truths. Wright also views Scripture through the lens of "story," a story that develops over time and whose meaning becomes clear only when it is completed in Christ. While agreeing with Wright's understanding of Scripture's function, Witherington argues that Wright needs to grapple more clearly with the question of Scripture's truth (which Witherington himself takes up through careful attention to genre). Unless Scripture is a "truthful instrument," it could not function for salvation in the way that Wright thinks it does.⁶¹ The truth of God's inspired Word is salvific now and forever: "God's Word is indeed so God-breathed that it has no expiration date!"⁶²

Vatican II and Biblical Inspiration

The solutions that these Protestant scholars propose have parallels in the nineteenth and twentieth-century Catholic discussions prior to 1965, as we have seen from Burtchaell's work. Burtchaell, however, makes a significant oversight by not discussing the doctrine of inspiration in the Second Vatican Council's constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum* (1965).⁶³ He does briefly quote from the debate on the floor of the Council regarding the relationship of inspiration and inerrancy.⁶⁴ In passing, he also asserts that Vatican II, like the First Vatican Council, focuses on the doctrine of revelation while touching "but lightly on the biblical question"

⁶⁰ Witherington, *Living Word*, 24.

⁶¹ Witherington, *Living Word*, 33.

⁶² Witherington, *Living Word*, 33.

⁶³ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* [The Word of God], Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (November 18, 1965), in *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, ed. Dean P. Bécharé (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ See Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 268.

and refusing “to unpuzzle the inspiration problem.”⁶⁵ What might *Dei Verbum* contribute to the theology of inspiration?

Dei Verbum teaches that the Word of God makes himself powerfully manifest in the New Testament writings, and especially in the Gospels. The Gospels arise from the preaching of the apostles and share in the apostles’ charism. As *Dei Verbum* states, “The apostles preached, as Christ had charged them to do, and then, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they and others of the apostolic age handed on to us in writing the same message they had preached, the foundation of our faith: the four-fold Gospel, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.”⁶⁶ The inspiration of the Holy Spirit ensures the Gospels’ “historicity” (*historicitatem*), their faithful teaching of “what Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation.”⁶⁷ The entirety of the New Testament was “composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁸ *Dei Verbum* regards the authors of Scripture, as well as the biblical text, as inspired by God. In support of this position *Dei Verbum* quotes 2 Timothy 3:16–17’s teaching about the inspiration and function of Scripture.

According to *Dei Verbum*, revelation proceeds progressively, culminating in Christ Jesus. But even so, the Old Testament writings are “divinely inspired” and retain “a lasting value.”⁶⁹ In the Old Testament, the sacred authors recount and explain God’s work of salvation. This work of salvation “appears as the true Word of God in the books of the Old Testament.”⁷⁰ The Old Testament writings reveal the truth about God and humanity, as well as about how God deals with humans in mercy and justice. Even in its inclusion of “imperfect and provisional” realities, the Old Testament provides “authentic divine teaching” (*veram paedagogiam divinam*). Not only has God ensured that the Old Testament writings provide “a lively sense of God” and “sublime teaching on God and . . . sound wisdom on human life,”⁷¹ but also he has ensured that the mysteries of the New Testament are “hidden in the Old.”⁷²

65 See Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 283. He quotes *Dei Verbum* once, in a footnote citation of the following sentence (without further discussion): “Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm [asserunt] should be regarded as affirmed [assertum] by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.” Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 268, n. 1; compare *Dei Verbum*, 11.

66 *Dei Verbum*, 18.

67 *Dei Verbum*, 19.

68 *Dei Verbum*, 20; compare at 11.

69 *Dei Verbum*, 14.

70 *Dei Verbum*, 14.

71 *Dei Verbum*, 15.

72 *Dei Verbum*, 16.

Dei Verbum affirms the compatibility of divine authorship and human authorship of the same texts. God does not overwhelm or negate the human author's capacities or culture. Rather, since God operates as a transcendent rather than a competitive cause, God authors Scripture in a way that allows for and requires the full operation of the human authors. God chooses the human authors, acts "in them and by them," and ensures that they write "whatever he wanted written, and no more," so that Scripture is entirely God's Word.⁷³ Like the action of grace, God's inspiration of the human authors involves their intelligent and free "full use of their powers and faculties" in writing the texts of Scripture; they are "true authors" rather than mere transmitters.⁷⁴ As *Dei Verbum* puts it (citing St. Augustine), "God speaks through men in a human fashion."⁷⁵ God expresses his meaning through human words and literary genres/conventions, which we must understand in light of the cultural context of the human authors. Quoting John Chrysostom, *Dei Verbum* praises the "marvelous *condescension*" of God in accommodating his divine truth to the limits of our human language, without thereby compromising his "truth and holiness."⁷⁶ Scripture expresses the words of God in human words that are "in every way like human language," fully human—just as the Word incarnate took on full humanity.⁷⁷

In seeking to identify the realities that God intends to teach through the inspired words of Scripture, therefore, we need to investigate what the human authors intended to affirm. *Dei Verbum* holds that where the human author, in recounting, explaining, or foretelling the economy of salvation,⁷⁸ intends to affirm something; this affirmation is also affirmed by the Holy Spirit, so that "the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures."⁷⁹ Yet the divine authorship of all Scripture requires that we cannot apprehend the meaning of Scripture solely by seeking the human authors' meaning. Rather, in order to appreciate the unified (divine) meaning of the whole Scripture, we must take "into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith."⁸⁰ Because of the divine authorship of Scripture, the ultimate interpreter of Scripture is the

73 *Dei Verbum*, 11; compare at 24.

74 *Dei Verbum*, 11.

75 *Dei Verbum*, 12.

76 *Dei Verbum*, 13.

77 *Dei Verbum*, 13.

78 *Dei Verbum*, 14.

79 *Dei Verbum*, 11. Lest the English translation imply a limitation of the scope of inerrancy, I quote the Latin: "Cum ergo omne id, quod auctores inspirati seu hagiographi asserunt, retineri debeat assertum a Spiritu sancto, inde scripturae libri veritatem, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa litteris sacris consignari voluit, firmiter, fideliter et sine errore docere profitendi sunt."

80 *Dei Verbum*, 12.

Church that carries forward, in the Holy Spirit, the apostolic mission of teaching the People of God.⁸¹

How do we know that the canonical books are the inspired ones? *Dei Verbum* states that with the Church of the apostles, the Church today “accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and the New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.”⁸² It is not the apostolic Church, let alone the Church today, that makes the books of Scripture “inspired”; rather the Church receives them because in faith the Church recognizes that the Holy Spirit has inspired them, as is attested by various New Testament passages.

Recall that for Burtchaell most of the Bible is simply “the chief record of the faith’s gestation.”⁸³ According to *Dei Verbum*’s doctrine of inspiration, by contrast, God inspires the books (and authors) of the Old Testament not simply as a record of revelation but so that the New Testament “should be hidden in the Old.” All of the Old Testament books are “caught up into the Gospel message”⁸⁴ and are “authentic divine teaching,”⁸⁵ and “the true Word of God.”⁸⁶ For Burtchaell, “inspiration is a charism that in no way interferes with a man’s methods or mind as he writes or edits, but causes that he produce a composition which, in combination with others, can serve the Church with an undeviating, or inerrant, reflection of how the faith grew from nothing to Christ.”⁸⁷ *Dei Verbum* agrees that the inspired human authors “made full use of their powers and faculties,”⁸⁸ but makes clear that the result is something more than what Burtchaell calls “a distinct selection of faith-leavings from a distinct epoch of faith-history.”⁸⁹ Rather, “since they are inspired by God and committed to writing once and for all time, they present God’s own Word in an unalterable form, and they make the voice of the Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles.”⁹⁰ They do so by teaching the truth about God and humanity, and about God’s saving work.

81 See Ignace de la Potterie, “Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the Spirit in Which It Was Written,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, vol. 1, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist, 1988), 220–266.

82 *Dei Verbum*, 11, citing John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 3:15–16.

83 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 301.

84 *Dei Verbum*, 16.

85 *Dei Verbum*, 15.

86 *Dei Verbum*, 14.

87 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 304.

88 *Dei Verbum*, 11.

89 Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories*, 303.

90 *Dei Verbum*, 21.

Dei Verbum holds that the Church, “relying on the faith of the apostolic age,” receives the canonical books “on the grounds that [*propterea quod*], written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself.”⁹¹ The inspiration of Scripture precedes the decisions—inspired though they were—of the apostolic Church. *Dei Verbum* emphasizes that God inspired not simply the Church or the community, but individual authors: “To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men” who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “consigned to writing whatever he wanted written, and no more.”⁹² God’s inspiration pertains both to the sacred writers and to the texts themselves. God is “the inspirer and author of the books of both Testaments.” The inspiration of the Holy Spirit enables the apostles faithfully to proclaim the Gospel, and this same inspiration enabled the apostles and others to hand on “to us in writing the same message they had preached,” the fourfold written Gospel.⁹³

The distinction that Franzelin makes between formal and material components of Scripture, with God as the sole source of the formal components, is not found in *Dei Verbum*. Rather, the statements of *Dei Verbum* reflect Lagrange’s view that God can employ the human authors as “instruments” without compromising their fully human authorship, because God’s transcendent causality is not competitive with human causality. As we have seen, *Dei Verbum* affirms that the human authors make “full use of their powers and capacities” and are “true authors” whose words have their intended meaning within “a determined situation and given the circumstances of [their] time and culture.”⁹⁴ *Dei Verbum* highlights the affirmations of the human authors, and states that these affirmations are also affirmed by the Holy Spirit. *Dei Verbum* instructs exegetes to seek to understand what the human authors are actually intending to affirm, in light of the genres in which they are writing and also in light of the divinely inspired unity of Scripture, which requires that we also attend to “the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith.”⁹⁵

91 *Dei Verbum*, 11, citing John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19–21; 3:15–16.

92 *Dei Verbum*, 11; compare at 20.

93 *Dei Verbum*, 18; compare at 7–8.

94 *Dei Verbum*, 11–12.

95 *Dei Verbum*, 12. For contemporary historical-critical understanding of the composition of the Old Testament texts, see Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007). Van der Toorn comments that “the modern notion of authorship” is not “adequate to describe the realities of literary creation in antiquity. Books have authors, but the writers of texts of the ancient Near East are, as a rule, anonymous. . . . The authors of antiquity were artisans rather than artists. Our preoccupation with originality would have been foreign to them, nor did they care about intellectual property. What they admired was skill, technical mastery. The texts they produced were often coproductions—if not by a collective of scribes, then by means of a series of scribal redactions. In most cases, then, the quest for an individual author is pointless. The making of the Hebrew Bible is owed to the scribal class

In short, although it leaves many problems unresolved, *Dei Verbum* defends a number of crucial principles regarding the doctrine of biblical inspiration, among them the following. First, inspiration has to do with both the human authors and the texts of Scripture: the charism of the human authors cannot be left out. Second, inspiration does not negate the limitations and cultural embeddedness of the human authors, but rather works in and through their graced intelligence and freedom. Third, the books of Scripture teach the truth about God and humanity in the economy of salvation. Fourth, the whole Scripture is inspired, although the Gospels have preeminence. Fifth, the inspiration of Scripture belongs within the context of divine revelation, so that Scripture is “constantly actualized in the Church”⁹⁶ as the Holy Spirit leads humans to salvation.⁹⁷

Not surprisingly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) draws its teaching on the inspiration and truth of Scripture almost entirely from *Dei Verbum*. The Catechism affirms that “God inspired the human authors of the sacred books” and that these books “teach the truth.”⁹⁸ Scripture has its purpose within the economy

rather than a limited number of individuals. We should not be looking for authors but seeking to penetrate the mind-set of the scribal elite” (at 5). He goes on to add that interest in individual authors is itself distinctively modern: “Until the dawn of modernity, neither theologians nor lay people had any great interest in the individual authors who wrote down the Bible texts. The Bible was the Word of God; whichever humans had been involved in its making were looked upon as mere channels for a heavenly voice. . . . This lasted until the Enlightenment, when the dogma of the literal inspiration of the Bible was eroded. Only when the Bible was no longer literally the Word of God did its human authors gain in importance” (at 29). Notably, van der Toorn reduces the composition of Scripture to *techne*, leaving out entirely the role of practical wisdom (*praxis*, virtue), let alone prayerful contemplation or *theoria*. Far from envisioning the human authors as “mere channels for a heavenly voice,” pre-modern theologians viewed them as holy people whom God had called into relationship with him, a relationship that provides the context for inspiration (of authors and texts in the compositional process). It is this insight—ultimately into the irreducibility of Scripture to extrinsic technological production—that *Dei Verbum* preserves through its refusal to break the link between what the human authors affirm and what the Holy Spirit affirms.

96 *Dei Verbum*, 8.

97 For examination of *Dei Verbum* with particular attention to the integration of the themes of *Dei Verbum*, 11–12, see Francis Martin, *Sacred Scripture: The Disclosure of the Word* (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2006), 227–247. For background to the text of *Dei Verbum* see Joseph Ratzinger, “Origin and Background,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 3, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969). See also Jared Wicks’s series of studies on Pieter Smulders and *Dei Verbum*, especially “Pieter Smulders and *Dei Verbum*: 3. Developing the Understanding of Revelation to Israel, 1962–1963,” *Gregorianum* 83 (2002): 225–267; “Pieter Smulders and *Dei Verbum*: 4. Assessing the Mixed Commission’s 1962 Work on Scripture/Tradition and Biblical Inspiration,” *Gregorianum* 85 (2004): 242–277; “Pieter Smulders and *Dei Verbum*: 5. A Critical Reception of the Schema *De revelatione* of the Mixed Commission (1963),” *Gregorianum* 86 (2005): 92–134. Robert J. Hill summarizes *Dei Verbum*’s position on inspiration in Hill, “Reading Symbols, and Writing Words: A Model for Biblical Inspiration,” *New Blackfriars* 89 (2008): 22–38, at 26.

98 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), nos. 106–107.

of salvation, in which Christ and the Holy Spirit heal and elevate us and lead us to the Father. Without faith, therefore, the Scriptures “remain a dead letter.”⁹⁹ Interpreting Scripture requires reading it in the same Spirit by whom Scripture was inspired.¹⁰⁰ Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are inspired, and “the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.”¹⁰¹ These points are all found in *Dei Verbum*, although the Catechism places a greater emphasis on spiritual exegesis.

Attention to the doctrine of inspiration is absent from the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (1993), as is appreciation for spiritual exegesis. The topic of God’s inspiration of Scripture comes up most significantly in the document’s discussion of “fundamentalism.” The Biblical Commission affirms that Scripture is inspired and inerrant, but it argues that fundamentalism falls into a dictation theory of inspiration. In general, however, the document adheres to its promise not “to adopt a position on all the questions which arise with respect to the Bible—such as, for example, the theology of inspiration.”¹⁰² The document instead focuses on historical-critical, literary, sociological, and liberationist methods of biblical interpretation, as well as hermeneutical questions and other issues.

In his April 23, 1993, address on the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” Pope John Paul II urges that the biblical texts be understood “in their historical, cultural context.” He criticizes the view that “since God is the absolute Being, each of his words has an absolute value, independent of all the conditions of human language.”¹⁰³ On the contrary, in expressing himself in human language, God accepts its limitations, including historical and cultural ones. God can do this while maintaining the truth of his biblical word because “the God of the Bible is not an absolute Being who, crushing everything he touches, would suppress all differences and nuances.”¹⁰⁴ But Pope John Paul quotes verbatim, with approval, Pope Pius XII’s statement in his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943): “Just as the substantial Word of God became like men in every respect except sin, so too the words of God, expressed in human languages, became like human language in every respect except error.”¹⁰⁵ Pope John Paul warns, too, against focusing solely on the human dimensions of the biblical texts:

99 *Catechism*, no. 108.

100 *Catechism*, no. 111.

101 *Catechism*, no. 129.

102 Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (Boston: St. Paul, 1993), 34.

103 Pope John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission (April 23, 1993), 8, in *Scripture Documents*, 170–180.

104 John Paul II, Address (April 23, 1993), 8.

105 John Paul II, Address (April 23, 1993), 6.

the exegete needs faith in order to perceive God's Word and thus to perceive the true nature and meaning of the Scriptures.

In his monograph on the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document, the Catholic exegete and theologian Peter Williamson touches briefly on inspiration at various points. Citing Pope John Paul's address, Williamson observes that "although all Scripture and all of its parts are inspired, not every verse or paragraph is of equal theological value," because (for example) some sentences express theological truths explicitly whereas others do not.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the human authors' writings are not exempt from the influence of the historical circumstances in which they were written. For the Biblical Commission, as Williamson says, divine inspiration/authorship does not override the limited capacities and resources of the human authors, including for instance faulty memory and mistaken historical and scientific opinions. As Williamson puts it, "neither the human authors nor the divine Author intended absolute precision in historical details or in scientific matters."¹⁰⁷

Williamson addresses Pope John Paul's citation of the passage from *Divino Afflante Spiritu* which takes a high view of inerrancy. Noting that the problem with the incarnational analogy is its lack of specificity with respect to how Scripture reflects divine perfections and human limitations, Williamson concludes that the Biblical Commission's document should have included "more serious reflection on the nature of Scripture [e.g. inspiration] and its implications for interpretation."¹⁰⁸ Williamson also discusses the position of a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Lothar Ruppert, who along with some others argued during the composition of the document that because of the complexity of the process of redaction, "the charism of inspiration and the literal sense should be considered to belong to the biblical text itself, rather than to the intention of an inspired author."¹⁰⁹ Williamson suggests that the Church will continue to affirm the inspiration of the biblical authors but, following the lead of historical-critical exegesis,

106 Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001), 36.

107 Williamson, *Catholic Principles*, 37.

108 Williamson, *Catholic Principles*, 40; compare at 331. For criticism of the document along these lines, see especially Avery Dulles, S.J., "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: A Theological Appraisal," in *Kirche sein: Nachkonziliare Theologie im Dienst der Kirchenreform* [His Church: Conciliar Theology in the Service of Church Reform] (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 29–37.

109 Williamson, *Catholic Principles*, 166, n. 9. See Lothar Ruppert, "Kommentierende Einführung in das Dokument," [Introductory Commentary on the Document], in *Die Interpretation der Bibel in der Kirche: das Dokument der Päpstlichen Bibelkommission vom 23.4.1993 mit einer kommentierenden Einführung von Lothar Ruppert und einer Würdigung durch Hans-Josef Klauck* [(The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: The Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of April 23, 1993, with a Commentary by Lothar Ruppert and an Assessment by Hans-Josef Klauck] (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995), 9–61.

may in the future accentuate the inspiration of the text rather than the inspiration of the authors and editors.¹¹⁰

Whither the Catholic Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration?

Since Vatican II, the great majority of Catholic exegetes and theologians have ignored the doctrine of inspiration. Two notable exceptions are Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy and Scott Hahn.¹¹¹

Farkasfalvy bemoans the precipitous decline of interest in the doctrine of inspiration after Vatican II. In accord with Burtchaell's findings, Farkasfalvy observes that "right before the Council, the question of biblical inspiration was perceived by both dogmatic and biblical theologians as a question of great importance and full of challenge."¹¹² Before the Council, he notes, the dominant interpreters of biblical inspiration were the Jesuits Augustin Bea and Sebastian Tromp and the Dominicans Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit. The contributions to this topic offered by the *nouvelle théologie's* recovery of the Fathers came too late to be absorbed by the Council, as did the work of Luis Alonso-Schökel. The result, Farkasfalvy thinks, was that *Dei Verbum* failed to attain the standard of constructive thinking with respect to inspiration that other documents, such as those on the Church, the liturgy, and ecumenism, achieved in their domains.¹¹³

In response to this situation, Farkasfalvy calls for scholarly monographs on the theologies of inspiration offered by the Fathers, parallel to his own dissertation on biblical inspiration according to Bernard of Clairvaux. He points for instance to the contribution that could be made by a study of Origen's introduction to his *Commentary on John*, where Origen reflects at length on the meaning of "euangelion."¹¹⁴ Farkasfalvy explains that the Fathers' understanding of biblical inspiration has two aspects: first, the charism of the inspired author whose mind is illumined to understand the realities about which he writes (and whose interpreter

110 On this point see also Hill, "Reading Symbols," 35.

111 For another Catholic approach, see Robert Hill, "Reading Symbols." Hill summarizes his position as follows: "With biblical inspiration, therefore, the writer is inspired by a higher level (Holy Spirit) to respond to symbols of divine disclosure" (at 38). Hill is indebted to Avery Dulles, for his theology of revelation, and to Paul Ricoeur for his theology of symbol. Hill also mentions his indebtedness to T. A. Hoffman, "Inspiration, Normativeness, Canonicity, and the Unique Sacred Character of the Bible," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 447–469. Hoffman explores what the Bible means when it depicts human beings as animated by the Spirit of Christ.

112 Denis Farkasfalvy, "How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration?," *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006): 231–254, at 231. For context see Anthony Dupont and Karim Schelkens, "Scopuli Vitandi: The Historical-Critical Exegesis Controversy between the Lateran and the Biblicum (1960–1961)," *Bijdragen, International Journal in Philosophy and Theology* 69 (2008): 18–51.

113 For this view see also Denis Farkasfalvy, "Inspiration and Interpretation," in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 78–100.

114 See Farkasfalvy, "How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration," 248.

must therefore be enlightened by faith); second, “the structure of the inspired text in which the literal sense veils and reveals a deeper sense of doctrinal, moral, and eschatological dimensions.”¹¹⁵

The first aspect expresses the principle of mediation in God’s revelation to his people: he reveals himself through the inspired words and deeds of chosen persons, leaders of the people of God. Indebted to Rahner, however, Farkasfalvy suggests that the doctrine of inspiration may be equally applicable “to collectivities of concrete historical human beings, who, in the same process by which the Church came about, played their role of leadership and mediation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, bringing the memory of prophetic and apostolic preaching into written forms in the way God wanted these to be recorded in his Church’s sacred books.”¹¹⁶ From this perspective, the Scriptures are both a record of God’s history with his people and a prime exemplar (in their composition and development) of that historical encounter.¹¹⁷ Within that history, moreover, the Scriptures function to advance God’s history with his people by mediating “(analogously) inspired encounters with God within the Church, by both communities and individual believers.”¹¹⁸ Emphasizing the social character of human existence and of the life of grace, Farkasfalvy seeks to extend our conception of inspired prophets and apostles: “God’s self-disclosure constitutes ‘prophets and apostles’—charismatically gifted human beings whose ministry transmits the knowledge of God in the world. . . . The ‘prophets’ mean those who anticipate his word and presence; the ‘apostles’ mean in a wider sense all those who extend his mediating role until the end of times.”¹¹⁹

In shifting inspiration away from the individual authors and toward the ecclesial community (without thereby negating the role of the individual authors),¹²⁰

115 Farkasfalvy, “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration,” 248. Regarding the human authors of Scripture, Farkasfalvy adds that “there are ample indications that, in their own way, the Church Fathers saw that the scriptural documents were depositories of traditions held in firm possession by a collectivity and also were the product of a plurality of authors” (at 242). He also thinks that “the conceptual differentiation between ‘inspired authors’ (subjective inspiration) and ‘inspired texts’ would have immensely helped the work of the conciliar subcommittee” (at 242–243).

116 Farkasfalvy, “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration,” 249.

117 Farkasfalvy explains, “Jesus and his apostles spoke and acted ‘in fulfillment of the Scriptures,’ the prophetic Word accumulated, distilled, and redacted into sacred literature through the special history that prepared the coming of the Incarnate Word. By their ministry, Jesus and his apostles enlightened the believers about the inspired character of the written records of Israel’s salvation history. In this sense the Christian canonicity of the Old Testament, although ultimately also ‘prophetic’ (that is, based on the tradition of Israel), is ‘apostolic’ (that is, its guarantee and credibility are received from their apostolic attestation).” “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration,” 251–52.

118 Farkasfalvy, “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration,” 249.

119 Farkasfalvy, “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration,” 251.

120 Commenting on the development of historical-critical biblical scholarship since the 1960s,

Farkasfalvy has in view the way that the Church doctrinally and liturgically mediates God's gracious gifting. The inspiration of the Scriptures enables the Scriptures to mediate God's outpouring of himself. This outpouring should not primarily be conceived in the propositional terms of "inerrancy," but rather should be primarily conceived as the quasi-sacramental "presence of a spiritual fullness in the biblical text, a capability to reveal not only truths but ultimately the One who said 'I am the Truth.'"¹²¹ Inspiration ensures that in Scripture we encounter not simply historical facts guaranteed by the Holy Spirit, but the inexhaustibly rich tri-personal God who cannot be known simply by knowing historical facts. This vision of inspiration is Trinitarian: the Father authors the biblical drama, the Son is its central protagonist, and the Holy Spirit guides the biblical authors and readers to a personal encounter in faith with the realities of the drama, which the letter of the text can only partially reveal.¹²²

Farkasfalvy defends the inspiration of all the words of Scripture, but he emphasizes that divine "authorship" must be understood analogously:¹²³ God

Farkasfalvy states, "While the Council's theologians wrestled with their respective schemes of linking human and divine authorship, biblical scholars began to leave behind the concept of a biblical author (the 'hagiographus' of the Council's text) as an individual and adopted various models of 'collective authorship' or theories of multiple authorship, as has been required by the emergence of source theories, the modern assumptions about strains of traditions, 'emerging thoughts,' and developing documents." "How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration," 241. Indeed, *Dei Verbum* itself exemplifies such "collective authorship" and redaction history. For many biblical texts, Farkasfalvy envisions "a chain of authors and redactors working in dialogue with a community of believers and directed by providential guidance to an ultimate and final redaction, working also under inspiration, so that the process would indeed produce a fully inspired text." "How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration," 242. See also Hill, "Reading Symbols, and Writing Words," 27.

121 Farkasfalvy, "How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration," 249.

122 From a Lutheran perspective, David P. Scaer similarly emphasizes the role of Christ and the Father in the inspiration of Scripture; see "Biblical Inspiration in Trinitarian Perspective," *Pro Ecclesia* 14 (2005): 143–160. In the same vein see Jenson, "Second Thought about Inspiration," 396–398, which focuses attention on the *Logos*.

123 Farkasfalvy criticizes *Dei Verbum* for failing to include "the focal issue of Rahner's book on inspiration, the distinction between 'author' and 'originator,'" with the result that "the question of God's transcendental authorship—and thus the fact that human and divine roles in inspiration can both be called 'authorship' only in an analogous sense—receives no attention. Instead, the document concentrates on the question of how to conceive a linkage between the two authors, one human, the other divine. God exercises his 'authorship' as he 'puts together (*confecit*)' the inspired books through selecting human beings through whom and in whom he acts (*Ipso in illis et per illos agente*). In other words, from the concept 'Deus auctor scripturarum' the document jumps to a concept of *double authorship*, divine and human, which it then promptly applies to all scriptural texts." "How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration," 237. In a footnote, Farkasfalvy points to the significance of Alonso-Schökel, along with Alonso-Schökel's student and translator Francis Martin, for rethinking the concept "Deus auctor scripturarum." Farkasfalvy goes on to extend his criticism: "The conciliar text fails to deal with the transcendence of the divine author. One does not see how to avoid a false conclusion that in the process of divine inspiration, the human being's consciousness sets limits to the divine meaning. Whatever the author does not intend consciously cannot be truly in any form or shape

providentially ensures that the biblical books, as a whole and in their parts, are his Word, and in this sense God makes no errors. But God does allow the human authors, as must be expected from truly human writing, to make grammatical errors, to lack eloquence, and so forth—deficiencies that God certainly does not possess but that God condescends to employ. Farkasfalvy thus argues that *Dei Verbum's* teaching on inerrancy needs to be revised in order to make it less propositional and more sacramental. Inerrancy would be better understood, he suggests, along the following lines: “By its inspired character each part of the Bible offers a path to Christ who is that Truth that God offered mankind for the sake of salvation.”¹²⁴ He adds that inspiration and inerrancy ensure not super-human propositional accuracy but rather our access, through each and every part of Scripture, to the divine realities that constitute our salvation: “This fullness of meaning or ‘spiritual sense’ that the Church Fathers affirmed to be accessible through each and every part of Scripture is not a collection of propositions in one-to-one correspondence with the individual grammatical units of the biblical text, but the ultimate sense of the whole, in which the unity, sacredness, relevance, and sanctifying force of the Bible lies.”¹²⁵ We have this access to God’s inspired and inerrant Word when we read it in faith, in the same Spirit in which it was written.

Another recent article on inspiration by Farkasfalvy deserves mention. In “Biblical Foundations for a Theology of Inspiration,” he first explores the relationship between the first Christians’ understanding of Israel’s Scriptures and their faith in Christ. The first Christians claimed the Scriptures of Israel (not yet a canon) as their own because Christ has fulfilled the covenants and prophecies recorded in Israel’s Scriptures. According to the New Testament writings, Israel’s Scriptures are God’s authoritative Word. The Gospels carefully attach themselves to the apostolic preaching. Other New Testament writings connect themselves to the apostles Peter, Paul, or John while in fact having been written after the deaths of these apostles: this practice parallels the attribution of large parts of the Old Testament to Moses, David, and Solomon, and it signals that the pseudepigraphic

a part of the authentic meaning of the text. Moreover one remains baffled by such a narrow ‘must’ imposed on the reader to reconstruct the human author’s intention in its original setting. Such a reconstruction is often not even possible or is of no central concern for the divinely intended meaning of a text. For the divine author’s intention does not appear only in the context of a biblical book’s historical setting, but also in its canonical context. In fact, there is much content in the biblical text of which the human author, according to his historically limited perspective, remains partially or fully unaware. . . . Moreover, an inspiration theory that exalts the importance of the author’s state of mind at the expense of the meaning of the text, fleshed out in its literary and grammatical properties, does not reflect the Church’s exegetical practice and tradition.” “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration,” 239–240.

124 Farkasfalvy, “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration,” 252; compare at 244–246, where he discusses the debate over inerrancy during the drafting of *Dei Verbum*.

125 Farkasfalvy, “How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration,” 253.

writing has a legitimate claim to participate in the charism of the prophets and apostles.

In Farkasfalvy's view, both 2 Timothy and 2 Peter are pseudepigraphic. Perhaps as a result, these two books provide the most help for the doctrine of inspiration. 2 Timothy 3:16 identifies every scriptural text as divinely inspired and useful for teaching. 2 Peter 1:21 identifies God as the source or inspirer of all biblical prophecy. Indeed, Farkasfalvy suggests that the author of 2 Peter views the entire Old Testament as prophecy, since the entire Old Testament points to Christ. Whereas 2 Timothy identifies inspiration with the text, 2 Peter 1:21 locates inspiration in the inspired author, the prophet "moved by the Holy Spirit." Only interpreters who have this same Spirit can interpret the biblical text.¹²⁶

In his book *Letter and Spirit* (2005), Scott Hahn emphasizes that God's breath both creates the universe and inspires the Scriptures, so that Paul can call the Scriptures "God-breathed."¹²⁷ Quoting a lengthy passage from Augustin Bea, whose work is surveyed by Burtchaell, Hahn notes that Jesus and his disciples clearly accepted the unique authority of Scripture. This authority becomes particularly apparent in liturgical proclamation: the Scriptures "are the documents of the covenant, which is solemnly renewed in the ritual worship of God's people."¹²⁸ In the Scriptures, we discover the terms of God's covenant with us; God makes his saving power present to us through his trustworthy Word. As Hahn says, with reference to the passage from *Divino Afflante Spiritu* quoted by Pope John Paul II in his above-mentioned address, "Scripture's authority is thus an extension of Christ's own authority, and its characteristics are analogous to those of Christ himself."¹²⁹ Just as Christ is divine and human, so analogously Scripture has the Holy Spirit as its primary author and human beings as its "instrumental" authors.

Hahn points out that *Dei Verbum*, indebted to *Divino Afflante Spiritu* as well as to Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* and to the tradition of the Fathers, connects inspiration with inerrancy: "*Dei Verbum* makes clear that inspiration is not merely for the sake of an unerring text, but 'for the sake of our salvation.' Still, an unerring text 'follows' logically from the doctrine of inspiration. Divine authorship is an act of God and, as such, it precludes error."¹³⁰ Hahn observes that this

126 See Denis Farkasfalvy, "Biblical Foundations for a Theology of Inspiration," *Nova et Vetera* 4 (2006): 719–745. See also the Catholic philosopher Michael Gorman's response to this article in the same issue of *Nova et Vetera*: "Inspired Authors and Their Speech Acts: A Philosophical Commentary on the Essay by Denis Farkasfalvy," 747–759, especially Gorman's point that "taking the human intentions of the scriptural authors seriously is important for taking them seriously as authors" (at 753).

127 2 Tim. 3:16. See Scott Hahn, *Letter and Spirit: From Written Text to Living Word in the Liturgy* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 78–79.

128 Hahn, *Letter and Spirit*, 80.

129 Hahn, *Letter and Spirit*, 81.

130 Hahn, *Letter and Spirit*, 83.

understanding of Scripture's authority is a liturgical one: the saving realities announced authoritatively and truthfully in Scripture are actualized in the Church's Eucharistic liturgy.¹³¹ The inspiration and truthfulness of the Old Testament make it possible for the Church to "remember" in the liturgy God's saving work in Israel. Were the Old Testament's (inspired) truthful memory to be denied, the Church's liturgical remembering would be cut off at its roots.¹³² For Hahn, it is a profoundly liturgical and participatory sensibility, rather than the usual suspects of rationalism or rigidity, that requires Christian biblical interpretation "to preserve and even exalt the historical and literary integrity of the Old Testament," without which "Christian liturgy—which depends upon deeply historical concepts such as *anamnesis* and covenant—makes no sense at all."¹³³

Hahn's point is that if the covenantal history of the Old Testament is in error, what sense would it make to "remember" liturgically the covenant's fulfillment by the trustworthy God of the covenant?

Conclusion

I agree with Farkasfalvy that the spiritual sense sheds light on Scripture's inspiration and inerrancy, and that biblical inspiration means that Scripture plays its role fully within the mediation of God's gracious gifting in and through the people of God. Farkasfalvy also rightly argues that divine authorship must be understood analogously, a point that affects arguments about inerrancy. Despite the complexities that attend the human authorship of the biblical texts (noted by Farkasfalvy, Chapman, and others before and after *Dei Verbum*), however, the theology of Scripture cannot do without *Dei Verbum's* insistence upon the Holy Spirit's inspiration of particular human beings. Although our understanding of the charism of the prophets and apostles can be expanded in the directions Farkasfalvy indicates, the fully personal character of God's relationship with his people means that his Spirit guides not merely canonical texts (or in the canonizing Church) but also the persons who, sharing the charism of prophets and apostles, compose the texts.¹³⁴

131 See Hahn, *Letter and Spirit*, 99–100, 144, 171–172, and indeed the whole book.

132 See Hahn, *Letter and Spirit*, 165–167.

133 Hahn, *Letter and Spirit*, 165. See also Hahn's "Canon, Cult and Covenant: The Promise of Liturgical Hermeneutics," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, 207–235. For his "liturgical hermeneutics," Hahn notes a particular debt to the following: Jean Daniélou, S.J., *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1956); Oscar Cullman, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM, 1953); Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (London: Burns and Oates, 1966).

134 Consider Augustine's insistence, faced with the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew version of the Old Testament, that the Holy Spirit inspired both the authors *and* the translators: "anything in the Septuagint that is not in the Hebrew texts is something which the same Spirit preferred to say through the translators, instead of through the prophets, thus showing that the former and the latter alike were prophets." *City of God*, bk. 18, chap. 43 (New York: Penguin, 1984), 822. Augustine comments, "For the very same Spirit that was in the prophets when they uttered their messages was at work also in the seventy scholars when they

Hahn's liturgical and covenantal understanding of Scripture brings out the way in which divine inspiration of particular human beings, which Thomas Aquinas describes as "the raising of the mind" by God, avoids an individualistic or strictly propositional focus.¹³⁵

Through its inclusion of the doctrine of inspiration within the doctrine of revelation, *Dei Verbum* supports a theocentric, liturgical, and participatory understanding of Scripture.¹³⁶ From this perspective, Allert's emphasis that inspiration cannot only involve the Scriptures but must also involve the Church is clearly correct. Wright's understanding of Scripture as part of God's saving work in Israel as fulfilled by Christ and his Spirit-filled Church is also profoundly helpful, despite his skeptical view of the Church's ability to interpret Scripture. Both Allert's and Wright's positions are enriched by Hahn's understanding of how the Scriptures are properly read liturgically, and thus how their meaning and truth is inseparable from our ecclesial participation in the realities that they proclaim. Chapman's insistence upon divine providence in the unfolding of the canonical process recognizes that the messiness of human history participates in the divine wisdom which guides all things to fulfillment. Farkasfalvy's appreciation of the spiritual sense recognizes that every passage of Scripture opens up into the eschatological realities that God intends from eternity, realities which are inexhaustible in their truth and meaning. Enns's discussion of the value of the way in which the New Testament authors interpret and employ Old Testament Scriptures points in this same participatory direction, although he should also note that sustaining this kind of reading requires sacramental communion.

translated them. And the Spirit could have said something else as well, with divine authority, as if the prophet had said both things, because it was the same Spirit that said both. The Spirit could also have said the same thing in a different way, so that even though the words were not the same, the same meaning would still shine through to those who properly understood them. He could also have omitted something, or added something, so that it might be shown in this way too that the task of translation was achieved not by the servile labour of a human bond-servant of words, but by the power of God which filled and directed the mind of the translator" (at 821).

135 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [Summary of Theology], pt. 2a-2, q. 171, art. 1, reply obj. 4, in *Summa Theologica*, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947).

136 This broader context is likewise emphasized, within the Protestant discussion, by (among others) William J. Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Abraham, *Canon and Criterion: Work, Living and Active*; Yeago, "The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures"; and Koskela, "The Authority of Scripture." Koskela recognizes that it is "crucial for Christian communities of faith to designate particular persons within the church to regulate and order their interpretive judgments" (at 217). Although he holds that "it would be unwarranted simply to transpose biblical authority unambiguously to the authority of particular persons within the church," Koskela cites Dulles to show that "what is ultimately authoritative is a dynamic process of the church's reception of revelation as demonstrated in particular beliefs and practices" (at 218). See Avery Dulles, "Scripture: Recent Protestant and Catholic Views," in *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 260. See also my *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2008).

When the doctrine of inspiration spills over into the doctrine of inerrancy, how should theologians respond? Inerrancy cannot be separated from inspiration, for the simple reason that what is involved in both doctrines is the truth of Scripture (and thus Scripture's power truly to transform). Can we hold with Marshall and Witherington to a view of inerrancy that allows for some, but not many, historical and scientific errors? Should we argue, with many of the Catholic thinkers whom Burtchaell chronicles and with *Dei Verbum*, that inerrancy pertains to what the human authors intend to affirm? Does this mean that when the human authors are not making judgments of truth, the inerrancy of their writings is not affected by historical or scientific errors? Should we suppose, with Enns and Farkasfalvy, that inspiration accords with a broad range of historical and scientific error in Scripture? Given the Fathers' high view of biblical inerrancy, have Woodbridge and especially Hahn succeeded in identifying a high view of inerrancy with the power and plausibility of worshipping the God of Israel?

On the basis of an understanding of history's participation in God's eternal presence and plan, a participation that is both revealed in Scripture and characteristic of Scripture, we can affirm *Dei Verbum's* teaching (referencing 2 Timothy 3:16–17) about the truthfulness of Scripture: "we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures."¹³⁷ What this means for particular biblical texts differs, insofar as God and the human authors teach truth in biblical texts in diverse ways.¹³⁸ The diversity of these ways rules out the quest for Cartesian certitude and instead invites us to understand biblical inspiration as rooted in "the power of God"¹³⁹ in those chosen to bear witness to "the wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification."¹⁴⁰ *Dei Verbum* calls us to this liturgical path: "Hearing the Word of God with reverence, and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod assents to the words of St. John, who says: 'We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.'"¹⁴¹

137 *Dei Verbum*, 11.

138 See Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia dei*, bk. 1, q. 4, art. 1, in *On the Power of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 8–9; see also Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation," 97, 104, 107–108.

139 1 Cor. 2:5.

140 1 Cor. 2:7.

141 *Dei Verbum*, 1, citing 1 John 1:2–3.