

**Inspired Authors and Their Speech Acts:
A Philosophical Commentary on the
Essay by Denis Farkasfalvy**

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DENIS FARKASFALVY'S paper contributes to the large task of understanding the Bible in light of modern approaches. Painting with a broad brush, we can say that modernity is a challenge because the scientific modes of understanding it has given rise to are often, at least apparently, in conflict with prescientific practice and intuition, much more so than were the scientific modes of understanding characteristic of ancient and medieval times. It seems to me that the conflicts are the result of mistaking abstractions, that is, partial views, for accounts of the whole. This suggests that we need to mount up to a higher perspective from which the correct place for modern scientific modes of understanding can be seen. Thus our task is not to stifle the modern spirit but instead, patiently, to think through it, testing everything and holding fast to what is good.

Having begun with that rather grandiose remark, I intend in what follows to focus on two smaller and more concrete issues, both of which are related to Farkasfalvy's concern with Biblical inspiration. The first issue is inspiration itself and its relation to the idea that the human authors of the Bible are true authors. The second concerns the fact that the Bible contains different types of speech act: to understand inspired speech fully, we must grasp that it comes in various types, types that in turn require various responses.

But first I feel compelled to comment on the rhetorical and intellectual situation in which I find myself. A philosopher speaking among theologians is in danger of acting like a bull in a china shop. Underinformed and

overconfident, he arrives on the scene with the intention of straightening out everyone else's ideas without feeling the need to know in any detail what those ideas are. Famous philosophers have acted this part before me, but I would rather not emulate them. For that reason, you will see that I raise questions more often than I offer answers. For much the same reason, I will have little to say about the theological literature, restricting myself instead to little more than a few references to relevant discussions in analytic philosophy. Even there I will not try for anything like comprehensiveness; my goal is really only to offer a few lines of thought that might be profitably pursued by people qualified in the field of biblical interpretation.

The first issue is inspired authorship. Denis Farkasfalvy mentions the distinction between objective inspiration—the inspiration of the text itself—and subjective inspiration—the inspiration of the mind of the scriptural author. Instead of commenting on what he says *ad litteram*, I will approach things from a different perspective, but my ultimate aim will be to buttress his concern to uphold both senses of inspiration. My strategy will be to imagine why someone might hold for objective interpretation over and against subjective inspiration and then to note the unfortunate consequences of so proceeding.¹

I accept as my starting point the following two theses: (1) God is the ultimate author of Scripture and speaks through it; and (2) the human authors of Scripture are also true authors.² Next, I note that authorship is not just a matter of producing a text;³ it is a matter of producing a text with a characteristic sort of intention, whether it be the intention to communicate, the intention to command, the intention to exhort, or something else along those lines. From these remarks it follows that for every passage in Scripture there is a meaning in the mind of the divine author and also a meaning in the mind of the human author.⁴

¹ I will “imagine” such a procedure because, in accordance with the limitation announced in the previous paragraph, I will be discussing an idealized foil of my own devising—without attempting to say where in the literature that sort of viewpoint might be advocated.

² See Vatican Council II, *Dei verbum*, nos. 11–13.

³ To be sure, the ways in which the human authors of Scripture produced texts differ from the way in which God produced them. As will be mentioned below, Nicholas Wolterstorff's way of thinking about divine authorship as textual appropriation allows us, if desired, to minimize the sense in which God produces a text. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chs. 3 and 7.

⁴ It would be better to say that there is at least one meaning in the mind of the divine author and at least one meaning in the mind of the human author, but

Now, if the divine and human meanings of a given scriptural passage match up in an obvious way, all is well. But sometimes they do not. For example, if we say that the divine meaning of a certain Old Testament passage has to do with Christ and if we also say (on historical grounds) that the human author cannot possibly have been thinking of Christ, then there is going to be a considerable gap between the human and the divine meanings. To be sure, a gap of this sort need not amount to a contradiction. To shift to a slightly different example, suppose a certain Old Testament passage is talking about how God saves his servants and suppose it seems to us that the human author is thinking that God saves his servants by protecting them from physical death. If someone wants to argue that the ultimate divine meaning of the passage concerns God's saving people from hell after death, it is possible to see the latter sort of salvation as a fulfillment of the former sort in such a way that there is no head-on collision between the two meanings. But at the same time, it appears that the latter sort of salvation is not what the human author meant.

Another case, a more difficult one, arises when the divine and human meanings seem to be truly opposed. Consider the worrisome last verse of Psalm 137: It appears that the human meaning of this text is a blessing on those who kill the children of the Babylonians. One traditional understanding of the divine meaning of this text is that it is an injunction to kill off temptations before they become sins, or to kill off little sins before they become big ones. How can we avoid seeing the human and divine meanings as being quite different and even opposed? Only, it seems, by reconsidering our original views of what those meanings were, bringing one of them closer to the other. Presumably we are not going to say that God blesses infanticides, so instead we will have to say that the human author was not really talking about smashing babies and was instead talking about something else—perhaps about how to handle temptations! Here anyone with a historical sense is going to start feeling nervous. It is hard to avoid thinking that we really do have an opposition between what the human author intended and what God intended.

Cases like these suggest that we shift from attending to the human author's intention to the meaning of the humanly produced text itself. Let the human author's intention be as limited or wrongheaded as may

adverting to that additional complexity is not necessary for the argument I am making. I do not have space here to argue against the view that authors' intentions are unknowable or irrelevant to textual interpretation. Suffice it to say that I am sympathetic to the line of thought found in Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*, especially ch. 11.

be; the real point of biblical inspiration, one might argue, is that the *text* is inspired. As long as there is no gap, or not too much of one, between the divine meaning and the *text's* meaning, it does not matter whether there is a gap between the divine meaning and the human *author's* meaning. Once this point has been accepted, it is fairly short work to argue that, in the overall context of the Bible, references to salvation have to do with the afterlife or that, in the overall context of the Bible, references to babies smashed on rocks are really discussions of how Christ helps us conquer sin. The fact is that texts are a lot more flexible than authors.

Now of course this shift makes sense only if there can be a gap between the human author's meaning and the text's meaning, but defending the possibility of such a gap is not so hard. Languages have a common social reality that is independent of individual language-users, which allows texts to have meanings that diverge from, or even oppose, what their human authors intended to convey. Suppose we are talking about Avicenna and suppose I suggest that he was influenced by Anselm, and you respond, "Impossible! Augustine was only a few years old when Avicenna died!" Clearly what you are intending to communicate is that *Anselm* was only a few years old then—your saying "Augustine" is just a slip of the tongue, so much so that I might not even notice it. But your *sentence*, the text you produced, did refer to Augustine. Exploiting this sort of fact, one can say that a biblical text has a meaning independent of what was in the mind of the human author who created it.

I noted above that texts are more flexible than authors, and perhaps one might fear that they are *too* flexible. Without controls, it becomes all too easy to make problems go away. Thus the Pontifical Biblical Commission, in its "Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," warned against straying too far from the meanings in the minds of human authors:

It does not follow from this that we can attribute to a biblical text whatever meaning we like, interpreting it in a wholly subjective way. On the contrary, one must reject as unauthentic every interpretation alien to the meaning expressed by the human authors in their written text. To admit the possibility of such alien meanings would be equivalent to cutting off the biblical message from its root, which is the word of God in its historical communication; it would also mean opening the door to interpretations of a wildly subjective nature.⁵

The upshot is that there are serious limits to the usefulness of shifting from intention to text in order to explain a problematic passage. The more

⁵ *Origins* 23 (1994): 512.

objectionable the authorial intention seems to be, the more one will want to assign to the text a meaning alien to that intention; but the more alien the proposed textual meaning is, the more questionable it becomes to assign it. In short, the greater the need to shift to textual meaning, the less legitimate it is to do so.

Be that as it may, I would like to raise a different sort of concern about focusing on the text as opposed to the human author's intention. It is a cliché to mock the dove-perched-on-the-shoulder theory of inspiration, and rightly so: It would be very strange for God to write the Bible that way. If he were of a mind to dictate, why would he not just write out the book himself, the way he did for Joseph Smith?—and on much nicer stationery, too! If God is going to bother using secondary causes at all, he is going to use them in accord with their natures. But that means that if God is going to use human beings as authors, he is going to make use of, and work through, whatever it is that goes on when human beings write. But since, as we have already seen, writing is not merely producing a text but doing so with a certain sort of intention, it follows that God is going to be working through the human authors' attempts to communicate their thoughts. Taking authorship seriously means more than taking text-production seriously; it means taking authorial intention seriously.

The point should be stated more carefully. An approach to Scripture that privileges textual meaning at the expense of human authorial meaning need not altogether deny that the human authors of Scripture had authorial intentions—it need not make them into dictation machines. All that is required for this approach is that human authorial intentions be irrelevant to God's intention in authoring Scripture. Thus one could hold that God used true authors with true authorial intentions but also that he bypassed those intentions, using the authors only as scribes. God's goal was to get a certain text written; the scriptural author's reasons for writing that text, and hence his status as a true author, was accidental.

This, I suggest, is inadequate. The claim that the human authors of Scripture were true authors is not rightly understood merely as the claim that the people who wrote the books of the Bible had authorial intentions—it is also a claim that those intentions are themselves part of what God was trying to bring about and that they are somehow relevant to, and in the service of, the divine meaning of Scripture. Once *that* is said, two things happen: First, the problem of the gap between the human and the divine meaning re-emerges; second, a way of closing the gap suggests itself, as follows. If the human author's intention, and not just the text he writes, is part of God's plan for the Scriptures, then it is plausible to think

that the human author's intended meaning would include ideas specially revealed to him by God. (God also, to be sure, would inspire him to choose especially fitting words to express those ideas, but since choice of wording is itself a mental operation, the crucial point is that God inspires his mind.) This is not just the ordinary divine concurrence with all created operations, but a special act on God's part to give the scriptural authors insight into, and firm grasp of, matters ordinarily unavailable to the human mind.⁶ Such inspiration would make it possible for the human author's intended meaning to be closer to the divine meaning than we might have thought. To put the argument in a nutshell, then: (1) the worry was that there is too large a gap between the divine intention and the human intention; (2) one proposed solution was to sideline the human intention and focus instead on the gap between divine intention and the meaning of the text, the advantage being that this gap is much smaller; (3) I raised a doubt about that solution on the ground that it does not take human authorship seriously enough; and (4) I am now proposing that we bring back the human author's intention but close the gap by thinking of that intention as divinely inspired.

No one who accepts divine intervention in the first place will find subjective inspiration objectionable just because it involves divine intervention.⁷ Why swallow the camel of the Incarnation but strain at the gnat of subjective inspiration? But other, more specific objections could be adduced.

First, it might be objected that only some scriptural authors give evidence of having had visions and the like. My response is that subjective inspiration and unusual experiences need not coincide. God can give extraordinary insight without using pyrotechnics. Perhaps Luke is a good example. He is working hard to get the story right, and he need not know that God is granting him extraordinary insights.

Second, it might be objected that believing in subjective inspiration means thinking of the biblical authors as having superhuman knowledge, which in turn would undermine the claim that they are human authors. The way to answer this objection is to clarify the notion of subjective inspiration. Subjective inspiration gives rise to extraordinary insights, but not to superhuman insights; if the insights were superhuman, then human authors

⁶ Of course, care must be taken, because we do not want to fall uncritically into saying that all the biblical authors had detailed insights into the fullness of Christian revelation. This point will return below.

⁷ Arguments for the compatibility of divine intervention and modern science can be found in Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, ch. 7.

could not have them! To think that anything other than ordinary, experience-based knowledge is superhuman is to fall into the same error as that of thinking that Christ could not have had the beatific vision in his earthly sojourn because he was human—whether or not Christ had the beatific vision then, you cannot argue against it merely on the basis of his being human, because the beatific vision is a human mode of knowing.⁸ So it is not convincing to argue that the human authors of Scripture could not have had special knowledge on the grounds that then they would not have been true human authors. The sort of knowledge possessed by the scriptural authors was a human way of knowing—extraordinary, but still human.

A third objection is a more nuanced version of the second. Let it be granted that inspired authors are not working on a superhuman level; still it seems mistaken to think of them as so thoroughly lifted out of their historical and cultural contexts. To put the point sharply, isn't it crazy to say that Moses and the prophets were not really Jews? Doesn't that undercut the whole idea that revelation unfolds over a long period of time?

This last objection is the really good one. I have argued, on essentially philosophical grounds, that taking the human intentions of the scriptural authors seriously is important for taking them seriously as authors, and I have suggested, in a more theological vein, that this pushes us to acknowledge subjective inspiration. But we want that inspiration to be consistent with the historical embeddedness of the human authors. Attributing to them a degree of knowledge that makes them more or less incapable of living as men of their times goes too far—it does not make the biblical authors non-human, strictly speaking, but it isolates them too far from their historical settings and communities.⁹ As an additional point, if their historical situation does not shape their knowledge at all, then there are too few controls on interpreting what they wrote.

I do not think any a priori formula is available. We need to hold that the human authors of Scripture had extra insight but that they were still

⁸ Scriptural inspiration and Christ's knowledge are treated in parallel by Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 54. She appears to be making the type of mistake I am warning against here, but her remarks are somewhat casual, so it is hard to be sure.

⁹ Does accepting this claim require us also to accept, in accordance with a parallelism noted above, that Christ cannot have had the beatific vision in his earthly sojourn? It does not, because Christ's salvific role is so different from that of a scriptural author that the issue cannot be settled in that way. For a look at how medieval authors understood the connection between Christ's "job description" and what we ought to think about his knowledge, see Marilyn McCord Adams, *What Kind of Human Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1999).

somewhat in the dark. We need to say that the inspired human meaning falls short of the presumed divine meaning;¹⁰ we also need to say that the two meanings are close enough that there are no contradictions or problematic gaps. But each case has to be decided on an individual basis. The idea of subjective inspiration will license a certain boldness in attributing insights and intentions to the human authors; the idea that those authors were men of their times, as best we can understand those times through the historical sciences, will temper that boldness. To return to an example given above, we might hold that Old Testament passages that talk about God's salvation from death are, in the first instance, just about protection from ordinary death, but we might also note that the texts can bear a larger meaning. The idea of subjective inspiration will allow us to suppose that the human authors might have had some version of that larger meaning in mind, but our historical sense will keep us from attributing to them a full and explicit grasp of the Church's teaching on salvation. To put the point in a somewhat Newmanesque fashion, then, we will hold that in the minds of the Old Testament authors there are seedlings that will grow into large trees in the minds of later readers.

There are, obviously, a large number of issues that I have not addressed. One of them is whether we should restrict inspiration to only some aspects of the Bible—for example, whether we should feel free to say that the human authors' ideas on astronomy or the details of military history are not inspired and can therefore safely be judged to be contrary to whatever God might intend to communicate on those topics. I raise this question only to set it aside.

Another important issue that can only be mentioned here concerns the unity of Scripture. If we focus on authorial intention and subjective

¹⁰ I say *presumed* divine meaning to acknowledge the fact that, throughout, I have been proceeding as if we already knew the divine intention identified with the textual meaning. It is a presupposition of my discussion that we can, at least to some extent, know that intention apart from our knowledge of the humanly intended meaning—at the very least, we can thus know what the divine intention *could not* be—because otherwise there could not be any question of an apparent gap between them. But limitations of space prevent me from explaining how we know the divine meaning in a way that is both tied up with, yet not utterly dependent on, our knowledge of the human meaning. I will say only that I find helpful the approach found in Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, ch. 12, and that found in Jorge J. E. Gracia, *How Can We Know What God Means?* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), ch. 6. Notwithstanding the differences between them (one thinks in terms of authorial intention while the other does not), they share the view that one must have recourse to extratextual ideas on theological issues, especially the nature of God, to guide one's interpretation.

inspiration, then since the Bible as a whole does not have a unitary human author in any straightforward sense, it looks as if the Bible as a whole will not have a humanly intended meaning. The several books of Scripture, it seems, are inspired and authoritative taken one by one, and they have meaning individually, but that is all; and indeed even that is too optimistic insofar as some biblical books appear not to have just one author in any straightforward sense. Two basic solutions suggest themselves. One is that there is not an overall human meaning, but that there is an overall divine meaning. The other is that, in addition to the overall divine meaning, there is also an overall human meaning because there is an over-arching human author or authorial committee after all, namely, the Church that selected the scriptural books for canonization.

To conclude my first topic: What I have proposed is that the view that the human authors are true authors leads to the view that they were inspired, that is, given insights or awareness beyond the grasp of ordinary human cognition. If they were not, then either (a) their communicative intentions were accidental to God's intention in authoring Scripture, or (b) it is essential to God's communicative intentions that there be huge gaps and contradictions between the Bible's human meaning and its divine meaning. The idea of subjective inspiration seems better than either of these.

Now let us turn to speech acts. Although philosophers before the twentieth century were aware that language had many uses, overall they tended to think of language almost exclusively as assertive, as something we use to say how things are: that the cat is on the mat, for example. Speech-act theory, which came to full flower among analytic philosophers in the middle of the twentieth century, is concerned with bringing out the wide variety of ways in which language can be put to use.¹¹ In what follows I want to indicate how the distinctions that speech-act theorists have drawn can be useful in understanding Scripture.

¹¹ The *locus classicus* for analytic speech-act theory is J. L. Austin's 1955 William James lectures, published as *How to Do Things With Words*, ed. Marina Sbisa and J. O. Urmson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). A leading developer of the theory is John R. Searle, and it is his terminology, as well as his taxonomy of illocutionary acts, that I will be deploying; see his *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); and also his *Mind, Language, and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), where he presents his views in light of his overall philosophy. For discussion of some precursors, see Barry Smith, "Towards a History of Speech-Act Theory," in *Speech Acts, Meanings, and Intention: Critical Approaches to the Philosophy of John R. Searle*, ed. A. Burkhardt, (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1990), 29–61.

First, let us distinguish locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act is the uttering or writing of words. Illocutionary acts, such as asserting, promising, and so on, are performed by way of performing locutionary acts. Illocutionary acts are our main focus, so I will say no more about them until the next paragraph, but it is worth noting that one can perform locutionary acts without performing illocutionary ones (for example, when one is practicing one's pronunciation) and also that one can perform illocutionary acts without performing locutionary ones (for example, when one "says" something through an ambassador).¹² Perlocutionary acts, finally, are attempts to bring about effects in the world by performing locutionary and illocutionary acts: getting someone to shut the door, for example. Hence, I can perform the locutionary act of saying "Shut the door," thereby performing the illocutionary act of ordering you to shut the door, thereby performing the perlocutionary act of getting you to shut the door.

Now let us focus on illocutionary acts. These have force and content. I can, for instance, order you to go to the store or order you to sit in a chair. These have the same force, ordering, but different contents. Likewise, I can order you to go to the store or assert that you are going to the store. These have the same content, *your going to the store*, but different forces.

Finally, and this is the main point for us here, there are different types of illocutionary acts. These types are, in a sense, broad types of illocutionary force: *assertives*, by which the speaker asserts or claims that things are, have been, or will be a certain way ("Paul is a tent-maker"); *directives*, by which the speaker tries to get someone to do something ("Please make me one large tent"); *commissives*, by which the speaker commits himself to doing something ("I will have the tent ready by Thursday"); *expressives*, by which the speaker makes known his feelings or attitudes ("I just love this tent!"); and *declaratives*, by which the speaker makes something happen ("I hereby declare you a full member of the Tent-Makers Guild of Lower Asia Minor").¹³

Now let us note first of all that theologians and philosophers, and others too, of course, are subject to the occupational hazard of paying so

¹² According to Wolterstorff, God can "speak" without producing words because he can appropriate someone else's locutionary act in order to perform his own illocutionary act; see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, esp. chs. 3 and 7; see also his "The Promise of Speech-Act Theory," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 83.

¹³ I note in passing that it is possible to perform a speech act indirectly, by performing another one: *Asserting* that the floor needs sweeping might be a way of *ordering*

much attention to assertion that they fail to notice that this is only one kind of illocutionary act. After all, assertions are—or should be!—what make up the bulk of their work. Hand-in-hand with the overemphasis on assertives is a temptation to look in Scripture for its assertives and to turn whatever is not an assertive into one. “The Word became flesh” is a nice assertion, very helpful to a theologian, as it can become part of a scriptural argument for the divinity of Christ. “Incline thy ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy” is not an assertive but a directive, a human attempt to get God to listen and lend a hand. It cannot become the premise of an argument, because it does not assert anything at all. But you can turn it into an assertive, or rather draw an assertive from it: The LORD is someone who can help the poor and needy.

I want to make it perfectly clear that I have no problem with theologians making assertions. Nor do I have a problem with finding assertions in the Bible (with due regard to context, of course). Nor in fact do I object to drawing assertives from non-assertives, as in the example just given. My point, rather, is that if we take the inspiration of the Bible seriously and if many of the passages in the Bible are not assertives, but instead speech acts of other sorts, then surely there has to be more for us to do with the non-assertives in the Bible than derive assertives from them. These non-assertives presumably have inspired status *as non-assertives*—as directives, commissives, or whatever.

Inspired assertives are, for the interpreter, relatively straightforward. They tell us things we might otherwise never know. The proper way of responding to them is by accepting as true what they assert. But what about inspired non-assertives? On this I can offer only a few speculative remarks. It will become clear that Christians have always attended to the non-assertive aspect of Scripture, but also that there is work to be done in spelling out a systematic approach to the non-assertive aspects of the Bible. It will also become clear that interpreting the Bible and using it in religious life go together. I will go through the four kinds of non-assertive speech acts in order, each time considering the case in which God addresses the speech act to us and the case in which humans address the

one's children to do their chores. Discussing this matter would add a layer of complexity without sufficient compensating advantages. Another point that cannot be developed here has to do with the fact that a large and complex text can be thought of as one large speech act that contains many embedded speech acts. It is not easy to work out the various levels in a way that respects both the text's complexity and its unity. I am grateful to Francis Martin for bringing this point to my attention.

speech act to God.¹⁴ I will say that when the non-assertives come from God to us, our task is to find and enact the correct response, where that response is something other than accepting asserted truth.¹⁵ When, by contrast, the non-assertives found in Scripture go from humans to God, our task is to adopt them for our own, that is, we should ourselves undertake to address such illocutionary acts to God, knowing (on the basis of the fact that Scripture is inspired) that this cannot fail to be a good idea.

The Bible contains many *directives that come from God to us*, although of course it is not always clear what they mean or whether they are still in force (here one thinks of Old Testament ritual laws). The response to a directive is not assent but obedience. The Bible also contains *directives that go from us to God*: “Preserve my life, O God!” The way to deal with these, I suggest, is to adopt them for our own use. We model our own activity of addressing directives to God on what is in the Bible—and in fact we can adopt the very locutionary acts found there, at least in translation. If it is really the case that *these* illocutionary acts, performed through *these* locutionary acts, were inspired by God in their utterance/inscription and canonization, then our use of them allows us, by participation you might say, to have an extraordinary and inspired way of asking God for help or otherwise addressing directives to God. Even better than talking to God, we can talk to God in a way that has been inspired by God! This explains, for example, the importance of the Psalms in the Church’s prayer.

Commissives from God to us are also to be found in the Bible, in the form of promises of salvation and the like. The way to respond to a promise is not just to assent to the fact that a promise has been made but to act on the promise in hope. *Commissives from us to God* can be adopted by us more or less as discussed in the previous paragraph on directives. In other words, we ought to commit ourselves to God in ways we see depicted in Scripture, and we can, to boot, do this in language chosen by God as especially apt.

Expressives from God to us are found in Scripture—the prophetic books are a gold mine. We respond by rejoicing in them, taking fright at them,

¹⁴ What about when humans aim them at each other (“Use a little wine for the sake of your stomach.”)? Often enough, I believe, the right stance is to treat the speaker as somehow speaking to us on God’s behalf, but I do not have time to work that out here.

¹⁵ At least ordinarily, our thus responding constitutes the accomplishing of the perlocutionary intention tied up with the divine speech act. On perlocutionary acts and the role of the Holy Spirit in their accomplishment, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts,” in Bartholomew, Greene, and Möller, *After Pentecost*, 1–49, 43–44.

and so on, as appropriate. They inspire emotions in us, and reading/hearing them correctly involves allowing this to happen in a way that cultivates appropriate attitudes toward God. *Expressives from us to God* can be adopted for our own use on the model mentioned previously: Scripture shows us appropriate emotions and gives us a model of how to express them.

Declaratives from God to us are best exemplified in the making of covenants, for example, when God declares Israel to be his people. We respond to these by hope, but also by shouldering the responsibilities they entail, making the fact of our election a ground for action. Another way to respond would be with a *declarative from us to God*. These are subordinated to the previous sort of declarative, because God always takes the initiative, but once he has done so, we can make ourselves parties to the bargain by responding with our own declaratives.

Again, I am not suggesting that no one has ever treated scriptural language in this way before. What I am doing instead is trying to show how things look if we spell it all out in a systematic way. One point especially worth mentioning is that distinguishing kinds of illocutionary force can make apparent conflicts between the human and the divine meanings go away without any need to discuss the issue of inspiration. I avoided mentioning it earlier precisely because it allows us to avoid the issue of inspiration, but here it is altogether to the point. Interpreting Scripture properly requires knowing which illocutionary acts are being performed when. Consider again the last verse of Psalm 137. It looks like a blessing, which is a kind of declarative, but perhaps it is really an expressive, a cry of anger in the outward form of a blessing. (A non-biblical example: "I'm going to kill you!" is not necessarily a threat.) If so, then that verse is nothing more worrisome than an over-the-top way of expressing anger, something akin to the use of foul language. Critical scholarship is indispensable here; speech acts are highly conventional, and knowing the conventions at work in an ancient text clearly requires historical knowledge.¹⁶

Philosophy cannot replace theology, but it can serve it. I hope that these remarks have indicated ways in which themes drawn from recent analytic philosophy can deepen and clarify issues of importance for the understanding of Scripture.¹⁷

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¹⁶ Careful distinctions must be observed even within the category of assertion; see Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, ch. 14, for interesting remarks on the illocutionary stance of biblical narrative.

¹⁷ I would like to thank William Kinsley, Jody Vaccaro Lewis, and David Williams for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank the other participants of the session in which this paper was presented. Finally, I would like to thank Teresa and Sophie Gorman for help with the proofs.