

Trinitarian Principles of Biblical Inspiration

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THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL INSPIRATION has been the subject of many learned books and papers. Yet, a subject is understood most profoundly when it is understood in light of its first principles and causes. Since the mystery of the Trinity, as the central mystery of the Christian faith, is the “source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them,”¹ this article intends to consider the nature of biblical inspiration in relation to the principal mystery of the Christian Faith, the doctrine of the Trinity. To this end, I will (1) set down some of the basic truths about the doctrine of the Trinity concerning the processions of the divine persons and then (2) their corresponding missions. One of the principal truths about the missions of the divine persons is that, when a divine person is sent, this mission is for the sake of revealing the person from whom he is sent. Since the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, I will argue that the inspiration of the Bible is appropriated to the Holy Spirit as an essential sign² of a mission of the Holy Spirit. This will involve (3) a consideration of the doctrine of appropriation in relation to the doctrine of the divine missions. Finally, (4) I shall argue from this mission of the Holy Spirit to certain properties of biblical inspiration, such as the truth of the whole of Scripture and the revelation of Jesus

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (hereafter, *CCC*), §234.

² I use the expression “essential sign” in order to communicate the essential connection between the mission of the Holy Spirit and the way in which the inspiration of Scripture signifies this mission. This will become clearer in what follows.

Christ throughout the whole of Scripture, as a consequence of the different modes of personal action involved in biblical inspiration.

The Trinitarian Processions

The Catholic Faith teaches that in the one God there exist three really distinct divine persons. Each of these persons is fully divine and identical with the divine essence but really distinct from the others on account of their real relations of origin.³ Everything in them is one when there is no opposition of relationship.⁴ This distinction of origin in God can be accounted for as follows. In God, there exist both understanding and will. It is a revealed truth that, in the divine act of understanding, there is a first person (one who conceives in the act of understanding) from whom another distinct person proceeds (one who is conceived in the act of understanding). Because the term of an intellectual procession is called a “word,” the one proceeding is appropriately called the Word.⁵ Since this intelligible procession is by way of likeness (since a concept is a likeness of the thing understood by it), the one proceeding is also called the Son, while the one from whom he proceeds is called the Father. And since following upon every intellectual act there is an act of the will, there is also a procession by way of love in God following upon the procession by way of understanding.⁶ Hence, a third divine person, really distinct in origin from the Father and the Son, is also found in God. This third person is said to be “spirated,”⁷ and is appropriately called the Holy Spirit, and also “Love,” on account of the mode of his procession. Because the Father and Son are not opposed to one another insofar as they are spirators, and since whatever is not relatively opposed in God is one, they are one principle of the Holy Spirit.⁸ In the Latin tradition, this truth is

³ CCC, §254.

⁴ Council of Florence (1442); see Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (hereafter, DS), 36th ed. (Rome: Herder, 1976), no. 1330.

⁵ John 1:1 (unless otherwise noted, all English translation of Scripture is taken from the Revised Standard Version).

⁶ This should not be taken to mean that we can demonstrate the two-fold procession in God and, hence, the Trinity of persons without recourse to revelation. But rather, this explanation should be taken as an account that renders more intelligible the revealed fact of the two-fold procession in God.

⁷ This is the name found in Scripture and tradition used to express the kind of procession that happens by way of love, owing to a certain likeness to the outward effect of breathing forth or sighing that takes place in one who experiences intense love for another.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter, ST) I, q. 36, a. 4: “pater et filius in omnibus unum sunt, in quibus non distinguit inter eos relationis oppositio.

expressed by the formula of the Creed that states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father “and the Son” (*Filioque*).

Hence, in God, we find two processions: a procession of the Word, or the Son, from the Father, and a procession of the Spirit, or Love, from the Father and the Son, as from a single principle.

The Missions of the Persons

Of the three persons of the Trinity, two, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are sent into creation. The Father is not sent because he does not proceed from another person. This sending of a divine person in such a way that he begins to exist in a new way in creation is called a mission (from the Latin word *missio*, meaning “sending”).⁹

The missions of the divine persons into creation find their archetype in the Trinitarian processions. That is, the missions are carried out in creation in such a way as to manifest the relationships existing within God before creation. This is not merely true of the divine missions, but even of God’s creative act in general. St. Thomas Aquinas laid down this fundamental theological principle beginning with his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard: “The eternal processions of the persons are the cause and reason of the whole production of creatures.”¹⁰ This principle was reiterated many times by Aquinas throughout his works and is found even more formally as

Unde, cum in hoc quod est esse principium spiritus sancti, non opponantur relative, sequitur quod pater et filius sunt unum principium spiritus sancti.” (“The Father and the Son are one in all things in which the opposition of relation does not distinguish between them. Hence, since in this thing, namely, being the principle of the Holy Spirit, they are not opposed relatively, it follows that the Father and the Son are one principle of the Holy Spirit”; unless otherwise noted, Latin quotations from Aquinas are taken from www.corpusthomaticum.org and English translations are my own.)

⁹ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 1: “Missio igitur divinae personae convenire potest, secundum quod importat ex una parte processionem originis a mittente; et secundum quod importat ex alia parte novum modum existendi in aliquo. Sicut filius dicitur esse missus a patre in mundum, secundum quod incoepit esse in mundo visibiliter per carnem assumptam, et tamen ante in mundo erat.” (“A mission can befit a divine person according as it implies, from one part, a procession of origin from the one sending; and according as it implies, from the other part, a new manner of existing in something. Just as the Son is said to be sent from the Father into the world according as he begins to be in the world visibly through the flesh he assumed, and nevertheless, he was in the world before.”)

¹⁰ *In I Sent.* d. 14, q. 1, a. 1: “Processiones personarum aeternae sunt causa et ratio totius productionis creaturarum.” This principle is not unique to St. Thomas, but is found also, for example, in St. Albert (*ibid.*, d.20, a.3).

applied to the missions of the divine persons: “Therefore, if ‘sending’ is designated as a principle of a person who is sent, thus, not just any person sends, but only that one to whom it belongs to be a principle of that person. And so the Son is sent only by the Father, while the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son.”¹¹ Consequently, the ultimate purpose of a mission is to reveal the one by whom a divine person is sent.

The Scriptures bear clear witness to the fact that the purpose of the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit is to reveal or manifest the persons who send them. Concerning the Son’s mission to reveal the Father, the Gospel of John states: “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.”¹² Later on in the same Gospel it is written:

Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father.”¹³

Again, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says: “No one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”¹⁴ Once more, Jesus says “I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world.”¹⁵

Concerning the mission of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel of John states: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”¹⁶ Later on, St. John speaks in even clearer terms: “But when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds

¹¹ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 8: “Si igitur mittens designetur ut principium personae quae mittitur, sic non quaelibet persona mittit, sed solum illa cui convenit esse principium illius personae. Et sic filius mittitur tantum a patre, spiritus sanctus autem a patre et filio.”

¹² John 1:18.

¹³ John 14:6–9.

¹⁴ Luke 10:22. See also John 15:15 and 17:26.

¹⁵ John 17:6.

¹⁶ John 14:26.

from the Father, he will bear witness to me.”¹⁷ Again, later on in the same Gospel, it states: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”¹⁸ The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums all these texts up by simply stating: “The eternal origin of the Holy Spirit is revealed in his mission in time.”¹⁹ This origin of the Holy Spirit is, of course, the Father and the Son.

This understanding of the divine missions was well known by the early fathers of the Church. St. Irenaeus wrote: “Without the Spirit, it is not possible to see the Word of God, and without the Son, one is not able to approach the Father; for the knowledge of the Father is the Son, and the knowledge of the Son of God is through the Holy Spirit.”²⁰ St. Basil the Great also confirms this view of the divine missions in his work on the Holy Spirit:

As the Father is seen in the Son, so the Son is seen in the Spirit. . . . As we speak of worship in the Son because the Son is the image of the Father, so we speak of worship in the Spirit because the Spirit is the manifestation of the divinity of the Lord. Through the light of the Spirit we behold the Son, the splendor of God’s glory; and through the Son, the very stamp of the Father, we are led to him who is the source.²¹

Aquinas expresses this doctrine concisely where he teaches that, “since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, as proceeding from the Son, who is the Truth of the Father, he inspires truth in those to whom he is sent, just as also the Son in being sent from the Father, makes the Father known.”²²

Fr. Gilles Emery sums up the doctrine of the revealing missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit in this way:

¹⁷ John 15:26.

¹⁸ John 16:13–15.

¹⁹ CCC, §244.

²⁰ St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching* 7, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 44.

²¹ *On the Holy Spirit*, ch.26, no. 64 (PG, 32:186).

²² *Super ad I Cor* 2, lec. 2 (1 Cor 2:10; Marietti no.100).

First, the mission of the Son *reveals* the Father, as the mission of the Holy Spirit manifests the Son (and in the Son, the Father himself): “Everything that is from another manifests that from which it is. Thus, the Son manifests the Father because he is from the Father. And so because the Holy Spirit is from the Son, it is proper to the Spirit to glorify the Son.”²³ This is, for St. Thomas, a central feature of the divine missions: the person who eternally proceeds from another, manifests that other.²⁴

It is important to notice here that the mission of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the *person* of the Word as such, not merely the divine nature of the Word (since this nature is common to all the persons). Therefore, since the person of the Word has both a human and divine nature, it follows that the mission of the Holy Spirit is not only to reveal the Word, but to reveal the Word precisely as incarnate: “Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.”²⁵ In the Gospel of John, we see the Spirit making known the incarnate Son of God in a visible mission to John the Baptist: “I myself did not know him; but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”²⁶ St. Thomas notes that it is fitting that a visible mission of the Spirit manifest the visible mission of the Son: “The Son of God made visible through flesh was to be manifested through the Holy Spirit in the visible form of a dove.”²⁷ He expands upon this insight in treating the visible mission of the Holy Spirit in the *Summa Theologiae*: “But to the fathers of the Old Testament, it was not fitting that there be a visible mission of the Holy Spirit, since the visible mission of the Son ought to have been accomplished prior to that of the Holy Spirit, since the Holy Spirit manifests the Son, just as the Son manifests the Father.”²⁸ The fact that the mission of the Holy Spirit is ordered to manifesting the incarnate Son will have significant consequences on the doctrine of biblical inspiration.

²³ *Super Ioan* 16, lec. 4 (John 16:14; Marietti no. 2107).

²⁴ “*Theologia* and *Dispensatio*: The Centrality of the Divine Missions in St. Thomas’s Trinitarian Theology,” *The Thomist* 74, no. 4 (2010): 539.

²⁵ 1 John 4:2.

²⁶ John 1:33–34.

²⁷ *Super Ioan* 1, lec. 14 (John 1:32; Marietti no. 270).

²⁸ ST I, q. 43, a. 7, ad 6.

The Trinitarian Missions and the Doctrine of Appropriation

When giving an account of God's action in the world, early theologians and fathers of the Church often attributed characteristics that in fact belong to the divinity as such (and hence, to all three persons equally) to one or another divine person on account of a certain likeness or fittingness. Thus, for example, the attribute of being Creator, though belonging to all three persons, was in a special way attributed to the Father, and similarly, wisdom was attributed in a special way to the Son and goodness to the Holy Spirit. For the Father is the principle of the other persons, so that being the first origin of creatures has a special affinity to the Father; and the Son proceeds from the Father by way of intelligible emanation, so that being wisdom has a special affinity to the Son; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son by way of love, whose object is the good, so that goodness has a special affinity to the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, all three persons of the Trinity are Creator, Wisdom, and Goodness. This practice is called "appropriation" (as if to indicate that what is common is somehow "made proper"), and many examples of appropriation can be found among the writings of orthodox theologians. St. Thomas defines appropriation as "the manifestation of the persons through essential attributes."²⁹ The reason for this practice of appropriation is that the essential attributes are better known to us than the personal properties and, hence, can lead the mind more effectively to those properties: "The essential attributes are more manifest to us according to reason, than the things proper to the persons, since from creatures (from which we take our knowledge) we are able to arrive with certitude to the knowledge of the essential attributes, but not to the knowledge of the personal properties."³⁰

While there is a significant likeness between mission and appropriation, it is important to see that the mission of a divine person is not merely a specific case of appropriation. The Son and the Holy Spirit are not said to be sent because they come to be in a new way that bears a special likeness to their personal properties. For example, when the gift of wisdom is conferred or increased in a soul, this is not called a mission of the Son merely because Wisdom is appropriated to the Son. Rather, sending implies not just coming in a certain way,

²⁹ *ST* I, q. 39, a. 7, corp.: "manifestatio personarum per essentialia attributa, appropriatio nominatur."

³⁰ *Ibid.*: "Essentialia vero attributa sunt nobis magis manifesta secundum rationem, quam propria personarum, quia ex creaturis, ex quibus cognitionem accipimus, possumus per certitudinem devenire in cognitionem essentialium attributorum; non autem in cognitionem personalium proprietatum."

but also being from another: “To send a divine person to someone by invisible grace signifies a new mode of indwelling of the person, and his origin from another.”³¹

Since every act of the Trinity *ad extra* (that is, any act of God having an effect terminating in creatures) is always an act of the whole Trinity and not solely of one of the persons, it follows that, each time a person is sent, all three persons of the Trinity come.³² Nevertheless, not all three persons are said to be sent. The coming is common to all three persons, but mission is proper to a person. Therefore, although any act of the Trinity *ad extra* is always an act of the whole Trinity, the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are fulfilled in different manners so that their respective missions are not redundant, but complementary. Thus, for example, the mission of the Holy Spirit, while accomplished together with the Father and the Son, will be accomplished in a different way by the Holy Spirit than by the other divine persons. St. Thomas points this out in an interesting text concerning the Paraclete. First he lays out an objection:

Because this name “Paraclete” implies an action of the Holy Spirit, therefore, in saying “another Paraclete” he seems to designate otherness of nature: for otherness in operation designates otherness in nature. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is another nature from the Son.³³

Since nature is the source of operation, it follows that a different kind of operation is the result of a different nature. St. Thomas responds:

It ought to be said that the Holy Spirit is both consoler and advocate, as is likewise the Son. That the Son is an advocate is said in 1 John 2:1: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ.” That he is a consoler is said in Isa 61:1, “The

³¹ *ST* I, q. 43, a. 5, corp.: “Mitti autem personam divinam ad aliquem per invisibilem gratiam, significat novum modum inhabitandi illius personae, et originem eius ab alia.” See also: *ST* I, q. 43, a. 1, corp.: “Missio igitur divinae personae convenire potest, secundum quod importat ex una parte processionem originis a mittente; et secundum quod importat ex alia parte novum modum existendi in aliquot.” (“A mission can befit a divine person according as it implies, from one part, a procession of origin from the one sending; and according as it implies, from the other part, a new manner of existing in something.”)

³² See John 14:23.

³³ *Super Ioan* 14, lec. 4 (John 14:16; Marietti no.1912).

Spirit of the Lord has sent me so that I might give consolation to those weeping in Sion.” Nevertheless, the Son is a consoler and advocate for a different reason than the Holy Spirit, if we accept this by way of appropriation of the persons. For Christ is said to be an advocate inasmuch as, according as he is man, he intercedes for us to the Father; while the Holy Spirit inasmuch as he makes us to ask. Again, the Holy Spirit is called a consoler inasmuch as he is formally Love; but the Son inasmuch as he is the Word. And this in two ways: both through teaching, and inasmuch as the Son himself gives the Holy Spirit, and ignites love in our hearts. In this way, therefore, the term “other” does not designate otherness of nature in the Son and the Holy Spirit, but designates another mode by which each is consoler and advocate.³⁴

This difference in mode of the divine missions shows that the mission of each person is not a mission simply of the divine essence without any indication of the distinction of persons.³⁵ Rather, the personal properties of each person remain intact through their different modes of acting in a mission. The Son acts in the mode of one who is *from the Father*, and the Holy Spirit acts in the mode of one who is *from the Father and the Son*. Emery relates the missions of the divine persons with their processions:

³⁴ Ibid. “Quia hoc quod dicitur Paraclitus, importat actionem spiritus sancti: ergo in hoc quod dixit alium Paraclitum, videtur designare alietatem naturae: nam alietas operationis designat alietatem naturae: est ergo spiritus sanctus alterius naturae a filio. Responsio. Dicendum quod spiritus sanctus est consolator et advocatus, et filius similiter. Quod enim filius sit advocatus, dicitur I Io. II, 1: advocatum habemus apud patrem Iesum Christum. Quod consolator, Is. LXI, 1: spiritus domini (...) misit me ut ponerem consolationem lugentibus Sion. Tamen alia et alia ratione est consolator et advocatus, filius et spiritus sanctus, si accipiamus per appropriationem personarum: nam Christus dicitur advocatus inquantum secundum quod homo interpellat pro nobis ad patrem; spiritus autem sanctus inquantum nos postulare facit. Item spiritus sanctus dicitur consolator inquantum est amor formaliter; filius vero inquantum est verbum. Et hoc dupliciter: quia per doctrinam, et inquantum ipse filius dat spiritum sanctum, et incendit amorem in cordibus nostris. Sic ergo ly alium non designat alietatem naturae in filio et spiritu sancto; sed designat alium modum, quo uterque est consolator et advocatus.”

³⁵ Indeed, it would seem to be improper or metaphorical speech to speak of the “sending” of an essence or a nature. One who is sent is one who acts, not just a principle by which one acts, as the name “essence,” or “nature,” would signify in its proper sense.

In his mission, the divine person is manifested; the Son and the Holy Spirit are made known by the gifts that represent them and that are appropriated to them. And when the person is thus manifested, the person is given in his personal relation. The Son is made known in his relation to the Father . . . and similarly, the Holy Spirit is made known in his relation to the Father and to the Son: he is received as the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

He concludes further on:

The recognition of the *proper* mode of acting of each divine person gives more value to the doctrine of appropriation, because appropriation of essential features rests precisely on the relative property that characterizes the distinct mode of existence and act of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By accounting for the personal dimension of the divine action, the proper mode of acting of the persons grounds the Trinitarian structure of the economy.³⁶

Thus, while the appropriation of essential attributes is not to be confused with the personal missions, still the personal missions serve as a basis for justifying the use of appropriation.

Biblical Inspiration

The utterances of the prophets in the Scripture are repeatedly referred to as the “word of the Lord” or the “word of God,” and the inspiration of the whole Bible is attributed in Scripture to God: “All scripture is inspired by God.”³⁷ But in many places, the person of the Holy Spirit is identified as the agent of inspiration: “No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”³⁸

Certainly, we can find many reasons why the inspiration of Scripture would be appropriated to the Holy Spirit. First of all, there is a special likeness to the property of the Holy Spirit in the activity of inspiration. The very word “inspiration” denotes a kind of breathing,

³⁶ Gilles Emery, “The Personal Mode of Trinitarian Action in Saint Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 69, no.1 (2005): 77.

³⁷ 2 Tim 3:16.

³⁸ 2 Pet 1:20–21. Cf., among others, Matt 22:43–44, Mark 12:36, and Acts 1:16.

which is a manner of proceeding appropriate to the Holy Spirit.³⁹ Moreover, it is appropriate to love that it prompts one to action. And so, since the gift of inspiration is not merely a gift of understanding, but also a gift prompting the receiver to speak or write, as if unable to contain himself,⁴⁰ this gift is rightly appropriated to the Holy Spirit. Finally, it is appropriate to a spirit to animate and give life, and the gift of inspiration is a vivification in the knowledge of divine things. Here, therefore, we have an instance of appropriation. As we noted above, appropriation is the attribution of some activity or quality that, although it is common to all three persons of the Trinity, is attributed to one of the persons preeminently on account of a certain likeness or fittingness. While the inspiration of Scripture is an act of the whole Trinity, it is appropriated in a special way to the Holy Spirit. Yet, it is important to ask how this appropriation of inspiration to the Holy Spirit is more profoundly rooted in a mission of the Holy Spirit.

Recall that the mission, or sending, of a divine person implies not just coming in a certain way, but also being from another. Recall also that the ultimate purpose of a mission is to reveal the one by whom a divine person is sent. When these aspects of mission are kept in mind, one can see more profoundly how biblical inspiration is rooted in a mission of the Holy Spirit. First of all, it is proper to the Holy Spirit to reveal the Truth who is the Word by making divine truth known, as St. Thomas says: “He inspires truth in those to whom he is sent.”⁴¹ Thus, the act of making divine truth known can be appropriated to the Holy Spirit precisely because it reflects the personal mode of action of the Holy Spirit: acting in such a way as to be *from the Son*, who is divine Truth, for the purpose of revealing the Son. There is even a more specific way the inspiration of the Scriptures can be attributed to the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit inspires the authors of Scripture not only to know divine truth, but also to commit it to writing so that it becomes outwardly manifest. This bears a likeness to the work of the Spirit by which the person of the Word becomes outwardly manifest in the Incarnation. This analogy governing the

³⁹ See *In I Sent.* d. 10, q. 1, a. 4, corp.

⁴⁰ We see something of this in the instance of the prophet Jeremiah, when he says: “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (Jer 20:9). The gift of inspiration goads its recipient to make God known and loved, even when this is against his initial inclinations.

⁴¹ *Super I Cor* 2, lec. 2 (1 Cor 2:10; Marietti no.100).

Scriptures was well known to the fathers of the Church and has been recently reasserted in *Dei Verbum*: “The words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.”⁴²

Note that neither the act of inspiration nor the corresponding outward manifestation of this act through preaching or writing is itself identical with the mission of the Holy Spirit. Rather, they are its proper effects, and serve to signify the mission that underlies the prophetic action of the Spirit. The inspiration of Scripture is a special case of the gift of prophecy, which is a charismatic grace for the upbuilding of the Church (*gratia gratis data*), as opposed to sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*). Yet, in special cases, this charismatic grace always comes together with sanctifying grace, as St. Thomas himself argues:

The working of miracles shows forth sanctifying grace just as does the gift of prophecy, and other charismatic gifts. Hence, in 1 Corinthians 12, charismatic gifts are named “manifestations of the Spirit.” Therefore, the Holy Spirit is said to be given to the Apostles for the sake of working miracles since sanctifying grace is given to them with a manifesting sign.⁴³

The charism of inspiration, being a proper effect of the mission of the Holy Spirit, can therefore be understood as proper to the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ This is more than mere appropriation on account of fittingness: it is an instance of appropriation essentially linked to the mission of the Holy

⁴² Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, §13 (Cf. CCC, §101).

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 43, a. 3, ad 4. “Operatio miraculorum est manifestativa gratiae gratum facientis, sicut et donum prophetiae, et quaelibet gratia gratis data. Unde I Cor. XII, gratia gratis data nominatur manifestatio spiritus. Sic igitur apostolis dicitur datus spiritus sanctus ad operationem miraculorum, quia data est eis gratia gratum faciens cum signo manifestante.”

⁴⁴ It is reasonable to hold that all the authors of Sacred Scripture received the gift of prophecy in this highest form of inspiration in the same way as the Apostles. Regardless of whether one holds that the charism of inspiration always came with sanctifying grace in the sacred human author, still one must hold that the inspiration itself is intended to be a sign of the grace of Christ, so that a mission of the Holy Spirit is always implied in inspiration. Hence, likewise, the visible missions of the Holy Spirit that were signs of the Spirit’s presence (such as the dove, the cloud or the tongues of fire) were not indications of grace in these creatures, but rather they pointed to the presence of grace in another (see *ST I*, q. 43, a. 7, ad 6).

Spirit as sign to thing signified. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, St. Thomas observes:

According to Augustine, there is a twofold voice of the Holy Spirit: One by which he speaks interiorly in the heart of man: and this voice only the saints and faithful hear. . . . There is another by which the Holy Spirit speaks in the Scriptures, or through preachers . . . and this voice even those without faith and sinners hear.⁴⁵

St. Augustine and St. Thomas see an essential connection between the inner voice of the Holy Spirit and the outward voice of the Holy Spirit, with the outward voice ultimately being founded upon the inner voice, even if not all who hear the outward voice hear the inner voice. In another place, Aquinas teaches that this mode of acting by the Holy Spirit is *proper* to the Holy Spirit:

He will speak whatever he will hear, since not only will he teach eternal things, but future ones as well. And therefore there follows: and those things which are to come, he will announce to you. . . . This is proper to the Holy Spirit, as it says in the prophet Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy." Moreover, the Apostles had the spirit of prophecy.⁴⁶

The theologian Martin Sabathé observes: "Basing himself on the Prophet Joel, Thomas goes so far as to say that the Spirit has as 'a property' to render one able to prophesy."⁴⁷ One reason why inspiration is

⁴⁵ *Super Ioan* 3, lec. 2 (John 3:8; Marietti no.453): "Secundum Augustinum, quod spiritus sancti est duplex vox. Una, qua loquitur intus in corde hominis; et hanc audiunt solum fideles et sancti: de qua dicitur in Ps. 84:9: audiam quid loquatur in me dominus deus. Alia est, qua spiritus sanctus loquitur in Scripturis, vel per praedicatores, secundum quod dicitur Matth. X, 20: non enim vos estis qui loquimini, sed spiritus sanctus qui loquitur in vobis. Et hanc audiunt etiam infideles et peccatores."

⁴⁶ *In Ioan*. 16, lec. 3 (John 16:14; Marietti no.2104): "Loquetur ergo quaecumque audiet, quia non solum docebit aeterna, sed futura; et ideo subdit: et quae ventura sunt annuntiabit vobis, quod est proprium divinitatis; Sap. VIII, 8: 'Signa et monstra scit antequam fiant;' Is. XLI, 23: 'Quae ventura sunt annuntiate nobis; et sciemus quia dii estis vos.' Hoc enim est proprium spiritus sancti; Joel II, 28: 'Effundam de spiritu meo super omnem carnem, et prophetabunt filii vestri et filiae vestrae.' Apostoli autem habuerunt spiritum prophetiae."

⁴⁷ Martin Sabathé, *La Trinité Redemtricié Dans Le Commentaire de L'Évangile de*

proper to the Holy Spirit is that it is proper to the Holy Spirit to be from the Son and to reveal the Son. The fact that the inspiration of the Scriptures is experienced as a coming of the Holy Spirit “from another” is implied in the words of Christ: “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send *in my name*, he will teach you all things.”⁴⁸ St. Thomas teaches more explicitly: “The word of God leads to Christ: for Christ himself is the natural Word of God. Moreover, every word inspired by God is a certain participated likeness of him. Therefore, since participated likeness leads into its principle, it is manifest that every word inspired by God leads to Christ.”⁴⁹ And so it is essential to biblical inspiration that it be an outward manifestation of the mission of the Holy Spirit.

Properties of Biblical Inspiration

As a consequence of the essential connection of biblical inspiration with the mission of the Holy Spirit, certain properties of biblical inspiration follow. First of all, since the purpose of the mission of a divine person is to reveal the one from whom he proceeds, and since biblical inspiration is a proper sign of the mission of the Holy Spirit, it follows that biblical inspiration is ordained to revealing the persons from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds, the Father and the Son. More specifically, biblical inspiration is ordained to revealing the Father through the Son. The revelation of the Father and the Son is not incidental to biblical inspiration, but constitutes the ultimate, formal reason for all inspiration.⁵⁰ The post-synodal exhortation *Verbum Domini* expresses this Trinitarian economy of revelation in the following passage:

Saint Jean par Thomas D'Aquin (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2011), 414: “Appuyé sur le prophète Joël, Thomas va jusqu’à dire que l’Esprit a pour ‘propre’ de rendre capable de prophétiser” (English translation is my own). The belief that it is somehow proper or appropriate to the Holy Spirit to inspire prophecy is, of course, not novel with St. Thomas. It is reflected in the ancient formulation of the creed: “I believe in the Holy Spirit . . . who has spoken through the prophets.”

⁴⁸ John 14:26 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ *Super Ioan.* 5, lec. 6 (John 5:38; Marietti no.820). “Verbum enim Dei ducit ad Christum: nam ipse Christus est naturale Dei verbum. Omne autem verbum a Deo inspiratum, est quaedam participata similitudo illius. Cum ergo omnis similitudo participata ducat in suum principium, manifestum est quod omne verbum inspiratum a Deo ducit ad Christum.”

⁵⁰ This is not to say that no statement in Scripture has any other purpose than to reveal the Father or the Son. Rather it means that, whatever else is revealed in Scripture, it is ultimately ordered to the revelation of the Father through revelation of the Son.

In the Son, “*Logos* made flesh” (cf. *Jn* 1:14), who came to accomplish the will of the one who sent him (cf. *Jn* 4:34), God, the source of revelation, reveals himself as Father and brings to completion the divine pedagogy which had previously been carried out through the words of the prophets and the wondrous deeds accomplished in creation and in the history of his people and all mankind. The revelation of God the Father culminates in the Son’s gift of the Paraclete (cf. *Jn* 14:16), the Spirit of the Father and the Son, who guides us “into all the truth” (*Jn* 16:13).⁵¹

And since it is the *person* of the Son that is revealed through inspiration (not just the divine nature), and since that person assumed a human nature at the Incarnation, it follows that the Scriptures are for the sake of revealing the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ.⁵² This agrees with the Scriptures themselves (“to him all the prophets bear witness”⁵³) and with the constant teaching of the Church (“All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and the one book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ and is fulfilled in Christ”⁵⁴). Therefore, an interpretative approach to Sacred Scripture that precludes reference to Christ is not only bound to be fruitless; it is necessarily a distortion of the true meaning and purpose of the text.

Following this logic even further, we can see why *Dei Verbum* teaches that there is an analogy between the incarnate Word and the word of God expressed in Scripture. The text is worth citing again: “The words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.”⁵⁵ When the Word was made flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, it was the Holy Spirit who was the agent revealing the Word in the flesh he assumed at the Incarnation: “The Holy Spirit

⁵¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010), §20.

⁵² Cf. 1 John 1:1–3: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and 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.”

⁵³ Acts 10:43.

⁵⁴ Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe* 2.8: (PL, 176:642). Cf. CCC, §134.

⁵⁵ *Dei Verbum*, §13. Cf. CCC, no.101.

will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”⁵⁶ The role of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation was the supreme manifestation of his mission, since it revealed the Word in the most perfect manner. So too, when the mission of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the inspiration of Scripture, the Word is once again made human in the heart of the Church.⁵⁷ Therefore, every word of Scripture is fully human and fully divine:

And so the words of Scripture, while having a single act of existence, can be said to be fully human and fully divine only when the divine intention and the human intention are directed to the same object. Nevertheless, the divine intention does this in a divine way, while the human intention does this in a human way which is completely subordinated to the divine intention. Because of these different modes of intending, the words of Scripture remain both fully divine and fully human.⁵⁸

Another property of inspired Scripture is that it must express and reveal what is true: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.”⁵⁹ The Spirit is the “Spirit of Truth,” meaning the Truth who is the second person of the blessed Trinity. Any kind of false assertion⁶⁰ in Scripture would serve to reveal neither

⁵⁶ Luke 1:35.

⁵⁷ See CCC, n.113: “According to a saying of the Fathers, Sacred Scripture is written principally in the Church’s heart rather than in documents and records, for the Church carries in her Tradition the living memorial of God’s Word, and it is the Holy Spirit who gives her the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture.”

⁵⁸ Sebastian Walshe, “A Thomistic Defense of the Traditional Understanding of the Presence of Christ in the Old Testament,” *The Aquinas Review* 14 (2007): 207. In this way, there is verified in the Scriptures what St. Thomas says is true about the sacraments: “The sacraments have a certain conformity to the [Word incarnate] in that the word is joined to a sensible sign, just as in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word of God is united to sensible flesh” (ST III, q. 60, a. 6).

⁵⁹ John 16:13.

⁶⁰ I use the expression “false assertions” here instead of “errors” to avoid ambiguity. For example, grammatical errors (departures from the conventional mode of signifying in a given language) do not necessarily involve false assertions and would therefore not be excluded from Scripture on this account. This is also the manner in which *Dei Verbum* §11 wished to express the truth of Scripture to make clear the Church’s position that the Scriptures are without error,

the Son nor the Father through the Son, but rather would lead back to the father of lies. Hence, it would be contrary to the mission of the Holy Spirit if the Scriptures he inspired signified a false assertion.⁶¹ This gives a Trinitarian basis for the teaching of *Dei Verbum*:

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers should be regarded as asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that we must acknowledge the Books of Scripture as teaching firmly, faithfully and without error the truth that God wished to be recorded in the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.⁶²

Yet, not just any truth is revealed in sacred Scripture, but the truth that breathes forth love: “The Son is not sent according to just any perfection of the understanding, but according to the kind of instruction of the understanding by which it bursts forth in the affection of love.”⁶³ Thus, St. Augustine says in *On Christian Doctrine*: “Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought.”⁶⁴ This helps to explain the rationale for the final clause of the above-cited text of *Dei Verbum*: “for the sake of our salvation.”

namely by identifying the assertions of the sacred writers with the assertions of the Holy Spirit.

⁶¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to enter in a detailed manner into the recent debates about the inerrancy of Scripture. The thrust of this article is to lay out the Trinitarian principles that may be applied to the various discussions. However, for some recent scholarship on this topic the reader may wish to consult: Scott Hahn, “For the Sake of Our Salvation: the Truth and Humility of God’s Word,” *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 21–45, and Michael Waldstein, “*Analogia Verbi*: The Truth of Scripture in Rudolph Bultmann and Raymond Brown,” *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 93–140. Also important for consideration of this topic is the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s (PBC) 2014 document *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, especially §§63–64. Another excellent contribution to the inerrancy discussion is David Bolin, “The Inerrancy of Scripture,” licentiate thesis, International Theological Institute, 2002.

⁶² *Dei Verbum*, §11.

⁶³ ST I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2: “Non igitur secundum quamlibet perfectionem intellectus mittitur filius, sed secundum talem instructionem intellectus, qua prorumpat in affectum amoris.”

⁶⁴ St. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.36, trans. J. F. Shaw, *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, 1st ser., vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 533.

In other words, since every truth asserted by the Holy Spirit begets love, so also the Sacred Scriptures inspired by the Holy Spirit are to be understood in a way that begets love and, in this way, become profitable for salvation. This is not to teach a form of restricted inerrancy or even to say that truths such as historical or philosophical truths are not asserted in sacred Scripture. But if such truths are found asserted in Scripture, it is only insofar as they are apt to promote charity. Hence, such truths are to be understood and interpreted in such a way that they promote charity.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Our conclusion is not novel to the Christian tradition. I have shown that, as a consequence of inspiration, the whole of Scripture is ordained to the revelation of the incarnate Word and that the whole of Scripture must be true. From the beginning, the Church has revered the Sacred Scripture as true in all its parts and as ordained to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Yet, if I have argued well, these perennial truths of the Faith can now be seen as properties flowing from the mission of the Holy Spirit. This sheds a new light upon these properties of inspired Scripture, since they are seen in relation to their most universal cause, the Trinitarian processions. Thus, for example, we see more distinctly why the truths revealed in Scripture must be interpreted in such a way as to build up charity, since this is a reflection of the Word spirating Love. Scripture itself reflects the inner life of God and is, by that very fact, more able to lead those who meditate upon it back to that inner life of the Trinity that is the beatitude of every rational creature. **N·V**

⁶⁵ An interesting example of this might be found in the opening chapters of Genesis. Attempts to interpret those chapters as merely scientific assertions about the origin of the universe tend to lead to inconsistent readings of the text itself. For instance, interpreting the seven days as seven revolutions of the sun around the earth does not attend to the fact that the sun is said to be created on the fourth day. Or even interpreting the seven days as seven periods of time in historical order seems problematic, since the plants (which naturally need sunlight) are also created before the sun. On the other hand, an interpretation that focuses upon truths apt to promote charity, such as the purpose for which God made each kind of thing (water and earth for plants, plants and heavenly bodies for animals, and everything else for the sake of man) makes sense of the text as it is written. This interpretive approach that focuses upon truths that promote the right order of charity assists the exegete and prevents him from imposing modern modes of expression upon the sacred authors. This may be what was intended in the PBC's *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture* when it states that "not everything in the Bible is expressed in accordance with the demands of the contemporary sciences" (§63).