
Chapter 8.8

The "Inspiration" of Scripture

It's Elements & Problems

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Primary Points

- Discussing "inspiration" is one of the most daunting theological tasks.
- Simply put, *Scripture is the faithful human recording of divine revelation.*
- The topic of "inspiration" does not involve how the *revelation* of Scripture was received, but rather, how did the human authors *write* and *record* the revelations after they had received them.
- If a biblical writer had made a mistake in what he recorded, God could have, and would have, granted another revelation, telling him of the mistake and ensuring that it was corrected.
- It is the denial that humans would be capable of recording divine revelation with sufficient accuracy to communicate what God intended that has caused the century-long debate on the issue.
- In the 20th century, there were significantly more scholarly books, articles, and debates devoted to the topic of "inspiration" than any other theological issue.
- Contrary to liberal Bible scholars, the divine authority of Scripture *does* depend on its inerrancy. Therefore, we do need an explanation for how Scripture could be inerrant even though recorded by humans.
- Packer: *concursive inspiration* means: "the [biblical] writers' . . . thinking and writing was both free and spontaneous on their part and divinely elicited and controlled."
- *Verbal plenary inspiration*: "the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration."
- The experience of an Ezekiel and Luke were quite different, and a "one-theory-fits-all" approach is far too simplistic to accurately reflect the great variety of genres we encounter in Scripture.
- The popular theory of "inspiration" depends on the idea that God directly plants thoughts in people's minds through some kind of *mental telepathy* as a form of revelation. There are no examples of this in Scripture.
- The popular theory of "inspiration" creates contradictory explanations that make it unacceptable.

A) A Rare But Simple Explanation of How We Got Scripture

Embarking on a discussion of the "inspiration" of Scripture is one of the most daunting of all theological tasks. This is true of even defining it. The simple question we are trying to answer is how did God's thoughts get recorded in writing? There are additional and related questions as well. What did God have to do in and through humans to inerrantly record divine revelation in Scripture? How can we deem Scripture as divine when human "authors" were involved in its recording?

These are the kinds of questions involved in the debate over "inspiration" and they have prompted a century of theological effort to describe something that Scripture leaves rather ambiguous. For example, what are we to understand of Paul's statement that: "**All Scripture is God-breathed**" and therefore divinely authoritative for, "**teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness**" (2 Tim 3:16)? It is understandable that thinking men, in an effort to defend the authority of Scripture, would make attempts to unpack this.

Accordingly, such attempts have been made. H. D. McDonald, in his book, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1700-1960*, lists 80 different theories of biblical "inspiration."¹ And there have certainly been more since 1960. Likewise, R. C. Sproul writes: "Of the writing of histories of the doctrine of inspiration it seems that there will be no end."² Nevertheless, there has been little consensus in that history, as William Abraham, Professor at SMU and noted expert on Christian epistemology and revelation writes:

To speak in these circumstances of there being some kind of Church doctrine of inspiration is historical nonsense. There is no more a single doctrine of inspiration than there is a single doctrine of atonement.³

Like we said: daunting. Nevertheless we are going to begin with a rather simple description of how we believe God's thoughts were recorded in writing. We have supported several of these throughout *Knowing Our God* including this book on the revelation of the Apostles.

Simply put, *Scripture is the faithful human recording of divine revelation*. The two steps can be described as follows:

- 1) God revealed information to Prophets and Apostles through obvious and rather "objective" means including physical apparitions and voices, or the more psychical means of visions. The point is, when God "spoke," those He was

speaking to knew it. And this part of the process was quite supernatural, as was the information received.

- 2) Humans recorded or wrote Scripture based on the revelation they had received, with the God-given mental equipment and natural abilities He has given humans. In rare instances, Prophets in particular virtually dictated word-for-word what God was telling them in a vision. In other instances, especially with Apostles, they simply wrote out of the supernatural knowledge they had been given.

The crucial point here is that we believe the second step in producing Scripture was rather "natural." Humans are able to communicate such revelations with sufficient accuracy to communicate God's meaning, without some sort of supernatural mental manipulation on the part of God. This is especially so because God generally intended to communicate *ideas* rather than specific words.

When God met with Moses "**face to face**" (Exod 33:11), physically appearing to his eyes and being heard with his ears, "**Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write down these words'**" (Exod 34:27), and Moses did. It is that simple. And if Moses had made a mistake in what he recorded, God could have, and would have, granted another revelation, telling him of the mistake and ensuring that Moses corrected it.

After giving Isaiah a supernatural vision, God told him, "**Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness**" (Isa 30:8; cf. Hab 2:2). There was no need for some sort of divine mental manipulation to ensure Isaiah accurately recorded what he had just seen and heard.

Likewise, when God gave Ezekiel a vision describing the temple to be built he was commanded: "**make known to them the design of the temple—its arrangement, its exits and entrances—its whole design and all its regulations and laws. Write these down before them so that they may be faithful to its design and follow all its regulations**" (Ezek 43:11). Did Ezekiel need some sort of supernatural assistance to do that? We don't think so.

Likewise, before giving the Apostle/Prophet John his visions, Jesus told him, "**Write on a scroll what you see**" (Rev 1:11, 19). And he did.

The Apostle Paul, after having Jesus personally appear to him on several occasions to give him direct divine revelation (cf. Acts 18:9-

11; 22:14-18; 23:11; 27:23-4; Gal 1:11-12; 1 Cor 11:23; 2 Cor 12:1-4; cf. section 8.3.C.4), simply wrote the Ephesian, Roman, and Philippian Christians out of the knowledge he had gained through those revelations. He did not need some sort of immediate human/divine mental telepathy or mind control to write Scripture. He already had what he needed: 1) supernatural knowledge from divine revelations; 2) the natural, human ability to accurately record and express that knowledge. And again, if the Apostle had made a mistake in what he had written, we believe God could have, and would have, reappeared to him and corrected the mistake.

In other words, there is no need for the multitude of theories of "inspiration." There isn't even a need for the word, in relation to Scripture, which, as we demonstrate later, is why the word "inspiration" does not occur in Scripture at all. Scripture is simply *the accurate human recording of divine revelation*. There was supernatural divine revelation and there was human, natural writing based on that revelation that produced Scripture. Some kind of third category which combines the two steps into a supernatural whole in which God is supernaturally manipulating and controlling the mind, and therefore the pen of the writer, is not only unnecessary for Scripture to be inerrant, but not supported in Scripture.

Accordingly, let us simplify things again and note that the topic of "inspiration" does not involve how the *revelation* of Scripture was received, but rather, specifically how did the human authors *write* and *record* the revelations after they had received them. In other words, for us, the word "inspiration" is synonymous with "writing" in the context of Scripture. It does not involve the act of revelation at all, but rather, its recording. And for that we need no theory of "inspiration" at all because the Prophets and Apostles were naturally able to faithfully record the revelations they had received.

If you have similar convictions, then you need not read on. It is, in fact, the denial that humans would be capable of recording divine revelation with sufficient faithfulness to communicate what God intended, that has caused the century-long debate on the issue, and prompted the many theories on "inspiration." And because we have found no one else who will simultaneously uphold the inerrancy of Scripture and propose that nothing supernatural was needed in the *writing* of the revelation, we will spend the next few chapters defending that view.

B) A Very Brief History of the Greatest Theological Debate of the 20th Century

In the 20th century, there were significantly more scholarly books, articles, and debates devoted to the topic of "inspiration" than any other theological issue. The nature of the "inspiration" of Scripture has been *the* subject of study for the last century. And remarkably, it still remains almost as confusing and controversial as when the whole debate began.

James Orr (1844-1912), ⁴ a revered defender of the authority of Scripture and the original editor of the influential *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, wrote in 1910 something that could be written today:

There is perhaps no subject at the present moment more difficult to write upon, and above all to write upon wisely, than this of Revelation and Inspiration. . . . The many able books which have recently been written on this subject probably help more to reveal the difficulties connected with it than to furnish a practical and satisfactory solution of these difficulties. ⁵

Most scholars will agree that for the first 1900 years of Christianity, the nature of the "inspiration" of Scripture was hardly touched upon by theologians and Teachers of the Church. The early Church did not develop an orthodox description of *how* biblical writers recorded their divine knowledge and revelations, although they were adamant that the *result* was trustworthy Scripture. ⁶ Accordingly, no early list of the biblical canon mentions "inspiration" as a criteria for a document to be Scripture. We would suggest this is because early Church leaders assumed the ability of the Apostles and Prophets to faithfully communicate divine revelation without "inspiration."

However, during the late 1800's and early 1900's, attacks on the inerrancy of Scripture began in earnest from professing Christian scholars. Foremost among these critics were the "Bad B's" from Europe, starting with F. C. Baur (1792-1860), and including E. Brunner (1889-1966), R. Bultmann (1884-1976), G. Bornkamm (1905-1990), J. Barr (1924-2006), and to a significant extent, K. Barth (1886-1968). All of these Bible scholars began their studies of Scripture with the belief that it contained errors, and developed theories regarding the nature of the Bible based on this assumption.

It was these attacks on the inerrancy of Scripture that prompted more conservative Bible scholars such as James Orr, B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), J. G. Machen (1881-1937), Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003), and J. I. Packer (b. 1926) to develop in earnest,

explanations of the "inspiration" of Scripture that would defend the inerrancy of Scripture and therefore its authority. ⁷

C) Scripture's Divine Authority Depends on its Inerrancy

First of all, let us make it clear that we believe in the Evangelical doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. Contrary to some more liberal Bible scholars, ⁸ the divine authority of Scripture *does* depend on its inerrancy. God does not speak lies, errors, mistakes, and blunders. And if Scripture is God speaking, as we believe, then it will not contain lies, errors, mistakes and blunders either. These types of things describe a great deal of especially unregenerated human thinking, but not the mind or communication of our perfect God. If there truly is an error of any kind detected in something claiming to have been spoken or revealed by God, then its claim can be, and should be, outright rejected. Whatever contains error is not divine, but at best human, and perhaps demonic.

Not only are the following stated in documents we believe to be the word of God, but they are things that any human would expect of a God worthy of trust and worship:

God is not a man, that He should lie. (Num 23:19)

God . . . does not lie . . . (Tit 1:2)

[I]t is impossible for God to lie. (Heb 6:18)

It is the devil, the archenemy and antithesis of God who lies. Accordingly, Jesus says of him, "**from the beginning**" satan was "**not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet . . . I [God] am telling the truth**" (John 8:44-45).

Not only is the nature of God not to lie or err, but truth itself, as created by God and recognized by humans, cannot contain contradictions. The Apostle wrote: "**O Timothy, guard the deposit [of truth] entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions [Gr. *antithesis*] of what is falsely called "knowledge," for by professing it some have swerved from the faith**" (1 Tim 6:20 ESV). In other words, true "**knowledge**" of anything cannot contain "**contradictions.**" ⁹

Accordingly, the claim that the Scriptures are the word of God clearly depends on their being without error and contradiction. Otherwise they are merely the words of men without divine

authority. Hence John Calvin's (1509-1564) famous formulation: "The Scriptures obtain full authority among believers only when men regard them as having sprung from Heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard."¹⁰ And we will believe such words are from Heaven instead of men only if they are inerrant.

Along these lines, Erwin Lutzer, Teacher of Moody Bible Church, writes:

Let us not fall into the illogical views of those liberals who say that the Bible is not the Word of God, but nevertheless is a helpful guide for the church to follow. It is either a fact or a fraud. . . .

[I]f the claims of the Bible are in fact true, it is obvious that it would be without error in the original manuscripts. If God is a God of truth, He must speak only that which is consistent with His character. It would be unthinkable to have an untruthful message from a truthful God. To say as some do, that the Bible is authoritative in matters of theology but has errors in matters of history and science, is nonsense.¹¹

Accordingly, apart from its references to "inspiration," we fully agree with the following statements from the "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy":

Art. V. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.

Art. XI. We affirm that Scripture, having been given by divine inspiration [more accurately, objective revelation], is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses.

We deny that it is possible for the Bible to be at the same time infallible and errant in its assertions. Infallibility and inerrancy may be distinguished, but not separated.

Art. XII. We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We deny that Biblical infallibility and inerrancy are limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the fields of history and science. We further deny that scientific hypotheses about earth history may

properly be used to overturn the teaching of Scripture on creation and the flood.¹²

Accordingly, we *do* need an explanation for how Scripture could be inerrant even though recorded by humans. This question, of course, entails many topics. Nonetheless, explanations of how Scripture was written are valuable in order to defend its inerrancy. Along these lines, Baptist theologian Millard Erickson writes:

Can we really formulate a theory of inspiration? It should be apparent that such a question is necessary before even beginning the procedure. Some would say that such a procedure is neither necessary nor helpful. We should instead simply use the Bible rather than theorize regarding its nature. We should be content with the fact that the Bible is inspired rather than ask how it was inspired.

This argument, however, is faulty. The fact is that our utilization of the Bible will be influenced by what we think about its nature. We will, whether consciously or unconsciously, be dealing with it on the basis of an implicit theory of its nature. It would therefore be desirable to think out our view of inspiration.¹³

As noted above, we do not need a theory of "inspiration," but rather a description of how Scripture was written. With this modification we can agree with both Dr. Erickson and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) who wrote:

There is in fact only one ground on which the authority of Scripture can be based, and that is [the nature of] its inspiration [or rather writing]. When that goes, also the authority of Scripture is gone and done with. In that case, it is merely a body of human writings, which as such cannot rightfully assert any claim to be a norm for our faith and conduct. And along with Scripture-for the Protestant-all authority in religion collapses. All subsequent attempts to recover some kind of authority say, in the person of Christ, in the church, in religious experience, in the intellect or conscience-end in disappointment.¹⁴

D) Problems With the Evangelical View of "Inspiration"

As noted above, Evangelicals and liberals alike have certainly attempted theories of "inspiration" regarding Scripture. For the most part, throughout the 20th century, Evangelicals have united

around the theory developed by B. B. Warfield (1851-1921). As such, he is recognized as perhaps the Protestant Church's foremost authority on the subject. Dr. Abraham writes: "There is little doubt but that Warfield did more to shape recent Evangelical thinking on inspiration than any other theologian."¹⁵ Dr. Warfield's basic thoughts are reflected in the following:

[If] the Divine purpose [is] that these books should possess qualities which rise above the powers of men to produce . . . then something more than providence . . . is necessary. This is the reason for the superinduction, at the end of the long process of the production of Scripture, of the additional Divine operation which we call technically "inspiration."

By it, the Spirit of God, flowing confluent in with the provisionally and graciously determined work of men, spontaneously producing under the Divine directions the writings appointed to them, gives the product a Divine quality unattainable by human powers alone.¹⁶

On the contrary, we would say that the supernatural *revelation* they received "gives the product a Divine quality unattainable by human powers alone," and the human recording of the revelation gives the Scriptures their obvious human qualities as well. As we argue later in chapter 8.10, Scripture is not just divine, just as Jesus was not only divine. Scripture is human as well.

Nonetheless, Dr. Warfield makes two main claims here. First, humans alone, even under God's providential oversight, are not able to faithfully record the revelations they received without some sort of supernatural assistance. Secondly, that supernatural assistance consists of a continuing influence of the Spirit on the minds of the men, giving their writing "a Divine quality." This simultaneous working of the Spirit in the mind of men, with the working of the author's own human mind, has been labeled *concurrent inspiration*.

As Evangelicals ourselves, and committed believers in the absolute inerrancy of anything reflecting the true word of God, we appreciate Dr. Warfield's view, and his attempt to defend the inerrancy of Scripture. He is, in fact, one of our very favorite theologians. However, we see several problems with his theory on "inspiration."

Before detailing them, we believe our general perspective on the topic of "inspiration" is perhaps well described in the introduction to a symposium of Professors from Westminster Theological Seminary on the issue of biblical "inspiration":

This book seeks to warn against both superficial or reactionary orthodoxy [i.e. Evangelicalism] and unguarded academic

speculation [i.e. Liberalism]. Critical scholarship [Liberalism] will judge our arguments as too conservative. Defenders of the evangelical status quo may fear we yield too much ground. The latter judgment is our deepest concern in this volume.¹⁷

And an even greater concern of ours is the truth. In light of that, we would point out the following issues we see in "the evangelical status quo" regarding the topic of biblical "inspiration."

D.1) All theories of "inspiration" are just that--theories

We will demonstrate elsewhere that Scripture does not describe anything like "inspiration" in the process of recording revelation. Accordingly, any description of it is merely a human theory. This is why, in fact, that Dr. Warfield consistently appealed to historical theology to support his view. However, even here it would seem there was some exaggeration. Dr. Abraham, a well known expert on the topic has written of Dr. Warfield:

He never tired of pointing out that he was simply presenting the doctrine of the Church as it had been held throughout the ages. However, he systematically and conveniently ignored the plain historical facts. First, the Church never at any time prior to the Reformation adopted a canonical account of inspiration. In fact, the early Church never even sanctioned a doctrine of divine revelation, content to leave this matter in the Scriptures and in the writings of the Fathers in an informal state.¹⁸

And again, it was because of the attacks on the inerrancy of Scripture beginning in the 16th century that such theories were deemed necessary.

Now to the problems we see with the consensus Evangelical theory of "inspiration."

D.2) The assumption that humans cannot faithfully record revelation

First, we question the underlying assumption that humans are automatically unable to faithfully and sufficiently record divine revelation. As we have described at length elsewhere in *KOG*, the Bible is quite descriptive of how its contents were *revealed* by God, including the use of apparitions, auditions, and visions.¹⁹ However, we believe the reason Scripture is *not* descriptive of how those

revelations were *recorded*, is because unlike modern theology, it was assumed that God had made humans capable of sufficiently recording divine revelation. And if they didn't, then God was certainly capable of providing another revelation to correct them. However, we never observe this happening, again reflecting the fact that God deemed humans capable of faithfully recording His revelations without some sort of supernatural influence.

In fact, if the sufficient capabilities of humans to simply record the revelation God gave them were recognized, the whole debate and topic of "inspiration" would be eliminated. And the assumption of human inability to sufficiently record received revelation is the foundational reason for all of the 80 some theories on "inspiration" including Dr. Warfield's. Accordingly, further support for our claim that humans are capable of accurately recording revelation will be given in chapter 8.10.

D.3) The promotion of & dependence on *divine/human mental telepathy* even though there are no clear biblical examples of it

A critical problem with the popular view of biblical "inspiration" is that it requires nothing less than the *divine/human mental telepathy* that is so foundational to *mega mysticism*. A typical explanation of *verbal concursive inspiration* is given in Carl F. H. Henry's book, *Revelation and the Bible*:

By inspiration is meant that influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of selected men which rendered them organs of God for the infallible communication of that revelation.²⁰

Notice that only by God directly planting thoughts in the mind of the writers apart from any objective means can such "inspiration" be achieved. In fact, the popular view of "inspiration" is so secret, mystical, and subjective that many claim the Apostles, for example, did not even know they were being "inspired" when they wrote Scripture. What is being described here is *divine/human mental telepathy* in which God directly transfers His thoughts to the minds of biblical writers. The result is that acts of revelation such as apparitions and visions are not even needed because the "inspiration" apart from these means makes them unnecessary.

Such descriptions of this *divine/human mental telepathy* in regards to how people wrote Scripture are common. The great Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) wrote:

Inspiration presupposes a person with a thought that he wishes to transfer directly to the consciousness of another,

without the intervention of a third person or of writing or of gesture [or apparently an act of revelation to the physical/psychical senses of the person like an apparition or vision]. Hence when God speaks to man three things are implied:

First, that God has a thought which He wills to communicate to man. Second, that He executes His design in a direct way. Third, that the person addressed now possesses the divine thought with this result, that he is conscious of the same idea which a moment ago existed only in God. ²¹

That is what we have thoroughly discussed elsewhere as *divine/human mental telepathy*. ²² Such a view makes "inspiration" one supernatural event, rather than involving 1) a supernatural physical/psychical revelatory act, and 2) the human recording of that revelation.

Likewise, J. I. Packer's description of "inspiration" can only be described as *mental telepathy* when he writes:

Scripture has a double authorship, and man is only the secondary author; the primary author is God the Holy Spirit, through whose initiative, prompting and enlightenment, and under whose superintendence [i.e. mind control] each human did his work. ²³

More recently, Dr. Erickson would seem to have done the same, but implies that *divine/human mental telepathy* was even the most common mode of revelation that Prophets and Apostles experienced. He writes:

Divine speech may take several forms. It may be an audible speaking. It may be a silent, inward hearing of God's message [where does Scripture say that?], like the subvocal process that slow readers engage in (they "hear" in their heads the words they are reading). It is likely that in many cases this was the mode used. ²⁴

Again, a "silent, inward hearing of God's message" is nothing more than *divine/human mental telepathy* in which God transfers thoughts directly to the mind apart from any other revelatory act.

Why is such a view of revelation and/or "inspiration" such a problem? Because Scripture *never* describes Apostles or Prophets experiencing such a thing. For example, there are no instances in Scripture where God subjectively and mystically gives an author of Scripture a mere inward mental impression for the sake of guidance or revelation. In fact, we have demonstrated that the only examples of such secret *divine manipulation* through *divine/human*

mental telepathy occurred in order to control pagan unbelievers against their will, but never to communicate to His people.²⁵ And those pagans never knew God was even controlling them! On the other hand, when God had specific direction for His people, He revealed it in unmistakable and miraculously authenticated ways such as a vision or apparition.

In other words, there is *no* biblical evidence for the kind of "mind influence" and control in the Christian's life that is so essential to both the popular view of biblical "inspiration" and the *mega mystical* way of life that expects divine guidance on extrabiblical matters through mental impulses. Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:

The non-biblical word ["inspiration"] has given many unbiblical ideas about divine revelation. Both secular and sacred dictionaries typically define divine "inspiration" merely as a "divine influence" on the mind of the writer. Often included in the idea of "inspiration" is that God spontaneously, and even rather imperceptibly, guided the thinking of the biblical writer, such that the words they wrote entered their mind through a process of something like divine/human mental telepathy.

By "mental telepathy" we mean the direct transference of thoughts from one mind to the other, apart from physically "hearing" or "seeing." This is very much like what is known as Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) which the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines as: "perception that occurs independently of the known sensory processes."²⁶ Likewise, popular modern explanations of biblical "inspiration" clearly reflect the idea that God's Son, Prophets, and Apostles experienced nothing more than ESP in their revelatory experiences.

On the contrary, we demonstrate elsewhere that such secret, mystical, subjective *divine manipulation* and *divine/human mental telepathy* are recorded in Scripture as only occurring with unbelieving pagans.²⁷ Secondly, and as also thoroughly demonstrated elsewhere, whenever the process of receiving divine revelation is described in Scripture, the recipient always described it as "seeing" or "hearing" something.²⁸ We put these terms in quotation marks because while divine revelation at times came through physical apparitions seen by physical eyes and heard by physical ears, at other times God communicated directly to the part of the mind that processes these physical senses such that they "saw" and "heard" a vision in their mind. . . .

The fact that God always made it clear when He was providing someone with extra-biblical miraculous revelation

underscores His desire to make it abundantly evident to people when He is speaking to them, a fact often neglected by modern *mega mysticism* which insists we need to be listening for some "still small voice" to understand God's will. . . . There simply are no biblical examples of this in Scripture.²⁹

Unfortunately, in typical attempts to describe "inspiration," a process only used by God to imperceptibly control pagan rulers, is invoked. Never are any people of God described as experiencing what proponents of "inspiration" claim was the foundational experience of biblical writers and the foundational explanation of its authority. Do we really want the authority of God's word resting on such a mystical, subjective, even unbiblical process as some sort of direct *divine/human mental telepathy*? We don't think so. Scripture is simply the faithful human recording of a supernatural revelation given through visions, auditions, Angels, apparitions, etc.

D.4) The effort to devise one all-encompassing theory of "inspiration"

Another problem with the standard Evangelical understanding of "inspiration" is that there is an effort to devise one all-encompassing theory that explains all of Scripture. In other words, it is implied that the writing that a historian like Luke wrote to produce Acts, involved and required the same kind of "divine influence" on the mind, as when a Prophet like Ezekiel wrote to record a vision. On the contrary, the experience of these two men were quite different, and a "one-theory-fits-all" approach is far too simplistic to accurately reflect the great variety of genres we encounter in Scripture. Along these lines, Wayne Grudem writes:

It must be emphasized that the Bible does not speak of only one type of process or one manner by which God communicated to the biblical authors what he wanted to be said. In fact, there is indication of a *wide variety of processes* God used to bring about the desired result.³⁰

Accordingly, we will discuss different types of Scripture and how we believe their writing would have differed in the next chapter. Along these lines, William Sanday, NT Professor at Oxford, wrote concerning the one-theory-fits-all mentality of modern promoters of "inspiration":

One class [of scholars] will have "All" of some little system, whether as is most often the case descended from the past, or an invention of the present. This is perfectly clear-cut and

sharp in its outlines, and it fits compactly together like a piece of mechanism. With it they drive a straight furrow through the world of phenomena [e.g. Scripture], regarding neither to right nor left, and not heeding what delicate flowers or what subtle interlacing growths their ploughshare overturns and buries.³¹

D.5) The inherent contradiction in the theory of *concurrent inspiration*

As noted above, Dr. Warfield's theory of *concurrent inspiration* has become the most accepted view. J. I. Packer describes it as follows:

We are to think of the Spirit's inspiring activity, and, for that matter, of all His regular operations in and upon human personality, as (to use an old but valuable technical term) concurrent; that is, as exercised in, through and by means of the writers' own activity, in such a way that their thinking and writing was both free and spontaneous on their part and divinely elicited and controlled, and what they wrote was not only their own work but also God's work.³²

How convenient. Convenient because all Bible scholars recognize the very human element in Scripture. Therefore, it is quite convenient to espouse a theory that says the biblical writers were "free and spontaneous" in "their thinking and writing" as an accurate description of what we see in a great deal of Scripture. But it is also contradictory to espouse a theory that says the biblical writers were "free and spontaneous" in "their thinking and writing" but that same "thinking and writing" was "divinely elicited [caused] and controlled." We have noted elsewhere Dr. Packer's penchant for "paradox theology" in which he claims God has intentionally revealed contradictory things in Scripture that we are to simultaneously accept as true.³³ Unfortunately, this unbiblical paradigm extends to a great deal of modern theology as well, including the popular theory of "inspiration."

Which is it? Were the biblical writers ultimately "free and spontaneous" in "their thinking and writing," or was God ultimately controlling their minds and actually "inspiring" every thought and word they wrote? Again, it is quite convenient to devise a theory that says both, but it is also embarrassingly contradictory and therefore not acceptable as being worthy of our trust as the truth of the matter.

Dr. Packer attempts to clarify when he writes elsewhere:

The idea is not of mechanical dictation, or automatic writing, or any process which involved the suspending of the action of the human writer's mind. Such concepts of inspiration are found in the Talmud, Philo, and the Fathers, but not in the Bible. The divine direction and control under which the biblical authors wrote was not a physical or psychological force, and it did not detract from but rather heightened the freedom, spontaneity, and creativeness of their writing.³⁴

If the "divine direction and control under which the biblical authors wrote was not a . . . psychological force," then how did it influence the writers at all? Instead of the obvious contradictions created by stating that humans wrote with "freedom, spontaneity, and creativeness" while God controlled and "inspired" every thought and word written, we believe it is better to simply say that *Scripture is the faithful human recording of divine revelation*.

D.6) The difficulty & actually misguided effort to denounce "dictation"

In the quote from Dr. Packer above we note his interest in wanting to deny that *concurrent inspiration* means "mechanical dictation." This introduces another problem with the most popular Evangelical understanding of the "inspiration" of the Bible. Proponents of *concurrent inspiration* seem concerned, but unable to distinguish their view from the idea of "dictation" concerning how the human authors wrote Scripture.

First, we note the consistent denial that their view of "inspiration" involved "dictation." The slightly neoorthodox Presbyterian theologian Donald Bloesch is typical when he writes: "Verbal inspiration must not be confused with . . . mechanical dictation."³⁵ Likewise, Dr. Packer has written:

Because Evangelicals hold that the biblical writers were completely controlled by the Holy Spirit, it is often supposed . . . that they maintain what is called the "dictation" or "typewriter" theory of inspiration. . . . But it is not so. This "dictation theory" is a man of straw. It is safe to say that no Protestant theologian, from the Reformation till now, has ever held it; and certainly modern Evangelicals do not hold it. . . . It is true that many sixteenth and seventeenth-century theologians spoke of Scripture as "dictated by the Holy Ghost." But all they meant was that the authors wrote word for word what God intended. [what else is "dictation"?]³⁶

The reason for such a denial stems from two things: 1) Evangelical theologians are typically attempting to find a "one-theory-fits-all" approach to how Scripture was written and; 2) much of Scripture obviously reflects the personality and feelings (humanity) of the writer and is therefore just as obviously not dictated. The human freedom, spontaneity, and personalization of much of Scripture are too obvious to claim it is simply word-for-word dictated by God.

Nevertheless, along with *concurrent inspiration*, an even more central term to the popular theory of how Scripture was written is *verbal inspiration*. As we discuss further in chapter 8.11, *verbal inspiration* is concisely defined in the "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy": "We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration."³⁷ Again, that sounds like dictation.

Remembering that Dr. Packer denies his view of "inspiration" involves "dictation," note his more detailed description of *verbal inspiration*:

The point that plenary and verbal [inspiration] make is that the biblical words themselves (in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek) are to be seen as God-given. Men were not left to articulate information about, and interpretations of, God's ways with men apart from His superintending providence. On the contrary, the Lord who gave the Word also gave the words.³⁸

Elsewhere, Dr. Packer writes: "The biblical concept of Scripture . . . is of a . . . God-given message, set down in writing in God-given words."³⁹ Likewise, he writes: "Inspiration is a work of God terminating, not in the men who were to write Scripture (as if, having given them an idea of what to say, God left them to themselves to find a way of saying it), but in the actual written product."⁴⁰

Again, we recognize the obvious contradiction here to Dr. Packer's insistence above that God did not exercise a "psychological force" in "inspiration" but rather, the biblical writers wrote with "freedom, spontaneity, and creativeness." Secondly, how else are we to understand *verbal inspiration* other than "dictation" if indeed, all the words of Scripture are "God-given" and "Men were not left to articulate" the revelations they received in their own wording, but "the Lord who gave the Word also gave the words."

Webster's defines "dictation" as: "the act or manner of uttering words to be transcribed."⁴¹ How is that different from the definition of *verbal inspiration* in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*:

All the words and all the verbal relationships [grammar] are inspired by God. This includes all seemingly peripheral [personal] statements as well as those more obviously germane to the matter under consideration. . . . Even [historical] accounts known beforehand by the writers from other sources are inspired in the same verbal way for inclusion in the Bible. Thus the totality of Scripture partakes of uniform verbal inspiration.⁴²

Goodness, you would think even all the punctuation marks in Scripture were dictated by God. Nevertheless, if the act of writing Scripture involved a divine influence over the minds of the authors with sufficient power to make sure that every single word and even grammatical relationship was precisely the mind of God, then how is that different from "dictation"? It is not. In fact, *verbal inspiration* would actually require something more like divine possession or *automatic writing* in which a person is controlled to such an extent that their hand moves and writes apart from the person willing it to.⁴³

Accordingly, the constant complaint of promoters of *verbal inspiration* that they are being accused of espousing "dictation" is rather ironic when we seriously consider how they describe their theory. The Anglican theologian Peter Jensen writes:

Hardly a reference to inspiration in the last hundred years has failed to exploit the confusion between 'dictation' and 'inspiration'. Whatever the author's view about the category of inspiration, we are assured that dictation is not intended. It is clear that, despite fervent protestations to the contrary, evangelicals are suspected of holding the view that God dictated the Bible word for word to its human authors, and that the human contribution was therefore minimal. The truth is that evangelicals have been careful to indicate that 'inspiration' entails no particular manner of human contribution, only the need to assert the ultimate divine authorship of the text and therefore its authority.⁴⁴

Two responses are in order. First, why wouldn't "evangelicals [be] suspected of holding the view that God dictated the Bible word for word to its human authors, and that the human contribution was therefore minimal" when word for word dictation is precisely what Evangelicals mean by *verbal inspiration*?

Secondly, it is not true, as Dr. Jensen claims, that "evangelicals have been careful to indicate that 'inspiration' entails no particular manner of human contribution." On the contrary, the popular

theories of *concurvise* and *verbal inspiration* attempt a very particular description of the human/divine mix in "inspiration."

Fortunately, others have been more honest about the problems and contradictions inherent in popular theories of biblical "inspiration." A generation ago, T. Rees in the "old" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, a standard of Evangelical and even "fundamental" Christianity, noted:

In an excess of zeal to defend the Bible against an excess of denigration a position is taken-the dictation theory of inspiration-that very few, even among the most conservative of biblical scholars, have ever been willing to espouse. It must be quickly added, however, that many are hard put to show wherein their positions differ practically from the dictation formula they repudiate.⁴⁵

Accordingly, what is the solution to the problems modern theories of "inspiration" create? In our opinion they are as follows:

- Recognize that many modes of writing, including "dictation," were a part of how Scripture was written. We argue for this in the next chapter, 8.9.
- Simply see Scripture as *the faithful human recording of divine revelation*. For further discussion of this see chapter 8.10 regarding the human/divine mix involved in the creation of Scripture.
- Drop the unnecessary and untenable theory of *verbal inspiration*, which we argue for in chapter 8.11.

Extras & Endnotes

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What is the definition of Scripture we suggest in this chapter? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) What is the safeguard against human error that we suggest? Do you agree or disagree and why?

- 3) What do we contend is the fundamental reason for the controversy surrounding "inspiration" and the perceived need to develop theories for it?
- 4) Why do we claim Scripture must be inerrant? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) Why do we claim a "one-theory-fits-all" approach to how Scripture was created is far too simplistic? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What is meant by *concurrent inspiration* and what is the contradiction we see in it? Do you agree or disagree?
- 7) What is *verbal inspiration* and what contradiction do we see in popular claims/denials regarding it? Do you agree or disagree?
- 8) Why do we claim that the popular theory of "inspiration" depends on *mental telepathy*? Why do we claim this is a problem? Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

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- ¹ H. D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1700-1960* (Baker, 1979).
 - ² R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Academie Books, 1984), 172.
 - ³ William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Clarendon Press, 1998), 42.
 - ⁴ Not to be confused with James E. Orr (1912-1987), former Professor of Church History at Fuller Theological Seminary.
 - ⁵ James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (Eerdmans, 1952), 1.
 - ⁶ Along these lines, Roman Catholic scholar Raymond F. Collins writes:
By and large, the early Fathers did not develop a theory on inspiration. As a matter of fact, the debate on revelation is a relatively late development in the history of theology. It is barely a century old, the topic having obtained a place unto itself only because of the issuance of magisterial statements on inspiration-sometimes largely provoked by the difficulties which modern historical findings were causing for the traditional inspiration [inerrancy] of the Scriptures. To this date, the tract on inspiration lacks the theological nuance and sophistication found in most other theological

expositions. (Raymond F. Collins, *Introduction to the New Testament* [Doubleday, 1983], 326.

- ⁷ In reality, these men wrote to defend the current canon of Scripture. In other words, if documents in the Bible such as 2 Chronicles were rejected from what is believed to belong to Scripture, a good portion of the accusations against the Bible's accuracy and authority would be diminished. On the other hand, if Romans was the only document accepted as Scripture, it is unlikely there would be any debates whatsoever regarding the inerrancy of Scripture, nor would there be such a felt need to devise theories of divine "inspiration."
- All of this is why we believe issues of inerrancy relate more to the question of canonicity. If someone believes a document of Scripture truly contains error than it should be thrown out of their canon of divinely authoritative Scripture, and the decision of early Church leaders to include it, questioned. This seems a better approach than trying to come up with an all-encompassing, purely human theory of "inspiration," all designed to defend the decisions of fourth century Bishops to approve a document as the Word of God which we believe contains errors.
- ⁸ For a defense of the view that Scripture can contain errors but still be considered the divinely authoritative word of God, see Jack B. Rogers and Donald McKim of Fuller Theological Seminary in their book, *The Bible: An Historical Approach*, (Harper & Row, 1979).
- ⁹ Regarding the fact that truth cannot contain contradictions see especially chapter 2.10: *A Critique of Fideism*.
- ¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:74; online at www.ccel.org.
- ¹¹ Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Convincing Miracles* (Moody, 1999), 51-53.
- ¹² "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.
- ¹³ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., (Baker, 1998), 229.
- ¹⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena, Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1 (Baker, 2003), 462.
- ¹⁵ William J. Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford, 1981), 15.
- ¹⁶ B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration" in *Revelation and Inspiration*, (Oxford, 1932), 103-4.
- ¹⁷ *Inerrancy & Hermeneutic*, Harvey Conn ed. (Baker, 1988), 11.
- ¹⁸ Abraham, *Canon*, 328.
- ¹⁹ Regarding means of divine revelation experienced by Prophets and Apostles see chapter 10.7.

- ²⁰ R. A. Finlayson in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed. (Baker, 1958), 222.
- ²¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Eerdmans, 1953), 71.
- ²² For an introduction to the idea of *divine/human mental telepathy* and its unbiblical nature see chapter 14.1. For a fuller discussion see chapter 14.6.
- ²³ J. I. Packer, "Inspiration" in *New Bible Dictionary* (Intervarsity, 1999), 507.
- ²⁴ Erickson, 213
- ²⁵ Regarding the biblical data concerning *divine/human mental telepathy* see chapter 14.6.
- ²⁶ "Extrasensory perception"; Online at www.britannica.com.
- ²⁷ Regarding the pagan nature of the *divine manipulation* and *divine/human mental telepathy* that is so foundational to popular notions of biblical "inspiration" and *mega mystical* theology regarding divine guidance see chapter 14.6.
- ²⁸ For a thorough study of the nature of the revelation that Apostles and Prophets experienced see chapter 10.7; 8.3 and section 9.5.A.
- ²⁹ Excerpted from section 10.7.C.
- ³⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 80
- ³¹ William Sanday, *Inspiration* (Green & Co., 1903), 428-9.
- ³² J. I. Packer, "*Fundamentalism*" and the Word of God (Eerdmans, 1958), 80-1.
- ³³ Regarding the "paradox theology" of J. I. Packer see section 2.10.B.
- ³⁴ J. I. Packer, "The Inspiration of the Bible," in *The Origen of the Bible*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Tyndale, 1992), 35.
- ³⁵ Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Harper & Row, 1978), I.55.
- ³⁶ Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 79.
- ³⁷ "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," online at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html>.
- ³⁸ J. I. Packer, "*The Adequacy of Human Language*," in *Inerrancy*, Norman Geisler ed. (Zondervan, 1979), 211.
- ³⁹ Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 88.
- ⁴⁰ J. I. Packer, "Inspiration" in *New Bible Dictionary* (Intervarsity, 1999), 507.
- ⁴¹ *Webster's Dictionary*, online at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dictation>.

⁴² I. S. Rennie, "Verbal Inspiration," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker, 1984), 1139.

⁴³ Regarding *automatic writing* see section 9.5.D.

⁴⁴ Peter Jensen, *The Revelation of God* (Intervarsity, 2002), 158.

⁴⁵ T. Rees, "Authority in Religion" *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, ed. Electronic Edition STEP Files (Parsons Technology, 1998), I.10.