



Holy Spirit & Scripture

Steve Puluka
1249 Biltmore Avenue
Pittsburgh PA 15216

Introduction

This paper will explore the status of patristic studies regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of scripture. This survey of the current literature in the field organizes the material based on the different expressions of inspiration observed in the patristic literature. Various scholars observe many of the same thought patterns in patristic authors. Related scholarly observations are placed side by side. This should facilitate a full view of the status of that observation.

The categories are:

- **Scripture on inspiration**—the observations on the internal evidence of the scripture on inspiration.
- **Scripture as Authoritative**—the authoritative use of scripture assumes divine origin with the action of the Holy Spirit implied or expressed.
- **Prophetic Experience**—the experience of the prophet as a model for understanding the divine inspiration of scripture.
- **Verbal Inspiration**—the assertion of direct dictation by God of the words in scripture to the author.
- **God as author**—the assumption that the real author of scripture in a literary sense is God through the human intermediary.
- **Accommodation or condescension**—the comparison of scripture to the incarnation of Christ by mixing divine and human elements to create one.
- **Canon debates**—discussions on the criteria of scripture and their affect on inspiration.

An important note with these categories is that they are not setup in opposition to each other. Many of the patristic authorities cited in the literature on inspiration are found speaking in multiple categories. These conceptualizations of inspiration are not set up as mutually exclusive or even contradictory (though we may well see them as such). They simply provide multiple angles from which to view the act of inspiration.

The cultural matrix of Christianity affects the patristic thought on the inspiration of scripture. Many of the scholars engaged in the examination of inspiration make note of the similarities in patristic thought to the contemporary views in Greek and Jewish cultures. Where this argument is prominent to the discussion the observation will be noted. Patristic thought grew up in the cultural influence

of both Jewish and Greek popular culture. What follows is a brief overview of the cultural features that are relevant to the concept of the inspiration of scripture.

Greek Culture Regarding Inspiration¹

The two major images of inspiration in Greek culture come from the arts and religion. The inspiration of poets by the muses is seen as a divine breath. The oracles as intermediaries of the gods are inspired to make pronouncements on their behalf. Both of these divine inspirations are intimately related to the activities of the gods on Olympus. They are encompassed by the same term used by Christians to refer to the Holy Spirit, πνευμα.

As early as in *Theogony* the poets call it by the muses breathing the divine voice into Hesiod. The muses operate from Mt. Olympus and dispense this gift of poetic and enthusiastic speech by this breath. This breath gives the poet the power to proclaim both the future and the past in their work. Euripides and Democritus both connect this power to πνευμα. Thus from as early as the fourth century BC poetic inspiration by divine breath is a common underpinning of Greek poetry.

The prophetic oracles of the gods, particularly the Oracle at Delphi, likewise experience the divine breath. Here the spirit takes over the Oracle and sends them into a frenzied state. During this state the divine overpowers the person and speaks, often in what appears to be gibberish to the crowd. The priests of the temple then interpret these utterances. The prophet becomes a ministering organ for the divine utterances. Plato is central to establishing the theological underpinnings for this prophetic experience.² He describes the prophet as full of

¹ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, X vols., vol. VI pe-r (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968; reprint, 1983), 343-352. G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 1103-1104.

²For more detail on the relationship of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics on inspiration see Thomas F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics*, 1st ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 17-22. On the use of Platonic and Aristotelian concepts in Biblical exegesis see Paul M. Blowers, *The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 152-157.

god and can accomplish much good in this state. The divine can truly speak through the prophet.

Jewish Culture Regarding Inspiration³

Moses received the Torah directly from God. This special revelation of the first five books in scripture is understood under the model of dictation. The very words of the text were spoken by God and written by Moses for the people. As a result, this Law has a special significance in the Jewish tradition of inspiration.⁴ This method of inspiration is different than that of the prophets. There is a single special channel for a direct revelation. The prophets have a different kind of inspiration. They experience contact with the “word” of God. This enlivens their experience, but the written scripture is collected and organized by their disciples. There is both a difference in divine contact and a difference in transmission of the message to successive generations. Finally, the other books in scripture have yet a different means of inspiration. There is no dramatic “pouncing” of the word on the author, yet these books are still scripture in the true sense.

The understanding of these different modes of inspiration becomes the organization for scripture itself in the Jewish experience. The three categories: Law, Prophets and Writings, are acknowledgement of these differing modes of inspiration. This organization creates a hierarchy of value based on the same. At the same time, Jewish contact with Greek Culture brings attempts to join the inspiration concepts of the Greek and Hebrew traditions.⁵

³ Kittel and Friedrich, 359-385. John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First-Century Judaism* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002). George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of Tannaim*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson Publishers, 1997), 414-22. Torrance, 15-25.

⁴ From the Babylonian Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin 99a, “He who says, ‘The Torah is not from God,’ or even if he says, ‘The whole Torah is from God with the exception of this or that verse which not God but Moses spoke from his own mouth’—that soul shall be rooted up.” as cited in Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 7.

⁵ Barry W. Holtz, *Back to the Sources : Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 33-35.

The interpretive work of Philo of Alexandria and the apologetics of Josephus⁶ demonstrate a merging of Greek oracle prophecy experience with the Old Testament tradition. We see the language of inspiration of the oracle transferred to the prophets of the Old Testament; Philo extends this language to Moses himself. Philo appropriates the Greek culture as image for the Hebrews by placing Moses in the same position that Plato puts the philosopher in society. The enlightenment of the philosopher is the hope of Greek civilization for Plato. Philo transfers this experience to Moses and the Law received from God. He further asserts that Moses then is the ultimate teacher and source of the knowledge expressed by Plato and the Greek philosophers. Philo even associates this spirit of inspiration to himself and his allegorical interpretations of the biblical texts.⁷ Josephus is much more restricted in his usage. He keeps the inspiration sense to the prophets alone. He sees this in the terms of the Greek oracle mania, but asserts that the spirit of prophetic inspiration is gone from Israel. This allows him to dismiss the fringe Jewish groups like the Essenes and Zealots, that claim a strain of prophecy in his own times. This view is espoused

⁶ Josephus speaks of 'the Deity as being present with' a writer; of 'holding converse with God'; of 'being in a state of divine inspiration'; of 'the spirit of god taking hold of the prophets'; of 'the divine gift passing over' from one person to another." He says that Balaam prophesied, "not as master of himself, but moved to say what he did by the divine spirit." (Antiquities, iv, 6, 5) He represents Balaam as though saying to Balak, "thinkest thou that it is in our power to speak or be silent...when the spirit of god takes possession of us? For he causes us to utter words such as he wills and speeches without our knowledge...for when he has entered into us nothing that is in us is any longer our own." (contra apion, I, 8) He declares that the Jews, from the hour of their birth, esteem the scriptures as the decrees of God, and as the evidence of their fidelity and reverence toward the bible, that "no one has ever dared to add or subtract or alter anything in it." As cited in, Frank Hallam, *The Breath of God: A Sketch: Historical, Critical and Logical of the Doctrine of Inspiration*, Atla Monograph Preservation Program, vol. ATLA Fiche 1985-1453 (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1895), 12.

⁷ Philo says: the prophet "gives forth nothing of his own, but acts at the prompting of another in all his utterances. As long as he is under inspiration he is in ignorance, his reason departing from its place and yielding up the citadel of his soul, the Divine Spirit enters into it and dwells in it." (de special, legg, iv, 8) He insists that there is "nothing superfluous in the law." (de prof, 10) Every word is divine. Even Hebraisms have a special significance, such as "blessing I will bless," and "let him die the death." And the little words as well, as in "brought him out," and thou shalt not plant thyself a vineyard." But Philo was enthusiastic on the matter of inspiration. He ascribed it to the Septuagint; to the great philosophers; to all good men; even to himself. Plato is the "most sacred," Heraclitus the "great and renowned," Parmenides, Emedocles, Zeno, and Cleanthes, "godlike men, and as it were a true and in the strict sense sacred band." As cited in, Ibid., 10-12. John R. Levison, "Inspiration and the Divine Spirit in the Writings of Philo Judaeus," *Journal for the study of Judaism in the Persian, hellenistic and Roman Period* 26, no. D (1995): 271-323. Helmut Burkhardt, "Inspiration Der Schrift Durch Weisheitliche Personalinspiration : Zur Inspirationslehre Philos Von Alexandrien," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, no. 3 (1991): 214-25, John R. Levison, "Prophetic Inspiration in Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Bilicarum," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 85, no. 3-4 January-April 1995 (1995): 297-329.

by mainstream Judaism in Rabbinical literature: “When the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, died, the holy spirit ceased out of Israel; but nevertheless it was granted them to hear communications from God by means of a mysterious voice.”⁸

This same school of Judaism in Egypt finds affinity between the Greek Stoic philosophy of *λογος* and scripture. Philo adopts the language and function of the *λογος* of the Stoics creating an intermediary being. Philo interprets the interactions of God with people as the action of the *λογος*. This is also associated with the figure of wisdom and ultimately the word of God itself. Here the double meaning of the word in Greek, utterance and reason, form a further justification for the allegorical interpretation of scripture. Many see the growth of Gnosticism in this same region as the natural result of these ideas brought into the realm of Christianity.⁹

In the Palestinian Rabbinical tradition, which becomes the mainstream for Judaism today, these Stoic ideas are not adopted. Instead, the word of God is merely the instrument of revelation and wisdom remains the personification of Torah. Here the word does not play any intermediary role; in fact, the concept is not even discussed in the commentaries or speculations outside the Targum translations. The contact of God with people is wrapped instead in the term *shekinah* (presence).

Rabbinical Jewish tradition ultimately brings the inspiration of scripture from the prophets to the written books through three stages: Word to the prophet through revelation, the Divine utterance of the prophet himself and the attentive collection and transcription by scribe. The entire process is guided and protected

⁸ Tos. Sotah 13,2; cf. Sotah 48b; Yoma 9b; Sanhedrin 11a. As Cited in, Moore, 421. baba bathra 14b-15a as cited in Albert Carl Sundberg, *The Old Testament of the Early Church*, Harvard Theological Studies, vol. 20 (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1964), 114. The Rabbis are establishing this cut off date for scripture in the same style the Christians will later use for the New Testament. By automatically rejecting later works they avoid the interpretive battles of Christian Jews using the texts to make Jesus the messiah. Christians use the same technique for the New Testament canon. By restricting the canon to books associated with the apostles they avoid the interpretive works popular with Gnostic communities.

⁹ Joseph T. Lienhard, *The Bible, the Church, and Authority: The Canon of the Christian Bible in History and Theology* (Collegville, MN: Michael Glazier Books, 1995), 11-12.

by God to insure that the message is not corrupted. Once set in place the scribal tradition under the Masorah go to great lengths to preserve the current form of the text while marking the anomalies in the margin at the same time.¹⁰ For Rabbinical Judaism revelation remains primarily one of appearance metaphors and a rule of life. The image field is a visual one. God's word erupts into the life of his people through the law. The scribes consider this law fixed and the oral tradition concentrates on the interpretation of the Law revealed. Judaism becomes a people of the book. The goal is complete study and understanding of the law in order to live out the law in ones life. Scripture becomes the will of God in ordering one's life, not an object of contemplation, but a rule of action.¹¹

Matrix of Christian Thought

These philosophies of inspiration from both the Greek and Hebrew tradition influenced Christian understanding of inspiration and the scriptures. There are many similarities between particular expressions of inspiration in the Christian tradition and the Greek and Hebrew positions. But at the same time none of these positions is adopted wholesale and uncritically. They are blended with the Christian theological view and form a basis for specifically Christian expressions. They form a cultural matrix for Christian reflection on the inspiration of scripture. The extent of this Christian thought is examined in the current literature below.

Scripture on Inspiration

There is very little mention in the scriptures themselves on inspiration or the role of the Holy Spirit in the same. The words for inspiration are not used at all in the Greek Old Testament. The Spirit is never shown as taking control of someone to write, but prophecy is often described as the "word" coming on the prophet to

¹⁰ Dimitri Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of His Old Testament Exegesis*, ed. Lawrence Boadt, 1st ed., 16 vols., Theological Inquiries, vol. 16 (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 78. Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford, *The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia : Introduction and Annotated Glossary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eedmans, 1998), 13-20.

¹¹ Pierre Benoit, *Aspects of Biblical Inspiration*, trans. J. Murphy-O'Conner and S. K. Ashe, Probe Books (Chicago: Priory Press, 1965), 64-69.

speak. The only reference of written revelation is with Moses. The Holy Spirit is not associated with any of these impulses to speak or write.¹²

In the New Testament “God-breathed” is used in 2 Timothy 3:16 to refer to Old Testament scripture. This clearly designates the scriptures as inspired, but does not attribute this inspiration to the spirit directly. The image of “God-breathed,” however, is one in the realm of spirit images. The use of πνευμα in the compound word is likely a play on words for the spirit. Gregory of Nyssa is typical of the connection drawn from this text; “The scripture is ‘given by inspiration of God,’ as the apostle says. The scripture is of the Holy Spirit, and its intention is the profit of men.”¹³

The formula citations of Old Testament within the New Testament reinforce this clear understanding of divine authority of the scriptures. In Acts Paul introduces his comments in Acts 28:25; “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet...” The inspiration of prophets is referenced in 2 Peter 1:21 & Hebrews 1:1-2. These New Testament texts become reference points for some of the fathers to discuss the nature of prophecy. “The prophets heard God speaking to them in the secret recesses of their own hearts. They simply conveyed that message by their preaching and writing to God’s people. They were not like pagan oracles, which distorted the divine message in their own interest, for they did not write their own words but the words of God.”¹⁴ Taken as a whole there is a solid assumption of the divine origin of scripture that we see played out in the citations of Old and New Testament by the fathers from

¹² The Greek words επιπνοια (Philo, Josephus) and τηροπνευστος 2 Timothy 3:16 are not found in the Septuagint. Ibid., 77-81. On Moses see: Exd. 33:9; 33:11; 34:34; Num. 7:89; 12:8. On the Prophets see: Isa. 38:4; Jer. 1:1-2; Eze. 1:2-3; Hos. 1:1; Joe. 1:1; Amo. 3:1; Mic. 1:1; Zep. 1:1; Hag 1:1; Zec 1:1; Mal. 1:1; Jon. 1:1; Dan. 9:2.

¹³ Peter Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ed. Thomas Oden, XII vols., Ancient Christian Commentary, vol. IX (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 269. During the Reformation Bullinger extends this passage to cover the New Testament in addition to the obvious reference to the Old Testament scriptures. This passage figures prominently as one of his standard proof texts for scriptural inerrancy. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, 1st ed., 5 vols., The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 208-9.

¹⁴ Bede on 2 Peter PL 93:73. As cited in, Gerald Bray, ed., *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, ed. Thomas Oden, XII vols., Ancient Christian Commentary, vol. XI (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 141.

the earliest period. In introductory statements very similar to Paul's in Acts they declare the inspiration of scripture as a role of the Spirit. There is a further designation of the spirit as the means for that inspiration, but there is little concern for the method and operation of the inspiration in the human authors.¹⁵

The New Testament is largely silent on the inspiration of scripture. These few passages form a basis for some understanding of the topic, but leave much more unsaid in the process. In the Old Testament the "word" of God is the primary means attributed to prophetic inspiration. This becomes important to those who draw the connection between the word of scripture and the Word of God in Christ. More instructive for those examining the question of inspiration is the use of scripture by the early Church.

Scripture as Authoritative

The use of scripture in Christian preaching and teaching demonstrates the early understanding scripture as divinely inspired. These formula citations quote both the Old and New Testament in support of Christian positions. Christians quote the Old Testament as inspired to verify the New Testament. The fathers further argue for an equality of the New Testament with the Old. They see both as the work of the Holy Spirit with no distinction between the giving of revelation and the written form. This usage demonstrates an early acceptance of the inspiration of scripture with an action by the Holy Spirit. Thus both Old & New Testaments form a single book.¹⁶

From the earliest periods of written preaching we see introductory phrases that attribute scripture to the "Lord" and the "Spirit." The sub-apostolic fathers introduce quotations from scripture in terms that assume this divine inspiration by the Spirit. Common examples include Barnabas; "The Lord says in the prophet..." Clement of Rome; "The spirit of the Lord prophesies..." Polycarp; "Moses spoke in the spirit..." and Shepherd of Hermes "and the spirit carried me

¹⁵In the NT additional references to inspiration like activity are found in: Acts 3:21; Acts 28:25; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:2; 2 Tim 3:16; Col 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21.

¹⁶ Zaharopoulos, 79-80.

away...."¹⁷ Other early fathers make clear statements attributing the scriptures to the work of the Spirit. Clement of Rome declares, "The scriptures are true utterances of the Holy Spirit." Irenaeus connects the word and the spirit to the inspiration; "The scriptures are perfect because uttered by the word of God, and his Spirit."¹⁸ These comments make clear what is strongly implied by the language of scripture in the previous section. Scripture comes by inspiration of the Spirit.

Beyond these simple statements, some fathers do draw some expand on the meaning of the Spirit's role as the source of all scripture. Athanasius teaches, "And not being ignorant, the old man then would say: In each book of Scripture the same things are specially declared. This report exists in all of them, and the same agreement of the Holy Spirit. ... Furthermore, in each book one is able to find prophecies and legislates and narratives. For the same Spirit is over all, and in each case in accordance with the distinction that belongs to it, each serves and fulfills the grace given to it, whether it is prophecy, or legislation, or the record of history, or the grace of the Psalms. Since it is one and the same Spirit, from whom are all distinctions, and it is indivisible by nature—because of this surely the who is in each, and as determined by service the revelations and the distinctions of the Spirit pertain to all and to each severally. Furthermore, according to the reserved need, each frequently, within the Spirit takes over, serves the Word."¹⁹ Tertullian responds to the Montanist heresy with this defense of scripture, "God sent forth, from the first, who, by their justice and innocence were worthy to know good and make him know, and filled them to overflowing with the divine spirit...and so gave us a written testament, that we might more fully and more deeply learn of him."²⁰ Here the authority of all

¹⁷ Brooke Foss Westcott, "On the Primitive Doctrine of Inspiration," in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, David Scholer, and Paul Corby Finney, Studies in Early Christianity (New York: Garland, 1993), 3.

¹⁸ As cited in, William James Abraham, *The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 33.

¹⁹ of Alexandria Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. Robert Gregg, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 106-107.

²⁰ Westcott, 19.

scripture is clearly derived from the action of the Spirit in the inspiration of these works. Further, the Spirit provides the continuity for the content throughout scripture.

Athanasius does allow for differences in the Spirit's work in various scripture books. He views the Psalms as a special case of the Spirit by the nature of the content. Here, the words are not only the Holy Spirit's words, but also our own prayer today. Where the Spirit does work through all of scripture, the Psalms work with the Spirit in a unique fashion on the faithful. God will listen to this prayer from us in a special way because we are praying with the very words of the Spirit.²¹ He describes the Psalter as, "For in addition to the other things in which it enjoys an affinity and fellowship with the other books, it possesses, beyond that, this marvel of its own—namely, that it contains even the emotions of each soul, and it has the changes and rectifications of these delineated and regulated in itself. Therefore anyone who wishes boundlessly to receive and understand from it, so as to mold himself, it is written there."²²

He describes praying the Psalms as, "And these words, as his own, he chants to the Lord. And so, on the whole, each psalm is both spoken and composed by the Spirit so that in these same words, as was said earlier, the stirrings of our souls might be grasped, and all of us as our own words, for a remembrance of the emotions in us, and a chastening of our life. For what those who chant have said, these things also can be examples and standards for us."²³

This attitude in praying the Psalms is essential to the efficacy of the prayer. "Those who do not recite the divine songs in this manner do not sing them wisely. They bring delight to themselves, but they incur blame, because a hymn of praise is not suitable on the lips of a sinner. But when they chant in the way mentioned earlier, so that the melody of the phrases is brought forth from the soul's good order and from the concord with the spirit, such people sing with the

²¹ From the introduction to Athanasius, 25.

²² *Ibid.*, 107.

²³ *Ibid.*, 111.

tongue, but singing also with the mind they greatly benefit not only themselves but even those willing to hear them."²⁴

Finally, because the Psalms are this special prayer in the words of the Spirit, one cannot add to them any secular thoughts or words. "Do not let anyone amplify these words of the Psalter with the persuasive phrases of the profane, and do not let him attempt to recast or completely change the words. Rather let him recite and chant, without artifice, the things written just as they were spoke, in order for the holy men who supplied these, recognizing that which is their own, to join you in your prayer, or, rather, so that even the Spirit who speaks in the saints, seeing words inspired by him in them, might render assistance to us. For as much better as the life of the saints is than that of other people, by so much also are their expressions superior to those we construct and if one were to speak the truth, more powerful as well."²⁵

Origen stakes the claim generally for inspiration across both the Old & New Testaments and Christian preachers. "Truly, it is most evidently preached in the churches that the Holy Spirit inspired each of the saints, prophets, and apostles, and that with same spirit was present in those of old time as in those who were inspired at the coming of Christ." The literal sense is valued for moral teaching. But some scripture have no literal sense, or the literal sense no longer has any use. These become archetypes or a spiritual world for interpretation. They prefigure the coming of Christ or the events of the New Testament.²⁶

He deals specifically with the role of Holy Spirit in the inspiration of scripture in his theological work "First Principles." "That the Scriptures are divinely inspired. Since in our discussion of such great and special matters it is of no avail to hand over the conclusions of the investigation to human senses and to our common understanding and, so to speak, give a visible account of invisible things, we

²⁴ Ibid., 125.

²⁵ One wonders how widely held this view of not augmenting the Psalms in prayer really was. On the surface, this seems to run counter to our experience in liturgical development. Ibid., 127.

²⁶ Westcott, 25.

must also take up the witnesses of the divine Scriptures to demonstrate the points we have made. And so that these witnesses may have certain and undoubted credibility whether in the matters we have already discussed or in those now to be treated, it seems necessary first to show that they are divine Scriptures, that is that they are inspired by the Spirit of God. Therefore, concerning this point we shall mark out as briefly as possible the passages from those sacred Scriptures that especially move us to this opinion, passages, that is first from Moses, the lawgiver of the Hebrew nation, and then from the words of Jesus Christ, the author and head of the Christian religion and teaching.”²⁷

Like the Shepherd of Hermes he feels free to extend this action of Spirit to his own writing. Origen can claim that the Spirit inspires him, while remaining modest at the same time. The proof of the inspiration is in the acceptance of the work in the same Spirit by the reader. “I have spoken sufficiently in the preceding examination on the subject of prayer and have done so as far as I have been capable of receiving it according to the grace given by God through His Christ. And my hope is that it has been given also in the Holy Spirit; if so, you who read this treatise will judge of its inspiration.”²⁸

Basil makes this assumption of inspiration by the Holy Spirit part of his Treatise “On the Holy Spirit.” “How can someone who calls scripture ‘God-inspired’ (since it is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) use language that insults and belittles him (the Spirit).”²⁹ Basil makes use of this widely held belief of divine inspiration to bolster his argument for the full divinity of the Spirit in

²⁷ First Principles Book IV Chapter one, 1. Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works*, ed. Richard J. Payne, trans. Rowan A. Greer, Classics of Western Spirituality (NY: Paulist Press, 1979), 171.

²⁸ On Prayer. Part Two: XVIII.1. Ibid., 117. On the individual judging the inspired writing, see the Recent Proposal section no. 1. Pneumatic Appeals: In declaring scripture inspired, the believer turns the interpretation to one’s private story or experience in the Spirit to interpret the sacred text. On the one hand they turn to the Spirit to validate the bible literally or validate private experiences of the text. On the other, they use experience from nature or science to validate the bible. Both claim the individual use of the Spirit for this validation and lay claim to the apostolic practice mentioned by Origen here. Proponents include Harvey Cos, Tom Driver, and Sam Keen. James A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 79.

²⁹ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson, Popular Patristic Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1980; reprint, 4th printing 2001), 83.

the Trinity. Casius regard revelations as the mark of an apostle, and in the same place uses the striking phrase, the scriptures of god. "Who fearlessly laid their hands on the divine scriptures, saying that they corrected them...how great is the daring of their error. ...cannot be unknown even to themselves; for either they do not believe that the divine scriptures were spoke by the Holy Spirit and are unbelievers; or they hold themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit and we must say they rave."³⁰

The Holy Spirit is the presumed authority behind scripture from the earliest writings of the Church. The Spirit is the source of inspiration for the creation of the scriptures and by extension, even the preaching of the fathers about the scriptures is inspired.

Prophetic Experience

Prophecy is a specific case of inspiration that the fathers discuss directly. Here the communication of a direct message from God to the prophet is central to the written scripture. In a sense the case for divine movement in the inspiration is most clearly necessary in this scenario. Here we also see the most direct communication from God to his people as well. The use of intermediary messengers from a powerful person has a cultural grounding. The messenger speaks in the place of the one who dispatches them. The key prophetic messages are introduced with this standard cultural formula to make clear that the message pronounced is on the ruler's behalf. In scripture the formula "Thus Says the Lord..." is used for this purpose. Because of these special characteristics of prophetic inspiration, we cannot assume the comments of the fathers regarding prophecy would necessarily extend to the remainder of the authors of scripture.

There is an understanding of the prophets ministry shaping the nature of the inspiration experienced. This seems to be driven by a social message, not simply an impulse to get the word of God onto paper. In a sense the prophetic books

³⁰ Westcott, 7.

are the reverse situation from the rest of scripture. Scriptural inspiration starts with the impulse to write but includes the content of the teaching. Where the prophet starts with the command to teach and his disciples take up the challenge of writing. Similar to the reader referred to by Origen above, there is a type of inspiration in the actions of the people of Israel and the Christian church in accepting these teachings.³¹

The experience of the prophet during inspiration is often on the Greek model of possession. In this model, the prophet is seized by the Spirit in a manner similar to the oracle of Delphi. The primary difference is no need for an interpreter of the message. We find this model in both the Jewish and Christian communities. Philo attributed prophecy to divine possession, and compared inspiration to the surrender of a citadel, which was then occupied by another power.³² Justin Martyr's constant introductions of prophetic quotes as the Holy Spirit speaking through the prophet seem to support a similar "possession" viewpoint.³³ In any case, the Spirit is closely associated with prophecy in Justin. The Spirit's prime designation in "Apology" is prophetic Spirit (20 of 23). In "Trypho" the "prophetic Spirit" appears twelve times and the bulk of the Holy Spirit references introduce prophetic quotations.³⁴ Justin also takes the mantle of the philosopher in Greek culture for the Martyr. He claims divine inspiration for the Torah by Moses.³⁵ Athenagoras similarly understood prophecy as an "ecstasy above the natural operations," and the "piper who breathed on the pipe."³⁶ Seeing the role of the prophet as the mere tool or instrument for the Spirit is

³¹ Benoit, 16-21.

³² P. J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals*, 8 vols., Biblical Perspectives on Current Issues, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 31.

³³ So Vawter sees in "Trypho." Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 14-16. The opposite view of Justin's comments is argued in: Dewey M. Beagle, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 132. Additional notes on how Justin's introductions relate to inspiration are in Johannes Delitzsch, *De Inspiratione Scripturae Sacrae Quid Statuerint Patres Apostolici Et Apologetae Secundi Saeculi: Commentatio Dogmatico Historica*, Atla Monograph Preservation Program (Leipzig: Prostat apud A Lorentz Bibliopolam, 1872), 73.

³⁴ Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988), 62-63.

³⁵ Westcott, 7.

³⁶ Beagle, 133. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Utrecht: Spectrum Publishers, 1962), 233-234.

common to others as well.³⁷ The apologists—Quadratus & Aristides (in Eusebius) had the prophetic power. Tatian claims that the "spirit of god abides with some whose conversation is just." Theopholus "the men of god being filled with the Holy Spirit and filled with prophecy, having inspiration and wisdom from god, were taught of him and because holy and just. Wherefore, they were deemed worthy to obtain this recompense to be made instruments of god and receive the wisdom which comes from him."³⁸ Hippolytus of Protus says, "For these fathers, having been perfected by the spirit of prophecy, and worthily honored by the word himself, were brought to the inner harmony like instruments, and having the word within them, as it were, to strike the notes by him they were moved to and announced that with god wished."³⁹ Cyprian sees the prophet possessed by the fountain of the Spirit. "Scripture is fountain of divine fullness.... By him (Holy Spirit) the prophets were quickened to a knowledge of the future."⁴⁰ Ignatius of Antioch makes the claim for his own possession by the Spirit as the source of his authority as a bishop.⁴¹

Theodore of Mopsuestia allows for the human side of the prophet to come through in his commentaries. The Word of the Lord is an experience of thoughts and images rather than the prophet being the Spirit's instrument. He sees a different level of inspiration active in the different types of Old Testament scripture, very similar to the Jewish traditional designations.⁴² He argues for degrees of inspiration, especially among the prophets and wisdom literature. The prophet experiences a call to a charism, not an inherited office. This experience is then only valid for points in time, not generally for the prophet's

³⁷ John K. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1981), 168.

³⁸ Westcott, 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴¹ Philadelphians, 7:1-2. Cited in C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, Rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1960), 62.

⁴² The correlation to the traditional Jewish categories is not exact. Theodore does separate the historical books from the Major & Minor Prophets. In the Jewish system they form one grouping of the Prophets together. The Rabbis see the transmission and inspiration of the entire group as one level. Theodore places the histories lower than the traditional prophets. Joseph Blenkinsop, *Prophecy & Canon of the New Testament* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 128-132.

entire life or works. David is the first in this line of prophets. This experience is an experience of the Word, not one of dictation. He still sees the prophet's experience as an ecstasy in the Greek model. He draws this connection in a word study between the LXX and the Petrine epistles. In contrast to the prophetic literature, he sees a different type of inspiration active in the historical works. Here the collection and editing of the books by the temple scribes demands a different view of inspiration. In looking at the book of Job Theodore uses the models of Greek literature to define its inspiration. Finally, in the New Testament he sees the human nature of the authors strongly in the texts. Thus for Theodore, there are degrees of inspiration that vary by the books of scripture. He argued this position at the second Council of Constantinople. The fifth general council of 553 denounced this view.⁴³

For Irenaeus the Spirit and the Word of God are intimately related in their activities throughout the Old Testament. He especially notes this in creation and prophecy. In prophecy the Word and the Spirit cooperate to prefigure the coming incarnation. "The Spirit shows forth the Word, and therefore the prophets announced the Son of God; and the Word utters the Spirit, and therefore is himself the announcer of the prophets. ...Hither were the prophets sent by God through the Holy Spirit; and they instructed the people and turned them to the God of their fathers, the Almighty; and they became heralds of the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God. ...It is not a man who speaks the prophecies; but the Spirit of God, assimilating and likening himself to the persons represented, speaks in the prophets and utters the words sometimes from Christ and sometimes from the Father."⁴⁴ For Irenaeus Christ stands at the summit of revelation with the prophets foretelling his coming and the Apostles proclaiming this after the fact. In both the prophets and Apostles the

⁴³ Zaharopoulos, 86-96.

⁴⁴ Dem. 5 & 30 & 49 as cited in Torrance, 71-72.

Holy Spirit is the operative power for the revelation. The Spirit thus unites the Old and New Testaments around the Word of God.⁴⁵

For Origen the prophet's primary purpose is prediction of the coming of Christ and the arrival of Christ are the primary justification for deeming them divinely inspired. "If someone considers the prophetic writings with all the diligence and reverence they are worth, while he reads and examines with great care, it is certain that in that very act he will be struck in his mind and senses by some more divine breath and will recognize that the books he reads have not been produced in a human way, but are words of God. ...It would, however, be too laborious to list one by one how or when the predictions made by the prophets in time past have been fulfilled, so that we might seem in this way to give complete assurance to those who doubt, especially when it is possible for anyone who wishes to gain a more careful knowledge of them to assemble proofs more fully from the books of the truth themselves." He goes on to point out that looking beyond the literal word is often necessary to see these obvious predictions. This below the surface interpretation is justified by comparing the hidden truth in the scriptures to the treasure of great worth hidden in the field from the Gospel parable (Mt 13:44). This spiritual meaning is that "which the Holy Spirit through Isaiah calls 'obscure, invisible, and hidden treasures' (Is 45:2-3)" Thus for Origen, the Holy Spirit is the clear power behind prophecy and that prophecy can be clearly seen in the study below the surface of the text.⁴⁶

Perhaps Cassiodorus provides the most concise summary of this position "Prophecy is a divine aspiration which, either by words or by deeds, proclaims with immutable truth the course of events." This statement wraps up the entire discussion on both the inspiration and purpose of prophecy so well that both

⁴⁵ D. Farkasfalvy, "Theology of Scripture in St. Irenaeus," in *The Bible in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson, David Scholer, and Paul Corby Finney, Studies in Early Christianity (New York: Garland, 1993), 51-53.

⁴⁶ Origen, 175-76.

Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas use this as his launching point for their discussions on prophecy.⁴⁷

The general sense of the fathers from an early period is God moves the prophets directly through the Holy Spirit. This view is held early and widely in the patristic tradition. Justin expressed it thus: "Prophetic speech is not the words of the inspired men, but of him who moved them."⁴⁸ This view is likewise supported by Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, Athenagoras, Tertullian, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. But this view is not universal; Origen provides a thoughtful counter point to seeing prophecy in such simple terms. He sees the inspiration of prophets as more of a partnership or collaboration between God and the Prophet. The prophets "voluntarily and consciously collaborated with the word that came to them."⁴⁹ Origen leaves the message clearly in God's hands and control, but does allow for an independent contribution and role for the prophet.⁵⁰

Verbal Inspiration

The natural outgrowth of looking at inspiration from the view of the prophets is the concept of verbal inspiration. This is also referred to as the dictation model, the words of scripture are dictated by God to the author of scripture. This is the same model that Judaism sees active in the compilation of the Torah by Moses or the inspiration of the LXX translators.⁵¹ The quotation by Justin Martyr of the

⁴⁷Cassiodorus PL 70:12. As cited in Benoit, 36-37. In *Summa Theologiae*, II-II question 171, article 1, objection 4. Aquinas cites Cassiodorus through the Glossa of Peter Lombard. He cites this text in many other passages of his treatise on prophecy (see II-II, qq. 171-74), always attributing it explicitly to Cassiodorus (indirectly, see *ibid.*, q. 171, a. 4, obj. 2). Sometimes the whole phrase appears abbreviated versions: "Prophecy is divine revelation": (*ibid.*, a 4., obj. 2; q. 171 a 2, obj 3; a 5, obj 1). In the *De Veritate* this text appears as the basic definition of prophecy. Once attributed to Cassiodorus (see *De Veritate*, q 12, a 3), it is more frequently referred to the Glossa in *Principio Psalterii* (see *ibid.*, a 1, obj 10; a 11, *sed contra*, 1) or left without indication of its source.

⁴⁸ *Apol.* 1.36, PG 6:385 Trypho 115, PG 6:741. As cited in Vawter, 25.

⁴⁹ *Hom. In Ezek. Frag.* 6.1, PG 13:709. As cited in *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

⁵¹ Achtemeier, 33. The inspiration of the LXX translation was proved by the discovery that, although the translators worked independently of one another, their work was found to agree word for word, as though, Philo said, "dictated to each by an invisible prompter." In a similar vein, the Book of Jubilees tells how Moses wrote the material in Gen. 1 to Ex. 12 at the dictation of the "angel of the presence," all in

Spirit blowing through the prophet as the wind in the lyre makes the prophet a mere conduit for the Spirit's words. "The words of the prophets guarantee our reasoning...for they, while the reasoning power within them was at a stand, under the motion of the divine Spirit, spoke forth what was being wrought in them, the Spirit working with them, as it were a piper who breathed into his pipe." Some came to view inspiration as a mechanical process, where the human element is no more than a tool for the divine. This model would have implications for the truth of scripture in history, cosmology and science as well as theology. Marcion and the Manichees openly challenge these assertions of authority, especially for the Old Testament texts, but for much of the New Testament as well.⁵²

Theodore of Mopsuestia adopted the position of verbal inspiration for the Psalms of David. The Spirit gives David the words of the Psalms as both a prayer and prophecy for the times to come. He classified the Psalms by their spirit and content in his commentaries. He sees David as the first prophet in

accordance with the direct command of God. Thus, the very words themselves come from God. (Life of Moses, II, 31-37); the quotation is from par. 37. The book of Jubilees, chs 1,2. The tradition here may be drawing on the imagery of Ex 24:12. For similar language about the Torah in the Talmud, see the discussion in Beagle, 130-131.

⁵² Zaharopoulos, 79-80. The topic of inerrancy of scripture is widely discussed in modern commentary with no connection to patristic models of thought. There is some overlap in the relationship of inerrancy to inspiration in this literature and some similarities to the patristic concept of verbal and prophetic inspiration. Further relationships of inerrancy to the patristic concept of accommodation and condescension will be noted later. Luis Alonso Schökel, *The Inspired Word: Scripture in the Light of Language and Literature*, trans. Francis Martin, 1st ed. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), 58-74. Classifies inspiration theories along the format of how the inspired speaker is viewed in relationship to God. He divides the theories into three categories: 1-the speaker is the instrument through who God speaks. 2-The author is the person to whom God dictates the word—here he includes Roman Catholic and Protestant scholastic theories of the early modern period. 3-the speaker is the messenger sent by God. Beagle, 124-125. Offers four classifications, but he does not develop them extensively. These are: 1-Intuition, 2-illumination, 3-dictation, and 4-dynamic relationship. Robert K. Johnson, *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), 19-34. Offers a very helpful typology of conservative or evangelical protestant views on inspiration. He classifies leading American Protestant theologians in four groups, which may be described in a spectrum of very conservative to less conservative perspectives: 1-detailed inerrancy. Advocates include Francis Schaeffer, Harold Lindell and others who demand that all Christians need to adhere to the total doctrine of scripture 's full inspiration and perfect testimony in the areas of faith, practice, and all matters of science and history. They refuse fellowship to anyone who does not adhere to this position. 2-irenic inerrancy or flexible inerrancy (not errors in context). 3-complete infallibility. 4-partial infallibility. Cultural limitations of text. Has errors of science and history but infallible in faith and practice. Lienhard, 79. Most modern views are found under these four headings: 1-verbal inspiration & total inerrancy; 2-verbal inspiration & religious inerrancy; 3-inspiration of persons or ideas; and 4-social inspiration.

Israel. This prophetic ministry is one of revelation. At the same time, he does not apply this verbal inspiration model elsewhere in the scriptures. As noted above, he sees different levels as well as modes of inspiration in the various books of scripture, a view ultimately rejected by the church as a whole.⁵³

But the approach of Irenaeus is the more typical of the verbal inspiration category; “The scriptures are perfect because they are uttered by the Word of God, and His Spirit.” Speaking almost a century earlier, Clement of Rome says; “The scriptures are true utterances of the Holy Spirit.” There are blanket statements ascribing scripture as a whole to the speaking of God. This insures the truth of the words.⁵⁴

This desire for complete truth in the words of the text is expressed by Augustine’s dictum: “there is no disagreement in any part of sacred scripture.”⁵⁵ In his letter to Jerome he explains how one is to resolve the conflicts. “If you chance upon anything in Scripture that does not seem to be true, you must not conclude that the sacred writer made a mistake; rather your attitude should be: the manuscript is faulty, or the version is not accurate, or you yourself do not understand the matter.” Here the proper attitude of the reader is clear. The errors are only apparent, not real.⁵⁶ The natural outgrowth of the verbal inspiration model is the allegorical exegesis in patristic literature. Since every word is divinely dictated then each must have special meaning beyond the text. There can be no needless words in scripture. The true meaning can be unlocked only by the orthodox approach to the text. The Greek view of inspiration served as an important basis for the allegorizing approach to the texts. The possession

⁵³ Zaharopoulos, 82-84.

⁵⁴ Abraham, 33.

⁵⁵ Augustine, Sermon 82.9. Vawter, 33. This same quotation by Augustine allows Warfield to assert that the Bible as inerrant. Abraham, 17. Augustine acknowledges the signs of human frailty evident in scripture and often embarrassed by them, he could only conclude that the Holy Spirit had permitted one or the other writer to compose what he did in apparent variance with other scripture (cons. Eueang 2.21.52). Jerome, more than any other was sensitive to the human dimension of scripture in his translation efforts but made little effort to link insights to the contention of the scriptures as divine. Vawter, 38.

⁵⁶ Achtemeier, 172.

of the prophet, yielding a direct dictation of the words in scripture, demands an explanation of the errors and conflicts in the text.⁵⁷

Clement of Alexandria is typical of this literal versus allegorical use of scripture. He speaks of scripture as having a deeper meaning than the simple surface of the text. "Since the Savior did not teach anything in a merely human manner but everything by a divine and mystical wisdom we must not attend to his words in a carnal way but search out and master their hidden meaning with appropriate inquiry and understanding." He approaches scripture with skill and the critical method of the day to determine the true meaning of the words.⁵⁸

God as Author

While the divine authority of scripture is widely attested and assumed by the usage of scripture in the fathers, the explicit reference to God as the author of scripture comes through later Latin literature. The term *auctor* enters into the debates on the authority of the Old Testament in North Africa during the Manichaen heresy. Some scholars see the usage of *auctor* in this period as a clear reference to literary authorship, but others challenge this assertion. Augustine clearly has this sense of literary authorship, but Ambrose sees the process more

⁵⁷For the most part the Reformation theologians did not subscribe to the verbal inspiration view of scripture. There are some notable exceptions. The Congregation of Reformed exiles in Frankfurt (1554) declares the scriptures to be the result of dictation by the Holy Spirit. This explicit proclamation as part of the document's introduction provides the foundation for placing the Congregation under the authority of scripture. Likewise, Calvin stands in the patristic tradition in describing the authors of scripture as the "organs" of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dictates the resultant writings. Pelikan, 208-9. By contrast the council of Trent defines inspiration as the dictation by the Holy Spirit "Spiritu sancto dictante." This makes revelation equal to the words of scripture and leaves little room for participation by the author. Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation*, The 1993 Warfield Lectures (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 66.

⁵⁸Torrance, 161-172. Tertullian complains about his opponents that, "Heretics either wrest plain and simple words to any sense they choose by their conjectures, or else they violently resolve by a literal interpretation words which ...are incapable of a simple solution." (Marc. 4.19.6). The allegorical method must still be applied under the guide of the orthodox creeds. As cited in, Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1st ed., 5 vols., The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 61. Maximus the Confessor, a dominant theologian in the east, provides the theological framework for allegorical interpretation of scripture in the later fathers. He connects the method to a full system of checks and balances that keeps the exegete within the norms of the Church. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)*, 1st ed., 5 vols., The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 16-18.

as a gift of God's presence. For Ambrose, God's work in scripture was to flood the minds of its writers with the dew of his wisdom. But the words of scripture are clearly the words of God and not man. In any case, the term is taken up by conciliar pronouncements on scripture from the latter part of the 5th century through *dei verbum* in Vatican II. Those arguing in favor seeing God as the literary author hang the argument on the contrast to the Manichean denial of God as scriptor of the Old Testament. They see God as auctor of all scripture as the orthodox counter formula in this debate. Those seeing the term used in the less direct sense point to the broader Latin literary tradition. Here, we see auctor used in combination with a wide variety of terms giving a causal sense to the associated terms, Livy's auctor templi (architect of the temple), Suetonius' auctor gentis romanae (founder of the Roman nation), Vergil's auctor vulneris (cause of a wound), or Cicero's tibi auctor sim (let me be your advisor).⁵⁹

Accommodation or Condescension

The fathers struggled with the human elements undeniably present in the written texts. These struggles occurred in defending the faith from both within and without. The differing interpretations offered by heretical sects and the apologetic activity against both the empire and Jewish influences forced further contemplation on the issue of these discrepancies. The concept of accommodation or condescension was one result of these reflections. Here, the word of scripture is analogous to the Christ the Word of God. Just as Christ is both divine and human, there are divine and human natures to scripture. The word in scripture is a manifestation of God on earth. God speaks the spiritual truths in scripture to us as a parent speaks to a child. God must accommodate our weak intellect. Like verbal inspiration, this becomes a platform for allegorical interpretations of scripture.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Vawter, 22-28. Augustine, Conf. 12.36, PL 32:840-841. Ambrose, Ep. 8.10, PL 16:912-916.

⁶⁰ Henri de Lubac, *Histoire Et Éprit: L'intelligence De L'écriture D'après Origène*, 16 vols., Théologie, vol. 16 (Paris: Aubier, 1950), 248-250. Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics*, 1st ed., *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective*, vol. 1 (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997; reprint, 1999), 104-109. Vawter, 40-42. Some reformation theologians deal with the same issues of the relationship of errors in scripture to its divine origin. Citing Augustine's analogy of God speaking to us as

Athanasius delivered an impassioned defense of the Nicean view of the incarnation of Christ as both fully God and fully Man. Naturally, he might make use of the insights from this theological exploration in his consideration of scripture. The same term used of the Godhead becoming man, condescension (συγκαταβασίς) is applied to the scriptural word as well. This acknowledges the limits of human speech in the same way the limits of flesh are noted in the incarnation. All speech will fall short of the glory of God, even the very words of divine revelation. The solution is to carefully examine the word in the divine writ to understand their appropriate relationship to God. These words are written by holy men who are obedient to the movement of the Holy Spirit in their work. The hearer must listen in the same Spirit, with a spiritual vision (θεωρία).⁶¹

Speaking even more frequently on the topic was John Chrysostom's perspective on condescension. Chrysostom often extends this notion to human authorship of the sacred writings, thus accounting for metaphors or deliberate overstatement. For Chrysostom nothing in bible is superfluous, "Nothing in scripture is out of place, not a letter or part of a letter."⁶² The incarnation of Christ increasingly came to be seen as analogous to the divine-human aspects of scripture. He can see a progressive revelation through the Old Testament to the New. Where the coming salvation is slowly created bit by bit. This prevents the

a parent addresses a child, Luther affirms the principle of "sola scriptura" but points out the problems with the texts of scripture. He notes that James contradicts Paul, Jude is a mere copy of 3 Peter, and Hebrews could not possibly be written by Paul. Calvin notes a similar list, Moses' demonstrates a faulty understanding of astronomy, and the Gospel writers misquoted the OT at times. But both still assert the essential authority and truthfulness of scripture based on this Augustinian model. Luther does compare the word of scripture to the incarnation. For Luther the Word can only be the redemptive work of Christ in the flesh, but revelation becomes concrete in the scriptures in a manner similar to Christ becoming concrete in the flesh. Thus scripture has a human dimension by the nature of its creation in words. Robert Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible: Theories of Inspiration, Revelation and the Canon of Scripture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 35. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 331-35. Modern views on verbal inspiration & religious inerrancy make use of the fathers' condescension or accommodation as part of the justification for the view. The image of God speaking to us as a spiritual child is prevalent. Lienhard, 79-81.

⁶¹ From his In Psalm. 118.138; Frag. In Ps. 98. in Torrance, 273-275. Diodorus of Antioch sees θεωρία as juxtaposed to allegorical interpretation. For Diodorus allegory weakens the text while θεωρία provides the true meaning. Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis*, trans. John A. Hughes (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 67-68.

⁶²In Isaiam. cap. I, Migne, PG (56), 13-14 in Zaharopoulos, 79.

overwhelming of our human minds with the fullness of revelation.⁶³ Like Athanasius, Chrysostom also stressed the need for spiritual vision in the reading of scripture. Throughout his homilies the need for this vision is explicitly invoked. The sense of scripture cannot be had without the help of the Spirit.⁶⁴

Irenaeus expounds the same idea of successive dispensations in the Old Testament scriptures. He sees this as the only way that God can reveal himself. The sudden appearance of all revelation would be too much for us to handle. He also applies the hidden treasure in a field metaphor (Mt 13:44) to the difficult passages of scripture. There are spiritual treasures under the letter of scripture. The scriptures have a two-fold meaning, the letter and the spirit. The real meaning is in the spirit of the word. Thus allegorical interpretation is often necessary.⁶⁵

Theodore of Mopsuestia also subscribes to the idea of progressive revelation. He sees in the Old Testament shadows of both the Spirit and the Logos that can prepare the way for the coming of Christ.⁶⁶ His notion of accommodation in this scenario yields the three-fold method of exegesis—typology, allegory and prophecy fulfillment. He sees the role of grace in these expressions of scripture. The ‘grace of prophecy’ and the ‘grace of wisdom’ work within the notion of accommodation. He sees the mixture of human interaction with grace in the process of inspiration giving expression to scripture. In a sense, grace takes the lead role in inspiration. “The divine grace put before the prophets the things that were soon to be, and before the rest of them it made Hosea mindful of those things that would be from God for them, and helped him make taking of list of those things which had been spoken by David long ago.” Grace becomes the

⁶³ Vawter, 40-42. Basil makes the same argument in his treatise “On the Holy Spirit.” He notes that God reveals things in shadow because he knows we cannot bear the full light. Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*, ed. Thomas Oden, 1st ed., Ancient Christian Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 110-112.

⁶⁴ Stylianopoulos, 172.

⁶⁵ Westcott, 12. The letter and spirit interpretation of scripture addresses the same issues faced by modern critics, the history or science does not match the biblical text. The ancient answer is the spirit and the letter of the text through allegory. Often the modern answer is to reject the text. Gunton, 64.

⁶⁶ Zaharopoulos, 90-91.

discerning power of inspiration. “That he might have greater faith in the fine grace which energized the prophets.” This grace is still the gift of the Holy Spirit. “Than indeed they all had a share in the grace of the Holy Spirit and became worth of many different kinds of gifts. Some of them predicted the future, and most of these did this to strengthen faith in the greatness of what would happen and to give proof of the glory concerning the Lord Christ.”⁶⁷

Theodore connects this accommodation to the typological interpretation of scripture. The Law does foreshadow Christ. But he does not reject the Old Testament revelation as useless without Christ. There is an intrinsic value to the existing text. God’s mode (τροπος) of revelation is profitable for his people in the original form. This accommodation of revelation is set in the context of God’s οικονομια, which finds its end in Christ.⁶⁸

The nature of the connection between the divine and human in scripture occupied several of the fathers. Origen attempted to find the balance. The Holy Spirit illuminated the inspired writer, leaving the human author with his own mind in the process rather than turning him into an automaton.⁶⁹ Origen takes issue with the direct verbal inspiration approach, at least in the Gospels. He claims that the apostles could express their own opinions or understanding of the events they portray in the gospels. He espouses this view in his commentary on the fourth Gospel to resolve contradictions among the gospels. This is not a denial of the divine inspiration of the Gospels, but an attempt to come to terms with the obvious contradictions in the texts. Origen’s view lays the philosophical groundwork for his concept of accommodation (συμπεριφορα). The anthropomorphism in the scriptures is a prime example of this accommodation for Origen, as they obviously cannot be literally true.⁷⁰ “We should also know that since the chief aim of the Holy Spirit was to keep the logical order of the spiritual meaning either in what is bound to happen or in what has already taken

⁶⁷ Rowan A. Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia, Exegete and Theologian* (London: Faith Press, 1961), 105-106.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶⁹ Princ 4.2.7 & cels 7.3-4 in Vawter, 38.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26-28.

place, if anywhere He found that what happened according to the narrative could be fitted to the spiritual meaning, He composed something woven out of both kinds in a single verbal account, always hiding the secret meaning more deeply. But where the narrative of events could not be coherent with the spiritual logic, He sometimes interspersed either events less likely or absolutely impossible to have happened and sometimes events that could have happened but in fact did not.”⁷¹ Origen also asserts that there is nothing useless in scripture. In his homilies on Numbers he is able to exercise this power of literary analysis.⁷² Origen uses the normal rules of Greek literary analysis to identify the problem areas in scripture. He points out that these are stumbling blocks for understanding and mean that the letter of the text cannot be followed and that a deeper meaning must be sought. Origen sees also finds the letter and spirit analogy helpful; he even extends it at times to an intermediate level, the soul. Thus there are potentially three understandings of any verse, letter, soul and spirit. He sets many of these constructs up with two typologies, a comparison of Old Testament to New or a comparison of earthly reality to heavenly reality.⁷³ The figure of Christ is central to the Old Testament revelation. Christ not only speaks when he comes in the flesh, but speaks through Moses and the prophets who “are filled with the Spirit of Christ.” Christ becomes the unifying power across all scripture.⁷⁴

In the West, Hillary of Poitiers also expresses a view on condescension for scripture. He asserts that God gradually reveals himself to his people and accommodated his revelation to our feebleness on the occasion. The scriptures can mean more than they did when written or heard by the original audience. By their nature they point to our ultimate redemption and fulfillment of God’s plan. Even when there is no possibility of the original audience so understanding them. “The prophetic word keeps the order of the divine dispensation and by

⁷¹ First Prin. Book IV, 2.9. in Origen, 188.

⁷² Homily on Numbers in Ibid., 247-248.

⁷³ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁴ Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers*, ed. Thomas Oden, 1st ed., Ancient Christian Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998), 143.

the works of the Law itself declares that the works of the Gospel are adumbrated through the Law.” This approach justifies the allegorical interpretation of scripture, but does not deny the basic historical truth of the text.⁷⁵

The relationship between the Word and Spirit is played out in scripture.⁷⁶ The Spirit inspires scripture, but the content of the revelation is the Word. The Word of Christ in a sense speaks in scripture. The lines between Spirit inspiration and Word in content become blurred.⁷⁷ Hippolytus of Protus expresses the relationship this way, “The law and the prophets were from God, who in giving them compelled his messenger to speak by the Holy Spirit, that receiving the inspiration of the father’s power they may announce the father’s counsel and will. In these men therefore the Word found a fitting abode and spoke of himself; for even then he came to his own herald, showing the Word who was about to appear in the world.”⁷⁸ The role during inspiration for these two persons of the Trinity becomes intertwined and difficult to separate. Origen expresses the same thought more succinctly, “Christ the Word according to the flesh, appears in the Bible according to the letter.”⁷⁹ For Origen all of creation reflects the image of the primordial Word, but scripture is a more perfect reflection. He clearly sees scripture are inspired by the Spirit, but reflective of the

⁷⁵ In Ps. 67.25. As cited by Torrance, 395-397. See also De Trinitate, 1.30; 4.27f; 5.18f; 24f.

⁷⁶ In the experience of OT prophecy we see both prophets of the spirit and prophets of the word. Moses and most of the former prophets in classical Judaism are of the spirit. Moses longs of the whole community to experience this ecstasy in the spirit (Num 11:29). But the classic prophets are of the word. They encounter God’s word in a special ministry of proclamation. James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 61-66.

⁷⁷ Benoit, 84. During the Reformation Calvin and Zwingli observe this same relationship of the spirit and the word. Asserting that they stand in the tradition of Augustine and the early fathers, they maintain that the spirit enlivens the Church through the Word in scripture. The Church is a human organization that can only have legitimacy while in concert with the Word of God. The Word and the Spirit are a single package; one cannot have one without the other. Calvin further points out that the same Holy Spirit that inspires the scriptures, becomes the teacher of the faithful. The indwelling Spirit allows one to discern the true meaning of the text. This teaching is a joint effort of the Word of God with the Holy Spirit as instructor; one cannot have one without the other. Pelikan, *Reformation of Church & Dogma*, 187-188.

⁷⁸ Westcott, 7.

⁷⁹ Comm. In Ev. Mt. 15.3, PG 13:1257. As cited in Vawter, 28.

Word. Scripture is an incarnation of the Word in letters analogous to the incarnation of the Word in the flesh.⁸⁰

Theological reflection on the incarnation of Christ provided a fruitful metaphor for the fathers to consider the divine and human in scriptures themselves. The fact that Christ is the Word and that scripture is a written word provides further food for thought. The division of scripture into the letter and the spirit that results provides a convenient matrix to discuss the interpretation of problematic passages.

Canon Debates

The canonical process is one of selectivity and repetition of the sacred stories. These are selected to serve the real needs of communities in teaching and liturgy. Not that the process is entirely driven by this need, but the collection and canonization of the texts we receive in both the OT and NT is to a large degree based on these needs. In essence the canon are those books which the believing community uses and passes on to the next generation of believers for their use.⁸¹ The question of what to include in the canon of scripture for both the Old and New Testament was hotly debated in the early Church. The debate on the canon of the Old Testament raged simultaneously in Judaism. The discernment and finalization of the Jewish Tanakh into the form we know it today, occurred during the first century of the Christian church. On the Christian side of the question, Jerome and Augustine were still advocating the two Old Testament different canons hundreds of years later.⁸² This debate reappeared in the Christian tradition during the Reformation. The alternatives in the Old

⁸⁰ Von Hans Balthasar, *Origen: Spirit & Fire a Thematic Anthology of His Writings*, trans. Robert J. Daly (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1984; reprint, 2001), 86-88.

⁸¹ James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 33-34.

⁸² Rufinus, like Jerome, championed the cause of the Jewish canon. His list corresponds to Jerome's in books named and has only two changes in order, and he speaks of it as having been received from the tradition of the fathers, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, and as handed down to the churches of Christ. The books of the apocrypha are placed into a separate category, not being called canonical but ecclesiastical by the majority; these are read by all in the churches who wish to, but not as authoritative for the confirmation of doctrine. (380 AD) Sundberg, 153.

Testament Canon for Christians highlight the problem of contradictions within the scriptures for those considering the nature of God's inspiration. There are several theologically significant divergences between the two canons.⁸³

For Christians looking at scripture, the primary task is creating the matrix that transforms the Hebrew scriptures into a work about Christ. By the time of Irenaeus we have clear indications of a Christian Bible. The "Rule of Faith" is the "canon" by which the books are measured. These basic creeds form the theological outline for understanding what can become scripture.⁸⁴ The Church is finding its way between the Jewish community and the Gnostic and other heretical forms of Christianity emerging. These two poles of experience combine with the creeds to inform the discernment of canon.⁸⁵

On the Christian side of the fence Marcion and the epistle of Barnabas provide a glimpse of the two extremes for Old Testament usage. Marcion was a Christian in North Africa that contributed large sums to the church. He rejects the Old Testament as being of another god who is replaced by the God of Christ. He is condemned and his money returned. Barnabas sees the same scriptures and insists they are of the Christian God and no longer belong to the Jews. For Barnabas the Jews lost the scriptures with the sin of the golden calf. They reject the law on arrival and no longer have access to the scriptures. The position of Barnabas is not dismissed explicitly, but the Church never adopts it either. Rather, Irenaeus sets forth the Church's position. The Old Testament contains Law, Discipline and Prophecy. The Law is the commandments and moral code.

⁸³ Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1968; reprint, Third reprint), 29-58. Lienhard, 12-13. Sundberg, 4-28. Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 231-288. The concept of canon is largely a construct of the first century period. The Jewish canon as such, does not exist prior to the end of the first century. The evidence from Qumran shows a remarkable degree of flux in both text and books from the Jewish tradition. A situation not unlike the contemporaneous Christian experiences. Eugene Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, ed. Peter Flint and Martin Abegg, First ed., *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Brill, 1999), 58-61.

⁸⁴ James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, 1st ed., *Library of Early Christianity*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 111-112.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 124-125.

Discipline is the cultic rules and temporary injunctions. Prophecy is the foreshadowing of Christ.⁸⁶

In debating the content of the New Testament canon, three criteria emerge as the standards for inclusion: apostolic authority, universal usage and sound doctrine. The apostolic authority served to ground the works of the New Testament to the earliest period of the Church, those with the most direct experience of Christ's revelation. The universal usage was a sign of the Spirit of discernment that preserved these good works. The sound doctrine debates insured that scripture could not contradict the creeds universally held. For the same Spirit was at work in both and could not contradict itself.⁸⁷

While the direct canon listings and debates center on the theological and usage issues, some fathers do assert the process of canonization is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The close of the Song of Songs mentions the vast number of Psalms and songs composed by Solomon. Origen makes a brief answer as to why these other writings are not considered inspired scripture. He notes that there is much "apocryphal" literature available in his day. But the faithful should beware of these books. "It exceeds our competence to make pronouncements concerning such matters. It is, however, obvious that many examples exist of passages, taken by the apostles or by the evangelists and put into the New Testament, which we never read among those Scriptures we hold to be canonical...It could have happened that the apostles or evangelists, filled with the Holy Spirit, know what ought to be taken from those writings and what ought to be refused. But for us, who do not have such a great fullness of the Spirit, it is

⁸⁶ Lienhard, 16-22. Torrance, 35-39. Marcion interpreted the OT literally in order to make it appear absurd. He also used the Greek poetic critical methods to the NT. This allowed him to label sections as insertions that should be removed. Tertullian would declare, "Marcion was prepared to declare a passage an insertion rather than explain it (Adv. Marc. 4,7) Similarly, the Gnostic Valentine will label the prophets thieves and robbers on the basis of Jn 10:8. Ptolemy will divide the Pentateuch into three sources: Divine, Moses or Elders. Allowing him to reject most of the text outright. Julio Trebolle Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible: An Introduction to the History of the Bible*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (New York: Brill, 1998), 516-517.

⁸⁷ Charles Francis Digby Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 2nd Rev ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1981), 188-196.

not without danger to attempt such a discrimination.”⁸⁸ Tertullian speaks to the same issue for the book of Enoch. Enoch is not accepted to the canon of scripture, but is quoted as scripture by Jude, which is accepted as scripture. “If (Noah) had not this conservative power by so short a route, there would still be this consideration to warrant our assertion of the genuineness of this scripture: he could equally have renewed it, under the spirit’s inspiration, after it had been destroyed by the violence of the deluge, as, after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian storming it, every document of the Jewish literature is generally agreed to have been restored through Ezra. But since Enoch in the same scripture has preached likewise concerning the Lord, nothin at all must be rejected by us which pertains to us...by the jews it may now seem to have been rejected for that reason, just like all the other portions which tell of Christ...to these considerations is added the fact that enough possessed a testimony in the apostle Jude.”⁸⁹ The selection of books for both the Old Testament and New Testament canon is a process under the direction of the Holy Spirit. This same Spirit inspired those works and helps the Church discern them for inclusion.

Conclusion

There is no treatise on the inspiration of scripture on the modern models in patristic literature. There is a clear sense of divine inspiration and the operation of the Holy Spirit in this process, but little concern as to the means and methods of this operation. Most of the modern literature on the topic is from the point of view of psychological models in the scriptural authors or the relationship of inspiration to revelation, authority or the canon of scripture. The patristic expressions on this topic are dealt with as foundational material for a more complete modern review of inspiration.⁹⁰

For the fathers, the Holy Spirit is clearly the source of scriptural inspiration. They see these features that result for that inspiration: scripture is a written form

⁸⁸ From commentary on Song of Songs, closing paragraph. Origen, 244.

⁸⁹ Sundberg, 165.

⁹⁰ Lienhard, 79.

of God's Word; This Word of God speaks in mouth of men; As a result, the image of God is a veiled glory "seen through glass dimly;" And these must be heard within an experience of Christ.⁹¹ The fathers respond to specific issues rather than delve into the nature and methods of inspiration.

While there is no treatise on inspiration in the modern sense, the role of the Holy Spirit in scriptural inspiration is explored in a number of ways. Most directly Origen deals with the theological implications of inspiration by the Spirit in his "First Principles." But many others make passing references or brief excursions into the topic in their writings. These observations provide different models for understanding inspiration, usually with a view to underscoring the ultimate authority of what is being taught at that moment of writing. At the same time, these models and observations provide food for thought in meditating on the interaction of God with his people. While the Holy Spirit inspiring a person to write scripture is not our experience, the same Spirit is seen operating in us using similar models by the fathers. The same Spirit that inspires the author of scripture allows us to discern the application of that scripture in our lives.

The chief problem for the theologian considering the inspiration of scripture is the presence of errors and contradictions in the texts. The model of accommodation and the use of allegorical or typological interpretation are the chief methods to resolve this conflict in the patristic literature. The contemplation of the incarnation as a model for the divine and human in scripture is another model for understanding these textual issues. The relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Word as the source of scripture is explored as well. The role for the Word in scripture is seen in conjunction with the movement of the Spirit. But throughout the process there is little doubt that the Spirit is the source of inspiration.

⁹¹ Torrance, 6-9.

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