

## REVELATION AND INSPIRATION: THE GROUND FOR A NEW APPROACH

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Should theological scholarship be satisfied with already-existing theories about revelation and inspiration, or is there room for development of a new understanding of the way in which the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures were originated? In this article I probe the question of the ground or basis for developing a new approach to this doctrine. Further aspects of the topic will be considered in later articles.

It seems clear, to begin with, that according to Scripture itself, both revelation (e.g., Dan 2:28; Gal 1:12; Eph 1:17; and Rev 1:1) and inspiration (e.g., 2 Tim 3:16 and 2 Pet 1:21) are acts of God. Without attempting at this point to define these terms precisely, we can say that revelation involves God's action in the process of generating ideas in the mind of the prophet, whereas inspiration involves God's action in the process through which the prophets wrote down the revealed ideas and produced the Bible.<sup>1</sup> It follows that any interpretation of the revelation-inspiration process will be conditioned by the prior understanding of God and human beings that theologians consciously or unconsciously assume in discussing the origin of the Scriptures.

When students of theology are able to realize that the natures of the two agents involved in the revelation-inspiration doctrine—God and the human spokesperson—are interpreted in diverse ways, they will have discovered why so many different and mutually exclusive interpretations of the very same process have been produced by theological reflection.

<sup>1</sup>Herein I speak of revelation in its specific and technical sense that refers to the process by which Scriptures were originated. For a discussion of the broader range of meaning involved in the biblical concept of revelation and a summary of additional aspects involved in this biblical concept, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:198-214.

The thesis in this article is that the ground on which a new basic Christian theology regarding revelation-inspiration can be developed is to be found at the level of the interpretation of the two agents that were necessarily involved in the production of the Scriptures. Briefly stated, a new theological model about the origin of Scripture is possible if the ground or basis for understanding God and the human spokesperson can be distinguished from previously existing models. The new model must, at the same time, be biblical in its interpretation of these two agents.

### 1. *God and Theology*

One's understanding of God affects directly one's conception of the manner and process of the divine action involved in revelation and inspiration.<sup>2</sup> It is important to remember that God's being has been interpreted in various ways throughout the history of Christian thought. However, one basic commonality to most, if not all, of these is that God's being and activity are characterized less on the basis of biblical concepts than on concepts produced by human philosophy—more specifically, Greek philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Because of its overarching systematic function, the doctrine of God is central not only to the revelation-inspiration doctrine but also to the entire system of Christian theology.<sup>4</sup> If a variation is

<sup>2</sup>Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit, commenting on Thomas Aquinas' interpretation of revelation (*lumen prophetiae*), correctly remark that Aquinas' solution is "based on a different conception of the concurrence of divine and human causality" (*Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-IIae, Questions 171-178*, trans. Avery R. Dulles and Thomas L. Sheridan [New York: Desclee, 1961], 93). What Synave and Benoit do not say because of its obviousness is that Aquinas' conception of both divine and human causality is determined by his conception of God and the human being—in other words, by what may be identified as the components of the systematic structure of revelation-inspiration.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, with foreword, new notes, and bibliography by Frederick C. Grant (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 238-282.

<sup>4</sup>The systematic centrality of the doctrine of God has been broadly recognized by both philosophers and theologians. Among the philosophers we find, for instance, Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 6.1.10,11) and Martin Heidegger ("The Onto-theological Constitution of Metaphysics," in *Identity and Difference*, ed. Joan Stambaugh [New York: Harper and Row, 1969], 59, 60). Among biblical theologians, see Gerhard Hasel (*Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975], 100); and among systematic theologians, Wolfhart Pannenberg, who explains that "in theology, the concept of God can never be simply one issue among the others. It is the central issue, around which everything else is

introduced concerning the interpretation of God's being and activity, the whole theological structure will be affected. This is exactly what has happened concerning the doctrine of revelation and inspiration. For one thing, both Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions have tended either to openly reject or covertly belittle the ideological content of the OT. In recent times, it appears that often even the NT is no longer considered normative.

Instead of basing its theology squarely on Scripture, the Christian church in earlier ages began to adopt Greek philosophical concepts as useful tools for interpreting the meaning of God's being, his transcendence, and his actions in history. It may, in fact, be said that Greek philosophical ideas tended very much to displace OT thought from its proper role in Christian theology.

In relationship to God's being and activity, one foundational difference between Greek philosophy and the Bible is that the former interprets ultimate reality to be timeless, whereas the Bible considers reality to be temporal and historical. During the medieval and modern periods of Christian history, in particular, the church has fostered a trend in Christian theology whereby a timeless interpretation of both the being and transcendence of God has been adopted. Indeed, we may well suggest that the timeless interpretation of God's being is very common in Christian theology, both in its classical and liberal traditions.<sup>5</sup>

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organized. If you take away that one issue nothing would be left to justify the continuation of that special effort that we call 'theology'" (*An Introduction to Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991], 21). John Macquarrie states that in Christian theology the doctrine of God "has a central place" that "underlies all the other doctrines," and he further explains that this "doctrine of the triune God already contains *in nuce* the whole Christian faith, so that reflection upon it will provide us with a center to which we can relate all the other doctrines as we pass through them" (*Principles of Christian Theology*, 2d ed. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977], 187). In addition, see Anders Nygren, *Meaning and Method: Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 357; and David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 146-147.

<sup>5</sup>The difference between theology and religious experience should be drawn here. Many individual Christians, who faithfully submit to the clear meaning of Scripture, are unaware of systematic-theological positions about God and Scripture. I am convinced that there is a distinct dichotomy between what theology tends to set forth in this respect and the understanding and experience of Christian believers in general. However, it must also be remembered that theology directly determines the doctrines of churches and denominations, thus influencing the content of teaching and preaching. When specific beliefs are not drawn from the Bible but rather from tradition, even biblically oriented Christians are not always able to rid themselves of nonbiblical understandings of vital issues.

The idea of timelessness in philosophical/theological discussion is a technical one. For the purposes of this article, a concise explanation of it will suffice. Timelessness is the conception that reality in general and God in particular are essentially and necessarily voided of, and incompatible with, time and space.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, a timeless conception of reality necessarily eliminates from the realm of genuine reality anything that may be considered as historical, or analogical to what we call history.

It is important to point out, further, that the technical sense in which timelessness is used in philosophy and theology must not be confused with common connotations usually connected with it. The technical sense of timelessness should not be identified with such ideas as, for instance, "having no beginning or end," "not restricted to a particular time or date," and "not affected by time: ageless."<sup>7</sup> In the technical philosophical view, the historical arena does not properly belong to reality. The timeless understanding of God means, consequently, that his reality is non-historical and incompatible with human history. Moreover, since God is considered to be the highest being, he is viewed as representing the highest level of timeless perfection. Therefore, God's actions cannot be conceived as his personal, historical involvement and operation within history, but rather as historical manifestations of his one eternal act outside of history.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Augustine had a timeless understanding of the being of God. He did not develop it technically at length, but it clearly shows when the issue of God's being and works is addressed. For instance, Augustine affirms, "At no time, therefore, did you [God] do nothing, since you had made time itself. No times are coeternal with you, because you are permanent, whereas if they were permanent, they would not be times" (*Confessions* 11, 14, 17). Thomas Aquinas describes the meaning of timelessness in the following way, as he uses it to portray the idea of God's eternity: "Those beings alone are measured by time that are moved. For time, as is made clear in *Physics IV*, is 'the number of motion.' But God, as has been proved, is absolutely without motion, and is consequently not measured by time. There is, therefore, no *before* and *after* in Him: He does not have being after non-being, not non-being after being, nor can any succession be found in His being. For none of these characteristics can be understood without time. God, therefore, is without beginning and end, having His whole being at once. In this consists the nature of eternity" (*Summa contra gentiles*, trans., introd., and notes by Vernon J. Bourke [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956], 1.15.3).

<sup>7</sup>*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1991), s.v. "timeless."

<sup>8</sup>For further information about the technical meaning of timelessness, see Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 6-16.

Thomas V. Morris explains the way in which a timeless God may be seen as "acting" in history:

There is one eternal divine act outside of time that has a great number of different effects in time, at different times. One effect of this eternal divine act is the world's coming into being. Another is Abram's hearing certain words at a particular time. Still another effect of this same act is Moses' hearing of different words at a later time, and so forth. The single eternal act of God has a bewildering variety of effects with respect to his temporal creation. But from the evident truth that those effects take place at different times, it may not legitimately be inferred that they are effects of distinct actions which also take place at different times.<sup>9</sup>

When the conception of timelessness for God's activity is adopted, the historical aspect of the divine manifestation becomes reduced from its proper biblical sense of true reality (ontic-theological level) to the human cognitive awareness (epistemological level) of "God for us." In other words, the historical acts of God portrayed in the Bible are interpreted, not as belonging essentially to God's being, but rather as belonging essentially to our human way of knowing—a capacity of perceiving and knowing which is obviously historical and limited.<sup>10</sup>

A timeless God, moreover, cannot be thought of as achieving the work of atonement through a historical act involving contingency and real risk. Therefore, when the timeless nature of God is assumed, the divine atonement at the cross has to be reinterpreted. This is done, for instance, by suggesting that what occurred at the cross was purely the manifestation of our salvation's finding its ground in the eternal unchangeable being of God, notably in his eternal love.

## 2. *God in the Bible*

Biblical thinking about reality in general and about God in particular posits that reality is essentially temporal and historical.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 131-132.

<sup>10</sup>By the term "historical acts" of God in history I mean divine acts in which God himself, experiencing the created temporal sequence (i.e., past, present, and future), but not limited to it, is a historical agent within the continuous flux of history. The definition of the so-called "historical acts" (or "act") of God in the timeless model is, of course, diametrically opposed to this.

<sup>11</sup>For an analysis of the way Exod 3:14-16 reveals a historical understanding of the ultimate reality of God himself, see Fernando Canale, *A Criticism of Theological*

This historicity of biblical thought is self-evident and constitutes the presupposition for very important theological ideas concerning God's being and his eternity.

In his *Christ and Time*, Oscar Cullmann uncovers the temporal conception of eternity that NT writers had. Cullmann underlines that "eternity, which is possible only as an attribute of God, is time, or, to put it better, what we call 'time' is nothing but a part, defined and delimited by God, of this same unending duration of God's time." He adds that "time and eternity share this time quality. Primitive Christianity knows nothing of a timeless God. The 'eternal' God is he who was in the beginning, is now, and will be in all the future, 'who is, who was, and who will be' (Rev. 1:4)."<sup>12</sup> This implies that real things, including God's being and activities, exist and occur in space and in time.<sup>13</sup>

One may regret that Cullmann has employed the historical conception of God's eternity as only a framework for his own interpretation of salvation history, without going more deeply into the implications that such a foundational idea has for the entire structure of systematic theology in general and for the doctrine of

*Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 349-374.

<sup>12</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 62-63.

<sup>13</sup>Contemporary philosophy has developed a temporal historical interpretation of Being (cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], prologue; and see also id., "The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Anthology*, ed. William Barrett and Henry D. Aiken [New York: Random House, 1962], 3:213-214); yet, no acceptable interpretation of God's temporality has been produced thus far. The dipolar solution of pantheistic "Process Philosophy" is not satisfactory because, relating God's time univocally to our human time, it actually identifies our world and time with a pole or component of God's being, thus destroying the possibility of personal relations with human creatures as presented in the Bible. Concerning this, see Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 521-524; and Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1948), 88-92. Working from within a Heideggerian background, John Macquarrie also sees time in univocality to our human time and thus is unable to conceive Being or God as an entity existing in time and history (*Principles of Christian Theology*, 208). The same can be said of Pannenberg's position (see *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990], 76-78; and *Systematic Theology*, 1: 401-410). Pannenberg is specifically critical of Heidegger and of Process Philosophy (*Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 8-14, 74-75, and 113-129). The biblical conception of God involves a specific analogical understanding of time as a dimensionality of his very nature.

inspiration and revelation in particular.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the implications of following either of the two possible interpretations of eternity are momentous for the understanding of the being of God and for the understanding of the whole system of theology. The basic theological structure of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, in both conservative and liberal forms, has leaned toward the timeless view. In fact, it may be said that this theological structuring has been produced on the assumption of a timeless, non-historical interpretation of the being of God and of reality as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. *God and Revelation-Inspiration*

From what has been considered thus far, it is possible to understand why the doctrine of revelation and inspiration has been developed assuming this timeless, non-historical interpretation of

<sup>14</sup>As far as I know, Cullmann never gave specific analytical thought to the issue of revelation-inspiration. Rather, he limited his comments about time to the discipline of NT history, shying away from both dogmatic and philosophical reflection. In *Christ and Time*, he states: "The message of the New Testament is most lucid within the framework of linear time, and until another is given which yields a greater understanding without adversely influencing the essentials of that message, I shall adhere to this framework. But it is no more than a framework." In the same place, he goes on to affirm that "the task of the dogmatic theologian is far more difficult than that of the New Testament scholar, in so far as the latter is required to show only what the New Testament teaches. He does not need to solve the difficulties arising in the teaching, nor wrestle with its basic presuppositions. But it is his bounden duty to keep within the limits of his work, for which the dogmatic theologian is thankful because only in this way can he rely on the results of the exegete's labor" (12). In *Salvation in History* Cullmann expands the vision that he briefly presented in *Christ and Time*, again without furnishing any systematic treatment of the doctrine of revelation-inspiration. He does, however, make some brief statements about revelation, suggesting basically that the Bible was originated by a combination of event and interpretation (*Salvation in History* [London: SCM, 1967], 88-97).

<sup>15</sup>Donald Bloesch correctly perceives that "we are living in an era of the confusion of tongues. We are confronted by the rise of theological schools that no longer share a common parameter, that are disturbingly incapable even of engaging in meaningful dialogue with one another because of the wide disparity in criteria and goals" (*A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992], 33). The affirmation of timelessness over the historicity of God's being and actions entails the concept that biblical language should be understood as indirect metaphoric or symbolic utterances in need of philosophical interpretation. If the timelessness of God is incorporated into theological methodology as a presupposition which determines the nature of God's actions, the *sola Scriptura* principle cannot be applied, even though it might be theoretically affirmed.

God's being, his transcendence, and his acts. The most influential present-day models of revelation-inspiration—such as the Thomistic thought-inspiration, the encounter-existential, and the various varieties of the dictation-verbal—can be seen as stemming from some form of a timeless conception about God's being and activity.<sup>16</sup>

One way in which the doctrine of revelation-inspiration is affected when the timeless perspective is replaced with a historical one can be perceived, for instance, when the status of Scripture as a source of theological data is considered. When God is conceived to act within a timeless realm, the theological content of Scripture (which is brought into being by God) will also pertain to the timeless realm. In this case, the historical side of Scripture is considered to belong, not to its divine cause, but rather to the human condition necessary for the expression of its divinely (timelessly) originated content. Thus, the Scriptures are said to be "historically conditioned." On the contrary, the concept that God is capable of acting genuinely in history (that is, "historically") leads to a conception of the biblical writings as being "historically constituted." According to the former view, the historical side of Scripture is external and incidental to its religious and theological contents; according to the latter view, the historical side of Scripture belongs to the very essence of its divinely revealed and inspired contents.

In conclusion, when substantial changes in the interpretation of God are introduced, substantial changes in the understanding of the revelation-inspiration process are also to be expected and do indeed occur. Since the Bible's conception of God's being and activity in history is clearly different from that of theological tradition in general, a critical reevaluation of the theological interpretation regarding Scripture origin is unavoidable.

#### 4. *Human Nature and Theology*

The constitution of theological doctrines not only presupposes an interpretation of God but also an interpretation of human nature. Basic anthropological concepts, therefore, appear as presuppositions which are involved, in various and different ways,

<sup>16</sup>This is not the place to discuss these theories. It should be noted, however, that it is hardly possible or proper to speak of, let us say, the view popularly called "thought inspiration" without assuming at the same time a technical definition of "thought."

in the development of major Christian doctrines. For instance, Millard J. Erickson explicitly mentions the connection between anthropology and the doctrines of God, Christ, atonement, regeneration, justification, and ecclesiology.<sup>17</sup> He also explains that the conclusions reached in anthropological studies "will affect, if not determine, our conclusions in other areas of doctrine." He goes on to say:

What man is understood to be will color our perception of what needed to be done for him, how it was done, and what his ultimate destiny is. If our conception of human nature is presupposed in our study of other doctrines, and if presuppositions have a significant influence upon conclusions, then the effort expended here is well worth it, for here the issues are overt and thus can be dealt with openly and consciously.<sup>18</sup>

Let us consider the way in which anthropology becomes a presupposition for the revelation-inspiration doctrine. As we have seen, besides God the other agent involved in the revelation-inspiration process is the human writer. The action of God is addressed to, and localized in, this writer. Both revelation and inspiration as acts of God occur within the human nature of the writer. As a human being, the writer can be said, therefore, to be the "place" or "locus" where the revelation-inspiration process occurs. This means that in this human being the ideas, data, information, etc., written in the Bible were originated as the result of God's revelational activities, and that likewise, in the human process of writing, the divinely originated contents were recorded through the process of inspiration.

The importance of this human component cannot be over-emphasized, insofar as it determines, not the content, but both the cognitive mode of revelation and the linguistic mode of inspiration. Human knowledge and language can be considered not only in relation to their content but also in relation to their general characteristics, thus revealing their cognitive and linguistic "modes."

<sup>17</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 84, 85, 456-457.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 457. Working within a quite different theological system, Pannenberg also recognizes the general function of anthropology as theological presupposition when he remarks that "the most general foundations of systematic theology will therefore have to come from anthropology" (*Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonagh [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976], 422).

The content dimension of human knowledge pertains to the various scientific enterprises undertaken by human beings. The "mode" dimension comes into view when either knowledge or language is considered in relation to its main characteristics aside from any reference to specific, concrete content. The interpretation of knowledge and language as "modes" uncovers the main general characteristics that were involved as God originated Scriptures through the agency of human beings. In other words, the theological doctrine of inspiration and revelation presupposes a theory of knowledge and a philosophy of language.

The technical task of interpreting the main characteristics that belong to human knowledge and language as modes of revelation and inspiration has been traditionally undertaken by the philosophical disciplines known as "Theory of Knowledge" and "Philosophy of Language." It should not be forgotten that the task of uncovering the main characteristics of human knowledge and language is itself an interpretation that can only be built on the foundation provided by a specific interpretation of human nature. In other words, the theological doctrine of inspiration and revelation presupposes a theory of knowledge and a philosophy of language which themselves presuppose an interpretation of human nature.

In short, since the doctrine of revelation and inspiration involves human knowledge and language as its cognitive and linguistic modes, it assumes a theory of knowledge and language.<sup>19</sup> This consequently assumes an anthropology that itself, in turn, assumes a philosophical ontology.<sup>20</sup> The structural connection

<sup>19</sup>For an introduction to the various ways in which the phenomenon of human knowledge has been interpreted, see Johannes Hessen, *Erkenntnistheorie* (Berlin: Ferd Dümmlers, 1926); Thomas E. Hill, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (New York: Ronald, 1961); John L. Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (London: Hutchinson, 1986); and William Pepperell Montague, *The Ways of Knowing: Or the Methods of Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1925). For an introduction to the various ways in which the main characteristics of language have been studied by philosophical research, see J. M. E. Moravcsik, *Understanding Language: A Study of Theories of Language in Linguistics and in Philosophy* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); Sidney Hook, ed., *Language and Philosophy: A Symposium* (New York: New York University Press, 1969); Franz von Kutschera, *Philosophy of Language* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1975); William P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964); and Jack Kaminsky, *Language and Ontology* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

<sup>20</sup>For an introduction to the various ways in which the human being has been interpreted, see Michael Landmann, *Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. David J. Parent

between each of these stages is unavoidable. Human philosophy has produced a variety of interpretations regarding human nature that are invariably conditioned by the ontological views of the various schools of philosophy concerned. Variety in the pre-suppositions (i.e., doctrine of God and doctrine of man) will necessarily produce a variety of results regarding the doctrine of revelation-inspiration.

Is there a way to avoid the uncertainty and plurality of theological explanations without rejecting the structural connection of the stages involved? This is a question which requires a new answer regarding the philosophy-theology relationship. I will explore this matter in a future article; it suffices here to say that a new approach to the study of revelation and inspiration is essentially connected to the possibility of interpreting ontology, anthropology, knowledge, and language on the basis of biblical conceptualization.

In conclusion, I would summarize by stating that a theological study of the revelation-inspiration process requires not only a clear conception of God, but also a correct view of the cognitive and linguistic capabilities of the human "prophet" (God's spokesperson in a broad sense, not limited to foretelling of the future). Thus, the technical understanding of the prophet's own nature and being (anthropological and ontological studies) and of the prophet's knowledge and language (epistemological studies) plays an important role in the theological formulation of any doctrine about the origin of the Scriptures.

### 5. *The Human Being in Theology*

Changes in our interpretation of the presuppositions will also determine and influence our interpretation of the revelation-inspiration process. As was the case concerning the concept of God's activity, the interpretation of the being of the human prophet and of that prophet's cognitive capabilities and linguistic characteristics has also been the object of various and different conclusions throughout the history of western philosophy.<sup>21</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that a great variety of theories about the origin of Scripture has been produced by Christian theology.

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(Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974); and Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974).

<sup>21</sup>See, e.g., Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1939), 40-53; Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 1:1-92; and Johannes Hessen, *Erkenntnistheorie*.

Traditional approaches, both in Roman Catholic and Protestant theological traditions, have, however, usually adopted a timeless interpretation of the being and knowledge of the human entity as an immortal soul or as "having" an immortal soul. Such a view is consistent with the timeless interpretation of the reality of God that these interpreters have also espoused.<sup>22</sup> More recently, however, some liberal approaches have embraced a temporal understanding of the human being, and, consequently, also of the human being's cognitive and linguistic capabilities.<sup>23</sup>

### 6. *The Biblical View of Human Nature*

In the early nineteenth century a theological revolution took place. Stemming from faithfulness to biblical concepts, it has worked consistently on the basis of an historical interpretation, not only of God but also of human reality. In some circles, the timeless-soul-substance idea of the human being that derives from a Platonic-Aristotelian heritage has been replaced by the biblical historical-relational understanding. This can be perceived, for instance, in the historicist approach to prophetic interpretation.<sup>24</sup>

Under the biblical model, this essence is seen as the actual historical concrete reality of the individual, who wholistically opens to the "other" and the world.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the human cognitive mode that is involved in revelation-inspiration should also be understood in a historical way.

<sup>22</sup>Man's timelessness, however, is not considered to be absolutely perfect. Timelessness reaches its perfect expression only in God's being. In fact, in various ways different philosophical and theological approaches have merged human timelessness with undeniable human temporality without eliminating either the timelessness or the temporality. For an introduction to the understanding of the way in which a timeless interpretation of the nature of human beings as soul-substance determines the "mode" of human cognition according to Thomas Aquinas, see Canale, 189-195, and also Macquarrie, 362-363.

<sup>23</sup>See Rudolf Bultmann, *Essays: Philosophical and Theological* (New York: MacMillan, 1955), 80, 83, 271; id., *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 46, 47, 56; id., *Faith and Understanding* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 56, 187.

<sup>24</sup>See Richard Davidson, "In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 2 (1991): 100-101.

<sup>25</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), has demonstrated on exegetical grounds that the biblical teaching regarding the nature of man clearly contradicts the Greek philosophical conception about the immortality of the soul.

### *7. Human Nature and Revelation-Inspiration*

A change in anthropological interpretation requires a change also in the interpretation of the main characteristics of human knowledge and language that are always assumed in a study of the doctrine of revelation-inspiration. The historical interpretation of man set forth in the Bible requires a historical interpretation of the cognitive and linguistic modes. Such an interpretation must replace the classical one wherein human cognition is based on the timeless understanding of the human soul as it was conceptualized under the Aristotelian agent, "intellect."<sup>26</sup> In its classical, Aristotelian interpretation, the cognitive mode presents human reason as reaching general (universal) timeless concepts by elimination of the historical and material aspects of reality. The biblical view, on the contrary, understands the cognitive mode as obtaining knowledge historically by way of the conscious gathering and integration of all the data provided by concrete, historical events.

As I will show in a future article, some contemporary approaches have rejected the classical doctrines of the immortality of the soul and of the Aristotelian agent, intellect. However, since these approaches do not base their new interpretations of either God or man on the biblical data, they tend to integrate many facets of the old views. Thus they fall short of perceiving the historical conceptuality assumed by biblical thinkers.

Since the doctrine of revelation and inspiration assumes an interpretation of the nature of the knowledge that is produced and communicated in the Scriptures, a proper understanding of the cognitive and linguistic modes appears to be of paramount importance. It seems reasonable to assume that the biblical approach to the interpretation of the cognitive and linguistic modes, originating from the biblical conception of man, should be favored.

In the historically and scripturally conceived interpretation of human nature and its cognitive and linguistic modes, two concepts that appear to carry special significance for a new approach to the revelation-inspiration doctrine are freedom and limitedness. Indeed, human freedom appears to play an important role in the conception of the human cognitive and linguistic modes in which the Scriptures

<sup>26</sup>A philosophical interpretation of human knowledge as historically constituted is, in fact, a very recent occurrence in the history of western epistemology. Some seminal thinkers in this area are, among others, Edmund Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein.

were produced. This freedom is not to be thought of as the mere capacity to choose among externally produced possibilities, but rather it is an expression of the very way in which human beings exist and are active in the world, creating their own possibilities and points of view. Thus, the human component in both revelation and inspiration may readily be understood as playing, not merely a passive role, but also an active one.

The obvious temporal and spacial finitude of human beings translates into modes of knowing and language that, while being temporally constituted, are themselves limited and incomplete. The cognitive and linguistic modes in which both revelation and inspiration have been given refer to general characteristics of human thinking and writing that, when historically understood, include features such as limitation, multiplicity of perspectives, variety and heterogeneity of forms, and incompleteness.

The distinction between modes and content should not be forgotten or ignored. Cognitive and linguistic modes should not be confused with the actual content of either knowledge or language as found in Scripture. Yet, the content, if it is to be communicated and understood by human beings, must adopt modes which cannot be separated from the biblical data themselves.

### 8. Conclusion

The ground that has been uncovered in this article as a basis for the doctrine of revelation-inspiration is really very simple. It consists of taking seriously the *sola Scriptura* principle, seeking in Scripture the presuppositions that necessarily condition theological teachings.

Among the various presuppositions that condition not only the formulation of the doctrine of revelation and inspiration but the whole of Christian teachings, we have specifically dealt with the two basic agents involved in revelation-inspiration: God, and the human being who serves as the transmitter of divine knowledge. When reinterpretation adopts the biblical perspective in place of the philosophical "timeless" model concerning these two agents, a basis or ground has been laid for a new and enriching theology of revelation-inspiration.

Once the basis or ground has thus been laid, the methodological question still remains. How should we formulate the doctrine of revelation-inspiration itself? The manner in which the issue of revelation-inspiration as a theological problem should be approached will be explored in my next article.