

# 'Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God' (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration

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## SUMMARY

Scriptural inspiration has traditionally been understood by Christian theologians to be plenary, verbal, and confluent. But how is the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture compatible with Scripture's being a truly divine-human product? How can one hold to the verbal inspiration of the whole of Scripture without lapsing into a dictation theory of inspiration which, in effect, extinguishes the human author? A theory of divine inspiration based upon God's middle knowledge is proposed, according to which God knew what the authors of Scripture would freely write when placed in certain circumstances. By arranging for the authors of Scripture to be in the appropriate circumstances, God can achieve a Scripture which is a product of human authors and also is His Word. Such a theory is compared and contrasted with similar views expressed by Lessius and Wolterstorff.

## 'MEN MOVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT SPOKE FROM GOD' (2 PETER 1.21): A MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE PERSPECTIVE ON BIBLICAL INSPIRATION

### *Introduction*

The Church has traditionally affirmed that the Bible is inspired by God and is therefore God's Word to mankind, authoritative in all that it teaches. The deeper appreciation of the role of the human authors in the composition of the books of the Bible, which dawned during the Enlightenment, put a question mark behind the claim that the Bible is God's Word. How could the Scriptures be at once the Word of God and the word of man? In this paper I shall argue that the doctrine of divine "middle knowledge" (*media scientia*) provides the key to the resolution of this conundrum. I shall first show that it has, indeed, been the historic position of the Church that Scripture is characterized by plenary, verbal inspiration. This demonstration is important because post-Enlightenment scepticism concerning Scripture's inspiration runs so deep that some have attempted to deny that the Church ever embraced so faulty a doctrine. I shall then explain the challenge posed to the traditional doctrine by incipient biblical criticism which won a new appreciation of the human side of Scripture. Finally, in conversation with contemporary philosophers of religion, I shall defend the coherence of the traditional doctrine of inspiration by

means of the doctrine of middle knowledge.

### *The Divinity of Scripture*

On the basis of biblical texts like 2 Pet. 1.21 and 2 Tim. 3.16 (“All Scripture is inspired by God”), Church Fathers from the earliest time on unanimously regarded the Scriptures as “holy,” “sacred,” and “divine” and therefore as absolutely authoritative, being the very words of God Himself.<sup>[1]</sup> Thus Clement of Rome advised the Corinthian church, “Look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>[2]</sup> The Sacred Scriptures are “the oracles of God.”<sup>[3]</sup> Clement can thus introduce his quotations from Scripture with the simple formula, “The Holy Spirit says. . . .”<sup>[4]</sup> Even Paul’s recent Corinthian correspondence is regarded as written “under the inspiration of the Spirit.”<sup>[5]</sup>

The fact that it is God Who speaks in Scripture is especially evident in the case of prophetic utterances. According to Justin Martyr, “the prophets are inspired by the divine Word.”<sup>[6]</sup> Thus, “when you hear the utterances of the prophets spoken as it were personally, you must not suppose that they are spoken by the inspired themselves, but by the Divine Word who moves them.”<sup>[7]</sup> So Justin, commenting on Deut. 10.16-17, remarks, “God Himself proclaimed by Moses” and on Is. 7.14, “God predicted by the Spirit of prophecy” what should come to pass.<sup>[8]</sup> But even when people speak in answer to God in Scripture, it is the Divine Word which speaks.<sup>[9]</sup> No doubt this conviction lies at the base of Justin’s confidence that “no Scripture contradicts another.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Clement of Alexandria emphasizes both the breadth and the depth of Scripture’s inspiration. With respect to the former he asserts, “I could adduce ten thousand Scriptures of which not ‘one tittle shall pass away’ without being fulfilled; for the mouth of the Lord the Holy Spirit hath spoken these things.”<sup>[11]</sup> And of the latter, he declares, “For truly holy are those letters that sanctify and deify; and the writings or volumes that consist of those holy letters and syllables, the same apostle consequently calls ‘inspired of God . . . .’”<sup>[12]</sup>

The great Church Father Irenaeus puts this same conviction into practice when he indicts the Gnostics for accepting part of the Gospel of Luke without accepting all of it<sup>[13]</sup> and when, in refutation of the Gnostic distinction between Jesus (the Son born of Mary) and Christ (the Father who descended upon Jesus), he bases his argument on the Holy Spirit’s use of a single word:

Matthew might certainly have said, ‘Now the birth of *Jesus* was on this wise;’ but the Holy Ghost, foreseeing the corrupters [of the truth], and guarding by anticipation against their deceit, says by Matthew, ‘But the birth of *Christ* was on this wise;’ and that He is Emmanuel, lest perchance we might consider Him as a

mere man . . . .[\[14\]](#)

Irenaeus is so bold as to declare that “the writings of Moses are the words of Christ” and “so also, beyond a doubt, the words of the other prepuce are His.”[\[15\]](#) In sum, “the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit . . . .”[\[16\]](#)

The Fathers did not engage in an extensive analysis of the means by which Scripture was inspired, but contented themselves with similes and analogies. Athenagoras seems to think of a sort of Spirit-possession akin to the Hellenistic model of the Sibylline oracles, the human spokesmen being mere instruments of the Spirit:

I think that you . . . cannot be ignorant of the writings either of Moses or of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the other prophets, who, lifted in ecstasy above the natural operations of their minds by the impulses of the Divine Spirit, uttered the things with which they were inspired, the Spirit making use of them as a flute-player breathes into a flute . . . .[\[17\]](#)

Athenagoras is willing to grant that pagan poets and philosophers have “an affinity with the afflatus from God,” but whereas they are moved by their own souls, “we have for witnesses of the things we apprehend and believe, prophets, men who have pronounced concerning God and the things of God, guided by the Spirit of God.”[\[18\]](#) Similarly, Athenagoras’s contemporary Theophilus states that the Spirit of God “came down upon the prophets and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things.”[\[19\]](#) Thus, “Moses . . . , or, rather, the Word of God by Him as by an instrument, says, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’.”[\[20\]](#) Like Athenagoras, Theophilus considers this sufficient to set the “divine writing” apart from the works of the philosophers, writers, and poets, for while they all have “a mixture of error” in them, the prophets, possessed by the Holy Spirit of God, wrote what is accurate, harmonious, and “really true.”[\[21\]](#)

The author of the pseudo-Justinian tractate *Cohortatio ad Graecos* also employed the simile of musical instruments to characterize the sacred writers:

For neither by nature nor by human conception is it possible for men to know things so great and divine, but by the gift which then descended from above upon the holy men, who had no need of rhetorical art, nor of uttering anything in a contentious or quarrelsome manner, but to present themselves pure to the energy of the Divine Spirit, in order that the divine plectrum itself, descending from heaven, and using righteous men as an instrument like a harp or lyre, might reveal to us the knowledge of things divine and heavenly.[\[22\]](#)

The analogy of musical instruments is an interesting one. It might appear to depreciate the human role in the production of Scripture. However, it does, in fact, succeed in emphasizing both the divine and human aspects of Scripture, since the type of instrument selected by the musician will determine the character of the musical sounds produced by his playing. But there is no denying that the analogy does reduce the role of the human spokesmen as free agents.

For example, although Pseudo-Justin emphasizes the simple and artless diction of the prophets, still their role as human instruments is subsumed under the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit; they “use with simplicity the words and expressions which offer themselves and declare to you whatever the Holy Ghost, who descended upon them, choose to teach through them . . . .”[\[23\]](#) In a similar fashion, Irenaeus, in trying to correct the inference that 2 Cor. 4.4 teaches that there is a second “God of this world,” explains that “according to Paul’s custom . . . he uses transposition of words,” thereby seemingly emphasizing the role of the human author in the production of Scripture.[\[24\]](#) But then the left hand takes back what the right hand has given: “the apostle frequently uses a transposed order in his sentences, due to the rapidity of his discourses, and the impetus of the Spirit which is in him.”[\[25\]](#)

Hippolytus continues to employ the simile of the divine plectrum playing the human instruments, but there is no trace of the Athenagoran idea that the prophets’ natural faculties have been transcended.[\[26\]](#) Rather the indwelling Spirit is conceived to enlighten and empower their faculties to speak the truths revealed to them by God:

For these fathers were furnished with the Spirit, and largely honored by the Word Himself; and just as it is with instruments of music, so had they the Word always, like the plectrum, in union with them, and when moved by Him the prophets announced what God willed. For they spake not of their own power (let there be no mistake as to that), neither did they declare what pleased themselves. But first of all they were endowed with wisdom by the Word, and then again were rightly instructed in the future by means of visions. And then, when thus themselves fully convinced, they spake those things which were revealed by God to them alone, and concealed from all others.[\[27\]](#)

Although the spokesmen are here compared to instruments, Hippolytus’s conception of God’s working through them is more personalistic than what such a comparison might at first seem to suggest.

Jerome also employed a more personalistic model, styling inspiration along the lines of dictation. The Epistle to the Romans, he says, was dictated by the Holy Spirit through the

Apostle Paul.[\[28\]](#) Since God is the author of Scripture, “every word, syllable, accent, and point is packed with meaning.”[\[29\]](#) Augustine had a similar conception of the composition of Scripture. Christ, he explains, stands in relation to his disciples as does the head to the body.

Therefore, when those disciples have written matters which He declared and spake to them, it ought not by any means to be said that He has written nothing Himself; since the truth is, that His members have accomplished only what they became acquainted with by the repeated statements of the Head. For all that He was minded to give for our perusal on the subject of His own doings and sayings, He commanded to be written by those disciples, whom He thus used as if they were His own hands. Whoever apprehends this correspondence of unity and this concordant service of the members, all in harmony of the discharge of diverse offices under the Head, will receive the account which he gets in the Gospel through the narratives constructed by the disciples, in the same kind of spirit in which he might look upon the actual hand of the Lord Himself, . . . were he to see it engaged in the act of writing.[\[30\]](#)

Here Scripture is understood to be the product of a concordance of human and divine agents, the human authors writing what Christ commanded them to, so that He is ultimately the author of what they wrote. Little wonder that Augustine should therefore insist that Scripture is uniquely authoritative and “completely free from error”![\[31\]](#)

The view that God is the author of Scripture in all its breadth and depth and that it is therefore authoritative and errorless was the common prepossession of the Church Fathers.[\[32\]](#) However the inspiration of Scripture was conceived to be brought about, the human authors of Scripture were regarded as instrumental causes only, doing what the Spirit moved them to do. Origen thus spoke for all the Fathers when he asserted, “the sacred books are not the compositions of men, but . . . they were composed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, agreeably to the will of the Father of all things through Jesus Christ.”[\[33\]](#)

Precisely because of this unanimity, the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture did not achieve creedal expression. As Cadoux points out, “The fact that Biblical inerrancy was not incorporated in any formal creed was due, not to any doubt as to its being an essential item of belief, but to the fact that no one challenged it.”[\[34\]](#) Medieval theologians continued in the conviction of the Church Fathers. In his review of this period Sasse remarks, “during all these centuries no one doubted that the Bible in its entirety was God’s Word, that God was the principal author of the Scriptures, as their human authors had written under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, and that, therefore, these books were free from errors and contradictions, even when this

did not seem to be the case.”[35] Thus, for example, Thomas Aquinas affirms, “The Spirit is the principal author of sacred Scripture; and inspired man is the instrument.”[36] The Holy Spirit never utters what is false:[37] therefore, nothing false can underlie even the literal sense of Scripture.[38] Augustine, says Thomas, was right in affirming that the authors of Scripture have not erred.[39]

The Protestant Reformation brought a renewed emphasis on Scripture’s authority. Committed as they were to the principle of *sola scriptura*, the Protestant Reformers were champions of the doctrine of biblical inspiration and authority. Luther dared to stand against the authority of the Catholic church because he believed that the Bible, which he took to support his teachings, is the true Word of God.[40] The Holy Scriptures, he declared, are “the Holy Spirit’s book.”[41] Thus, in his comment on Ps. 90 Luther states that “we must, therefore, believe that the Holy Spirit Himself composed this psalm.”[42] Quoting David’s words in 2 Sam. 23. 2 “The Spirit of the Lord has spoken by me, and His word is upon my tongue,” Luther marvels,

What a glorious and arrogant arrogance it is for anyone to dare to boast that the Spirit of the Lord speaks through him and that his tongue is voicing the Word of the Holy Spirit! He must obviously be sure of his ground. David, the son of Jesse, born in sin, is not such a man, but it is he who has been called to be a prophet by the promise of God.[43]

Though David was a sinner, he spoke the very words of God because he was a prophet through whom the Holy Spirit spoke. Luther remarks, “Neither we nor anyone else who is not a prophet may lay claim to such honor.”[44] Luther thus portrays David as in effect saying, “My speech is not really mine, but he who hears me hears God.”[45] The entirety of the canonical Scriptures are God’s inspired Word: “Thus, we attribute to the Holy Spirit all of Holy Scripture.”[46] Even the trivialities in Scripture (the *levicula*) are inspired. Commenting on an incident in Gen. 30.14-16, Luther remarks,

this is ridiculous and puerile beyond measure, so much so that nothing more inconsequential can be mentioned or recorded. Why, then is it recorded? I reply: One must always keep in view what I emphasize so often, namely, that the Holy Spirit is the Author of this book. He Himself takes such delight in playing and trifling when describing things that are unimportant, puerile, and worthless; and He hands this down to be taught in the church as though it redounded to the greatest education.[47]

Luther affirms that the very words of Scripture are divinely inspired. Thus, in defending the

interpretation of Is. 7.14 as a prophecy of the Virgin Birth, Luther asserts, “Even though an angel from heaven were to say that *almah* does not mean virgin, we should not believe it. For God the Holy Spirit speaks through St. Matthew and St. Luke; we can be sure that He understands Hebrew speech and expressions perfectly well.”[\[48\]](#) Because the Holy Scriptures are God’s Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luther, citing Augustine’s letter to Jerome, could therefore affirm, “The Scriptures. . . have never erred.”[\[49\]](#)

In the era of Protestant scholasticism following the Reformation, the Lutheran theologians insisted forcefully on the inspiration of the very words of Scripture. Abraham Calov, commenting on 2 Pet. 1.21 wrote,

The *foraç* embraces both an inner enlightenment of the mind and communication of what was to be said and written, and an external urge of such a nature that the tongue and pen no less than the intellect and mind acted by that impulse. The result was that not only the *forma*, or content was suggested, but the words also, which are placed in their mouth and dictated to their pen by the Holy Spirit, were committed to the original amanuenses, or men of God.[\[50\]](#)

Or again, in the words of J. A. Quenstedt:

The Holy Spirit not only inspired in the prophets and apostles the content and the sense contained in Scripture, or the meaning of the words, so that they might of their own pleasure clothe and furnish these thoughts with their own style and their own words; but the Holy Spirit actually supplied, inspired, and dictated the very words and each and every term individually.[\[51\]](#)

As for Aquinas, so for these Protestant scholastics, God is the *causa efficiens principalis* of Scripture; human authors are the *causae instrumentales*. They are compared to quills used by the Holy Spirit, who dictates each and every word they write. Inspiration involves not only an *impulsus ad scribendum* and a *suggestio rerum* from the Holy Spirit, but also a *suggestio verborum* as well. Now of course these divines were aware of the stylistic differences and peculiarities of the authors of Scripture, but these were explained as a sort of condescension on God’s part whereby He accommodates Himself to speak in the vocabulary and style appropriate to each respective author.

The Reformed Protestant tradition took an equally strong stand on the doctrine of inspiration. Calvin’s favorite characterization of the means by which Scripture was inspired is dictation.[\[52\]](#) Thus, he affirms, “Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered

according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>[53]</sup> He calls the human authors “amanuenses” of the Holy Spirit; they are His “organs” and “instruments.”<sup>[54]</sup> Calvin goes so far as to assert that the prophet brings “forth nothing from his own brain,” but merely delivers what the Lord commands.<sup>[55]</sup> Thus, commenting on Jeremiah’s prophecies, Calvin states that while “the words were his,” Jeremiah “was not the author of them,” since “he only executed what God had commanded.”<sup>[56]</sup>

Paradoxically, Calvin combined with the dictation theory of inspiration the affirmation that the biblical authors wrote freely in their own styles:

The Spirit of God, who had appointed the Evangelists to be his clerks, appears purposely to have regulated their style in such a manner, that they all wrote one and the same history, with the most perfect agreement, but in different ways. It was intended, that the truth of God should more clearly and strikingly appear, when it was manifest that his witnesses did not speak by a preconcerted plan, but that each of them separately, without paying any attention to another, wrote freely and honestly what the Holy Spirit dictated.<sup>[57]</sup>

Despite the affirmation of the authors’ freedom, the weight of the passage falls on the divine sovereignty which determined that four differing accounts should be dictated.

Like their Lutheran counterparts, the Reformed scholastic theologians emphasized the inspiration and authority of Scripture. According to T. R. Phillips, “That God is the author of all Scripture; and thus inspired not only the substance but even the words, was unquestioned within seventeenth-century Reformed scholasticism.”<sup>[58]</sup> Three emphases characterized Reformed thought on Scripture. First, “Everything within Scripture was regarded as being free from the ‘peril of error’ and thus absolutely certain.”<sup>[59]</sup> On this basis the statements of Scripture could serve as the authoritative premises for the deduction of theological conclusions. Second, inspiration of the Scriptures by God was conceived as the basis of the Bible’s authority. Third, “because inspiration . . . has become the ground for Scripture’s authority, the nature of this authority assumes more externalistic and legalistic qualities. Scripture is viewed as a book of authoritative sentences: what Scripture says, God says.”<sup>[60]</sup> Reformed theologians, while continuing to employ terms like “dictation” and “amanuenses” when explicating the means of inspiration, did not, according to Phillips, intend such terms to be taken literally, since they conceived of inspiration as a *habitus* or charism, a special divine gift of knowledge and volition which inwardly supplies the human author with the capacities for carrying out God’s mandate to



write. Nevertheless, some Reformed theologians like Voetius could speak straightforwardly of a *suggestio verborum* in the process of inspiration:

The Holy Spirit has spoken immediately and extraordinarily all that was to be written and has been written, either the things or the words . . . The Holy Spirit has provoked them, and has suggested to them so that they were writing this rather than that . . . the Holy Spirit ordered, arranged and constructed all of their concepts and sentences namely so that they deployed this sentence at the first, that at the second, and another at the third place, and so on in succession and as a result they are being sealed and authenticated by having been written down: in the strict sense to produce and to compose a book entails this.[\[61\]](#)

Other Reformed thinkers like Rivet, Thysius, and Ames denied that the process of inspiration involved a *suggestio verborum*, but all were one in the belief that the extent of inspiration in the final product included the very words of Scripture.

For their part, Catholic theologians of the Counter-Reformation also insisted on the inspiration and authority of Scripture. In the fourth session of the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church declared that the Old and New Testaments have God as their author, having been dictated by the Holy Spirit (*a Spiritu Sancto dictatas*).[\[62\]](#) Protestants and Catholics alike were thus united in seeing God as the author of Scripture who employed human scribes to write down what He by His Spirit dictated. In so doing, they were reaffirming what the Christian Church had always believed and taught.

### The Humanity of Scripture

Although Christian theologians had always recognized the idiosyncrasies of the human authors of Scripture, the role of human agents in the writing of Scripture was undeniably minimized. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, rumblings of discontent with the classical doctrine of inspiration began to be heard among Catholic theologians. But these misgivings broke into public view with Benedict de Spinoza's publication of his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in 1670. In addition to denying Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Spinoza attacked the traditional doctrine of inspiration. The prophets, he observes, were only inspired when speaking directly the words of God; when they spoke in ordinary conversation as private individuals, their words were not inspired. Although the apostles were prophets, it is evident when we read their writings that they were not speaking as inspired prophets in those writings. For their style of writing and their use of argumentation is incompatible with direct revelatory utterances:

Now if we examine the style of the Epistles, we shall find it to be entirely different from that of

prophecy. It was the constant practice of the prophets to declare at all points that they were speaking at God's command, as in the phrases, 'Thus saith the Lord,' 'The Lord of hosts saith,' 'The commandment of the lord,' and so on . . . , But in the Epistles of the Apostles we find nothing like this; on the contrary, in I h. 7 v. 40 Paul speaks according to his own opinion. Indeed, there are numerous instances of expressions far removed from the authoritativeness of prophecy . . .

Furthermore, if we examine the manner in which the Apostles expound the Gospel in their Epistles, we see that this, too, is markedly different from that of the prophets. For the Apostles everywhere employ argument, so that they seem to be conducting a discussion rather than prophesying . . .

Therefore the modes of expression and discussion employed by the Apostles in the Epistles clearly show that these originated not from revelation and God's command but from their own natural faculty of judgment . . . [\[63\]](#)

By associating inspiration only with revelatory, prophetic utterances, Spinoza undercuts the inspiration of the non-prophetic portions of Scripture, including the bulk of the New Testament. Far from being dictated by the Holy Spirit, "the Epistles of the Apostles were dictated solely by the nature light . . ." [\[64\]](#) The Gospels fare no better:

There are four Evangelists in the New Testament; and who can believe that God willed to tell the story of Christ and impart it in writing to mankind four times over? . . . Each Evangelist preached his message in a different place, and each wrote down in simple style what he had preached with view to telling clearly the story of Christ, and not with view to explaining the other Evangelists. If a comparison of their different versions sometimes produces a readier and clearer understanding, this is a matter of chance, and it occurs only in a few passages . . . [\[65\]](#)

Scripture is called the "Word of God" only in virtue of its prophetic passages, and God is understood to be the author of the Bible only because "true religion" is taught therein. [\[66\]](#)

Spinoza's *Tractatus* sparked an eruption of controversy throughout Europe. In effect Spinoza was insisting that one must take seriously the humanity of Scripture and argued that doing so is incompatible with the traditional doctrine of inspiration. There was no denying the human element in Scripture to which Spinoza had drawn attention; the question was whether his inference followed that inspiration must therefore be circumscribed to direct prophecy. The Dutch theologian Jean Le Clerc, shaken by Spinoza's critique, advocated abandonment of the classical doctrine of inspiration, while insisting on the general reliability of the non-inspired portions of the

Bible. Le Clerc distinguishes prophecies, histories, and doctrines within Scripture. The doctrines taught by Christ and the apostles he takes to be divinely inspired. But he claimed that even prophecies need not be inspired. For example, a prophet may report visions or voices from God by giving back in his own words the sense of what he heard or saw. The fact that the various prophets differ in their style of writing disproves the dictation theory of inspiration. In the same way with respect to histories: since the Evangelists differ in precise wording of Jesus's teaching, they are merely giving back the sense of what Jesus said, for which task they needed only good memory and honesty, not divine inspiration. Citing Lk. 1.1-4 Le Clerc comments, "You may observe in these words a Confirmation of what I have been saying, and a full Proof that St. *Luke* learn'd not that which he told us by Inspiration, but by Information from those who knew it exactly."[\[67\]](#) Le Clerc maintains that his position does not undermine Scripture's authority because we are rationally obliged on the basis of the evidence to believe that the historical narratives of the New Testament are substantially true. Thus, in response to Spinoza he grants "that the Sacred Pen-Men were not inspired, neither as to the Stile, nor as to those things which they might know otherwise than by revelation," but insists "that the Authority of the Scriptures ought not for all that to be esteemed less considerable."[\[68\]](#)

Richard Simon, an early French biblical critic, attacked Le Clerc's concessions to Spinoza in *Réponse au Livre intitulé Sentimens de quelques Theologiens de Hollande* and in his epochal *Histoire Critique du Texte du Nouveau Testament*.[\[69\]](#) The central presupposition of Spinoza and Le Clerc attacked by Simon is their assumption that biblical inspiration is to be understood woodenly in terms of *dictation*. "Il n'est pas necessaire qu'un Livre pour être inspiré ait été dicté de Dieu mot pour mot."[\[70\]](#) Instead Simon proposes to understand inspiration in terms of God's *direction* of the authors of Scripture. Elsewhere he explains,

Immediate revelation takes place when the Holy Spirit reveals to a sacred author what he writes in such a way that this author does nothing but receive and give us what the Holy Spirit has dictated to him. It is thus that the prophets were inspired concerning things of the future, which they learned directly from God. This inspiration can also extend to words, should it happen that the Holy Spirit suggests to a writer the words he uses.

One speaks of special direction when the Holy spirit does not reveal directly to an author what he puts into writing, but when he stirs him to write simply what he already knew, having learned it before, or understood it through his own perception. The Spirit assists and directs him in such a way that he will choose nothing that will not conform to the truth and the purpose for which the Sacred Books were composed, to know how to edify us in faith and charity. It is for that reason that Luke wrote in the Acts several incidents which he heard from the Apostles, and from those

who were witnesses to them, as the preaching and miracles of St. Peter; or those he saw himself, as the arrival of St. Paul at Malta. It was not absolutely necessary that the facts he knew by himself be revealed to him.[\[71\]](#)

Spinoza and Le Clerc's objections are predicated entirely on a false understanding of the nature of inspiration, which they took to exclude human reasoning. But if inspiration is understood in terms of direction, not dictation, then there is no incompatibility between inspiration and the human phenomena noted by Spinoza. The Evangelists, for example, were not divested of memory and reason when composing the Gospels, but they were assisted by God in such a way as to prevent them from falling into error. Simon writes,

God has guided their pen in such a way that they do not fall into error. It is men who write; and the Spirit who directs them has not robbed them of their reason or their memory in order to inspire in them facts which they know perfectly well. But He has in general determined them to write instead of certain facts rather than others which they know equally well.[\[72\]](#)

Simon thus denies that "the Evangelists were sheer instruments of the Holy Spirit, who dictated to them word for word what they wrote."[\[73\]](#)

Le Clerc responded to Simon's critique by falling back to a more modest position: "My argument proves not directly that there was no Inspiration on these occasions, but only that there was nothing in the thing itself to induce us to believe that there was any . . . ." [\[74\]](#) As for Simon's idea of inspiration as direction or guidance, this is unobjectionable so long as the direction extends no further than the selection of the subject matter. With respect to Simon's contention that divine inspiration and human reasoning are not mutually exclusive, Le Clerc maintains that either the Holy Spirit gave the apostles fully framed arguments or only general principles. If He gave complete arguments, then there was no need for the author's reasoning. But if He gave only general principles, then the apostles were still dependent on fallible reasoning to make their deductions, and nothing has been gained.

In his counter-response to Le Clerc Simon defended the inspiration of all Scripture on the basis of 2 Tim. 3. 16.[\[75\]](#) But he agrees that inspiration does not extend to the words of Scripture: "it is not at all necessary to extend it to the words or to the style of each sacred author; it is enough that the substance be inspired."[\[76\]](#) There is no need to fear that the apostle's use of fallible reasoning renders their writings errant, for God's direction will prevent this. "The Holy Spirit guided them in such a way that they never made a mistake in what they have written; but one need not therefore believe that there is nothing in their expressions other than the divine and

supernatural.”<sup>[77]</sup> As we shall later see, whether Simon meant to deny verbal inspiration will depend upon some very subtle issues arising out of the tradition of Jesuit theology in which Simon operated.

These seventeenth century debates over the nature of biblical inspiration awakened the Church to the human side of Scripture. It now seemed altogether implausible to suppose that the means of biblical inspiration was divine dictation to human authors. The authors' variety of styles, their divergence in narrating identical events, their evident effort in gathering information, their trivial remarks and grammatical mistakes all seemed to point to a more important role for them to play than that of mere scribes. Thus, free human agency had to be an essential element of any adequate doctrine of biblical inspiration. Together with the Church's historic commitment to the full breadth and depth of biblical inspiration, the element of human agency implies, in Pinnock's words, that “Divine inspiration is plenary, verbal, and confluent.”<sup>[78]</sup> By *plenary* inspiration it is meant that all of Scripture, not just portions of it, is inspired. Along with the great doctrines, even the *levicula* are God's Word. This does not imply that all parts of Scripture are equally important or equally relevant at various times and places, but all of it is God-breathed. By *verbal* inspiration it is meant that the very words of Scripture are inspired. The Bible, as a linguistic deposit, is God's Word. Hence, not merely the thoughts expressed, but the very language of Scripture is God-breathed. Finally, by *confluent* inspiration it is meant that Scripture is the product of dual authorship, human and divine. The human authors wrote freely and spontaneously, and yet God somehow was also at work through them to produce His Word. Hence, the writers of Scripture were not mere stenographers, but real authors, whose individuality shines through their works. At the same time, God is the author of Scripture, so that it can truly be affirmed, “The Holy Spirit said by David . . .,” thereby guaranteeing Scripture's authority and inerrancy.

#### *The Apparent Incoherence of Plenary, Verbal, Confluent Inspiration*

But the obvious difficulty is that the above properties of inspiration seem to constitute an inconsistent triad. John Cardinal Newman wrestled aloud with the tension they present:

In what way inspiration is compatible with that personal agency on the part of its instruments, which the composition of the Bible evidences, we know not; but if any thing is certain, it is this,—that, though the Bible is inspired, and therefore, in one sense, written by God, yet very large portions of it, if not far the greater part of it, are written in as free and unconstrained a manner, and (apparently) with as little consciousness of a supernatural dictation or restraint, on the part of His earthly instruments, as if He had had no share in the work. As God rules the will, yet the will is free,—as He rules the course of the world, yet men conduct it,—so He has

inspired the Bible, yet men have written it. Whatever else is true about it, this is true,--that we may speak of the history, or mode of its composition, as truly as of that of other books; we may speak of its writers having an object in view, being influenced by circumstances, being anxious, taking pains, purposely omitting or introducing things, supplying what others had left, or leaving things incomplete. Though the bible be inspired, it has all such characteristics as might attach to a book uninspired,--the characteristics of dialect and style, the distinct effects of times and places, youth and age, or moral and intellectual character; and I insist on this, lest in what I am going to say, I seem to forget (what I do not forget), that in spite of its human form, it has in it the spirit and the mind of God. [\[79\]](#)

One will look in vain among the classical defenders of plenary, verbal inspiration for a resolution of this difficulty. Of the Lutheran dogmatists, Robert Preus confesses frankly,

The Lutheran doctrine of inspiration presents a paradox. On the one hand it was taught that God is the *auctor primaries* of Scripture, that He determined and provided the thoughts and actual words of Scripture and that no human cooperation concurred *efficienter* in producing Scripture. On the other hand it was maintained that the temperaments (*ingenia*), the research and feelings (*studia*), and the differences in background (*Nationes*) of the inspired writers are all clearly reflected in the Scriptures; that there is nothing docetic about Scripture; that God's spokesmen wrote willingly, consciously, spontaneously, and from the deepest personal spiritual conviction and experience; that psychologically and subjectively (*materialiter et subjective*) they were totally involved in the writing of Scripture. These two salient features of the doctrine of inspiration must be held in tension ....

Now it may seem utterly inconsistent that the Spirit of God could in one and the same action provide the very words of Scripture and accommodate Himself to the linguistic peculiarities and total personality of the individual writer so that these men wrote freely and spontaneously. But this is precisely what took place according to the Biblical evidence and data. And if Scripture does not inform us how both of these facts can be true, we must not do violence to either or try to probe the mystery of inspiration beyond what has been revealed. The Lutheran teachers are well aware that there is a lacuna in their theology at this point ...; and they are content to retain this logical gap and accept the paradox. [\[80\]](#)

We should not sell the doctrine of accommodation short. After all, in choosing to inspire the biblical books at all, God has already accommodated Himself to speaking in the languages of Hebrew and Greek and has thus limited His expression to what the grammar and vocabulary of those languages permit. Having stooped so low, is it incredible that He should also take account

of the further limitations and idiosyncrasies of each individual author, so that through one He speaks in the language of a shepherd, through another in the language of a civil servant, and so on? To achieve truly idiomatic speech, perhaps God even deigns to speak ungrammatically on occasion. Perhaps, as Aquinas believed, God's instruction might be so subtle and mysterious that the human mind could be subjected to it without a person's knowing it, so that one is unable to discern whether his thoughts are produced by the divine instinct or by one's own spirit.<sup>[81]</sup> Whether accommodation plausibly explains the *levicula* in Scripture is more doubtful. But the salient point is that accommodation still falls short of confluence: if the author's thoughts and sentences are the product of either the divine instinct or his own spirit, rather than both, then Scripture is not the product of dual authorship. There is then one author of Scripture, God, and one stenographer, man, to whom God dictates Scripture in a vernacular that makes it indistinguishable from the writer's own expression. Inspiration is not confluent. How inspiration can be confluent as well verbal and plenary is admitted to be a paradox.

Nor will we find much help *chez* the Reformed divines. B. B. Warfield of the old Princeton school maintains that the classical doctrine of inspiration "purposely declares nothing as to the mode of inspiration. The Reformed Churches admit that this is inscrutable. They content themselves with defining carefully and holding fast the effects of the divine influence, leaving the mode of divine action by which it is brought about draped in mystery."<sup>[82]</sup> But what about Calvin's heavy use of the notion of dictation with respect to Scripture's inspiration? Warfield admits that Calvin "is somewhat addicted to the use of language which, strictly taken, would imply that the mode of their [*i.e.*, the Scriptures'] was 'dictation'."<sup>[83]</sup> But he contends that "dictation" refers to the result or the effect of inspiration, not to its mode. The Scriptures have, in virtue of their inspiration, the quality of a dictation from God; but they were not dictated by God. "It is by no means to be imagined," declares Warfield, that the classical doctrine of inspiration "is meant to proclaim a mechanical theory of inspiration. The Reformed Churches have never held such a theory: though dishonest, careless, ignorant or overeager controverters of its doctrine have often brought the charge."<sup>[84]</sup> The assertion that Calvin's notion of dictation is not "mechanical" is frequently made by Reformed thinkers. Taken literally, mechanical dictation would be dictation involving only one agent, the speaker, such as would take place when one utilizes a machine like a dictaphone or tape-recorder to register one's words. Non-mechanical dictation would then involve two agents, not only a speaker but also a secretary, who freely writes down the speaker's words and perhaps concurs with what the speaker is saying. Unfortunately, this sort of non-mechanical dictation is still insufficient for true confluence because while the secretary exercises freedom in agreeing to write or not, he exercises no freedom at all with respect to content or style: the words are not truly his. As Warfield rightly emphasized, "the gift of Scripture through its human authors took place by a process much more intimate than can be expressed by the term



'dictation' . . . ."[85] Kenneth Kantzer believes that such an intimate process may be found in Calvin's own conception of inspiration:

In ordinary dictation . . . the secretary is active only to recognize and to copy words originating outside the mind of the secretary. This sort of dictation is by no means consistent with Calvin's view of the method of inspiration. As he interprets the facts, the sacred authors are active with their minds and whole personalities in the selection both of ideas and words. Scripture really originates in the mind of God, who is its ultimate author in the sense that He controls the mind and personality of the men He has chosen to write Scripture. By this means, God inspires the writers of Scripture (better breathes out through them as instruments) to speak to man exactly His chosen words as He wills. When, in Calvin's thought, the prophet is referred to as an instrument, he is by no means an instrument which simply passes on words mechanically given to him. Rather, because of God's sovereign control of his being, he is an instrument whose whole personality expresses itself naturally to write exactly the words God wishes to speak. Only in this large and comprehensive sense are the words of Scripture dictated by God.[86]

The difficulty of Kantzer's account is that while it seems to express the *desideratum* of confluence, it does not explain how this is achieved. How is it that God "sovereignly controls the mind and personality" of a biblical author so that his "whole personality expresses itself naturally to write exactly the words God wishes to speak"? Given Calvin's strong views on divine providence, the answer would seem to be that a very rigid determinism is in place whereby God, through the use of all causes under His control, shapes the biblical author like clay in such a way that he writes what God has pre-determined. But this is worse than secretarial dictation; it is, in fact, strict mechanical dictation, for man has been reduced to the level of a machine. God's causally determining Paul to write his Epistle to the Romans is incompatible with Paul's freely writing that epistle, on any plausible account of freedom.[87] Absent human freedom, we are not only back to mechanical dictation, but also to mere accommodation as the ultimate account of the humanity of Scripture, since God is the only agent who determines what an author shall write. Genuine confluence, then, requires human freedom, such that there are at least two authors of any book of Scripture. That inspiration is plenary prevents confluence's being understood as the divine and human authors each writing different portions of Scripture; that inspiration is verbal precludes confluence's being interpreted to mean that God is the author of the ideas and a man the author of the words. The whole of Scripture, down to its very words, is the freely written word of both God and man. How can this be?

The tension in the classical doctrine of inspiration has in our own day been more precisely



formulated by Randall and David Basinger.[\[88\]](#) They are concerned to show that the traditional affirmation of biblical authority and inerrancy is inseparably wedded to the dictation theory of inspiration. If God alone were the author of Scripture, its inerrancy would be unproblematic; but given that the human authors write freely, how can God guarantee that they write what He desires? The defender of the classical doctrine of inspiration must argue along the following lines:

1. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity.
2. Human activities (such as penning a book) can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom.
3. God totally controlled what human authors did in fact write.
4. Therefore, the words of the Bible are God's utterances.
5. Whatever God utters is errorless.
6. Therefore, the words of the Bible are errorless.

This argument is as much an argument for the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture on the assumption of confluence as it is an argument for inerrancy. The key premiss is (2). Detractors of plenary, verbal inspiration will regard (2) as self-contradictory. The only way God could have totally controlled (an expression Basinger and Basinger take to be synonymous with "infallibly guaranteed") what the human authors wrote would have been to take away their freedom. The defender of classical inspiration, on the other hand, must affirm (2) if he is not to fall into a dictation theory of inspiration. Although Basinger and Basinger go on to argue that the defender of classical inspiration cannot, in view of his endorsement of (2), utilize the Free Will Defense with respect to the problem of evil, I think that the price of "placing direct responsibility on God for each instance of moral evil in the world"[\[89\]](#) is so great that their appeal to the problem of evil is more perspicuously understood in terms of evil's constituting evidence against (2). Given the reality of human evil and the fact that God cannot be the author of evil, (2) must be false. Accordingly, one can then argue:

1. The words of the Bible are the product of free human activity.
- 2'. Human activities (and their products) cannot be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom.

7. The doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible entails God's total control of the words of the Bible.

8. Therefore, the doctrine of the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible is false.

If one persists in affirming the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration, then, since (7) is true virtually by definition, one must deny (1); that is to say, verbal, plenary inspiration implies dictation. The bottom line is that the doctrine of the plenary, verbal, confluent inspiration of Scripture is incoherent.[\[90\]](#)

The response to Basinger and Basinger on the part of defenders of classical inspiration has not been encouraging. New Testament scholar D. A. Carson agrees that their argument that "is valid,"[\[91\]](#) by which he evidently means "sound," since he does not dispute the truth of their premisses. Carson agrees that the classical doctrine of inspiration is incompatible with the Free Will Defense. But he does not see this as in any way problematic. On the one hand, the notion of divine/human confluent activity lies at the very heart of the Christian faith, since the major redemptive acts of history were wrought by both God and man:

. . . the conspirators did what God Himself decided beforehand should happen. Yet the conspirators are not thereby excused: they are still regarded as guilty. Any other view will either depreciate the heinousness of the sin or render the Cross a last minute arrangement by which God cleverly snatched victory out of the jaws of defeat, rather than the heart of His redemptive purposes.[\[92\]](#)

If we permit divine human *concursum* in redemptive history, Carson asks, why not also in biblical inspiration? This line of response seems to indicate that Carson would accept (2) and reject the Free Will Defense. In fact, he does go on to dismiss that defense; but he does so in such a way as to call into question his commitment to (2). For he says, "human responsibility can be grounded in something other than 'free will,' where free will is understood to entail absolute power to the contrary" and footnotes Jonathan Edwards and other defenders of a compatibilist view of freedom.[\[93\]](#) But if one is a compatibilist about human freedom, then (wholly apart from the difficulties this occasions for theodicy) the sort of freedom envisioned in (1) seems inadequate to secure confluence. One has advanced no further than a deterministic doctrine of providence which turns the authors of Scripture into robots. One has not lived up to the charge of Carson's co-editor John Woodbridge that "We must spell out unequivocally our full commitment to the human authorship and full freedom of the biblical writers as human authors"[\[94\]](#) nor have we stayed true to what Carson himself calls "the central line of evangelical thought . . . : God in His sovereignty . . . super-intended the freely composed human writings we call the

Scriptures.”[\[95\]](#) Rather we have simply watered down the concept of freedom so as to be able to affirm determinism and, hence, God’s total control.

Norman Geisler, on the other hand, argues that the Basingers’ argument is not sound.[\[96\]](#) Unfortunately, his critique is not as clear as it could be, and the Basingers are able to point out a number of misunderstandings in their reply to Geisler.[\[97\]](#) These misunderstandings notwithstanding, there are, I think, a couple of points in Geisler’s critique to which Basinger and Basinger have not given due attention. First, Geisler, in effect, challenges (3). He observes that a purely human utterance may be inerrant; if, then, a true statement is made by both God and man, God need not totally control the human author in order for the statement to be without error. By extension all the statements of Scripture could be errorless and have both God and human beings as their authors, yet without God’s exercising total control over what the human authors wrote. If (3) is false, then the defender of biblical inerrancy does not assume (2) in defense of his doctrine; rather he defends his position on the basis of (4-6) alone. Now Geisler is obviously correct that total divine control of human authors is not a necessary condition of the inerrancy of their writings. Nonetheless the denial of (3) is so outrageously improbable that (3) is doubtlessly true. Otherwise we should be forced to say that the biblical authors of their own free will just *happened* to write exactly the sentences which God wanted as His own utterances. In any case, if I am correct that what is at stake here is not so much inerrancy as plenary, verbal inspiration, then (7) tells us that the truth of that doctrine entails (3). For God and man did not merely *concur* in tokening separately the same Scriptural sentence-types; rather the doctrine of inspiration holds that the human author’s sentence-tokens are identical with God’s sentence-tokens; God tokens the sentences *through* the human author; his words are God’s words. Thus, God must in some way so control the author as to speak through him. The control is “total” in that it extends to the very words of Scripture. Hence, Geisler’s first objection fails to show why the defender of inspiration is not committed to (3) and, if he wishes to avoid dictation, therefore (2).

But Geisler has a second line of attack.[\[98\]](#) He exposes a hidden assumption in Basinger and Basinger’s reasoning, towit,

9. If God can infallibly guarantee what some men will do, then He can do the same  
for all,

an assumption which Geisler rejects as false. Geisler is quite correct that the Basingers make this assumption, for (2) may be taken in the sense of

2\*. Some human activities (such as penning a book) can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom, *i.e.*, ( $\$x$ ) ( $Hx \cdot Cx \cdot \sim Vx$ )

or

2\*\*. All human activities (such as penning a book) can be totally controlled by God without violating human freedom, *i.e.*, ( $\forall x$ ) ( $Hx \supset [Cx \cdot \sim Vx]$ ).

The Basingers require (2\*\*) for their argument to be sound. But one could maintain that while it is within God's power to control the writing of Scripture without violating human freedom, that does not imply that God can so control human activity in general that no one ever freely does evil. In order for the classical doctrine of inspiration to be incompatible with the Free Will Defense, (2) must be taken as universally quantified rather than as existentially quantified. But now a familiar move in the Free Will defense may be turned against Basinger and Basinger: (2), so understood, is neither necessary nor essential to Christian theism nor a logical consequence of propositions that are; nor is the person who fails to see that (2) has these qualities intellectually deficient in some way.<sup>[99]</sup> Therefore, no incompatibility has been demonstrated between the classical doctrine of inspiration and the Free Will defense. Basinger and Basinger's reply at this point is faltering:

Geisler . . . denies that people who believe that God infallibly guaranteed that the writers of Scripture freely produced an inerrant work must also believe that God can infallibly guarantee that all individuals will always freely do what he wants . . .

But is this true? Can God infallibly guarantee that any single human action will *freely* occur if he cannot totally control all *free* human action ...? We believe not . . . if ([2]) is false, then God can never *guarantee* that any human will freely do what he wants.<sup>[100]</sup>

But this amounts to nothing but a personal confession of belief on the Basinger's part. It needs to be remembered that Basinger and Basinger are making the very strong claim that "Any person wanting to *both* use the free will defence in his theodicy *and*, at the same time, defend inerrancy against dictation is attempting the impossible . . . . One cannot have it both ways"<sup>[101]</sup> But in order to show these doctrines to be broadly logically incompatible, they must come up with a proposition whose conjunction with the propositions formulating each doctrine is logically inconsistent and which meets the above stipulated conditions, and (2) is definitely not it.

#### *A Middle Knowledge Perspective*

But where does this leave us? I suggested that Basinger and Basinger's argument might be more perspicaciously understood as claiming that human evil constitutes evidence against (2). That is to say, given (2\*), (2\*\*) is highly probable. For if God can control human activities in

such exquisite detail as to produce through free agents a Scripture which is verbally and plenary inspired, then there seems no reason why He could not control human activities such that people always freely refrain from sin. Given, then, the evil in the world, (2') is probably true. But if (2') is probably true, then, as argued, the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration is probably false.

To defeat this argument what is needed is some plausible, positive account of how God can control free human activities in such a way as to yield inspired Scripture without being able simultaneously to control free human activities in such a way as to prevent evil. Here Geisler is less helpful. He suggests,

The way God 'can' guarantee that some do not perform evil (or err) is by knowing infallibly that they will freely do good. It does not follow that God can do this for those who freely choose to do evil. For in this case God would have to force them to do contrary to their free choice.[\[102\]](#)

On Geisler's view, "since God knows (and so determines) which men will utter truth and when, then God can also affirm these truths as his infallibly true Word."[\[103\]](#) There are two problems with this suggestion: (1) It appears to endorse an untenable theological fatalism springing from the fact of divine foreknowledge. The suggestion seems to be that future acts, whether good or bad, are somehow fixed in virtue of God's infallible foreknowledge of them. But as numerous thinkers have shown, such an inference is simply logically fallacious.[\[104\]](#) Since God's foreknowledge is counterfactually dependent upon future contingents, they can fail to happen until they do happen; were they to fail to happen, then God would have foreknown differently than He does. (2) Divine foreknowledge is insufficient for providential control of the authors of Scripture. Foreknowledge only informs God of what the authors of Scripture will freely write; but such knowledge comes too late in the order of explanation for God to do anything about it. The problem is not that God would have to "force them to do contrary to their free choice." Rather it is logically impossible to *change* the future. Geisler in effect misplaces the divine creative decree *later* in the order of explanation than divine foreknowledge, rather than *before*. Thus on his view God must consider Himself extraordinarily lucky that He finds Himself in a world in which the writers of Scripture just happen to freely respond to their circumstances (including the promptings of His Spirit) in just the right ways as to produce the Bible. This is incompatible with a robust view of divine providence.

Geisler does, however, hint at the account we are looking for. In asking why some men were providentially preserved from error while others were not kept from error (or evil) at every time, he suggests,

It may have been because only some men freely chose to co-operate with the Spirit so that he could guide them in an errorless way. Or it may have been that the Holy Spirit simply chose to use those men and occasions which he infallibly knew would not produce error.[\[105\]](#)

Here we are speaking not of simple foreknowledge, but of God's counterfactual knowledge. It involves His knowledge of what some creature would freely do, were he to be placed in a specific set of circumstances. If God has such knowledge explanatorily prior to His creative decree then such knowledge is what theologians have called middle knowledge (*media scientia*). Largely the product of the creative genius of the Spanish Jesuit of the Counter-Reformation Luis Molina (1535-1600), the doctrine of middle knowledge proposes to furnish an analysis of divine knowledge in terms of three logical moments.[\[106\]](#) Although whatever God knows, He has known from eternity, so that there is no temporal succession in God's knowledge, nonetheless there does exist a sort of logical succession in God's knowledge in that His knowledge of certain propositions is conditionally or explanatorily prior to His knowledge of certain other propositions. That is to say, God's knowledge of a particular set of propositions depends asymmetrically on His knowledge of a certain other set of propositions and is in this sense posterior to it. In the first, unconditioned moment God knows all *possibilia*, not only all individual essences, but also all possible worlds. Molina calls such knowledge "natural knowledge" because the content of such knowledge is essential to God and in no way depends on the free decisions of His will. By means of His natural knowledge, then, God has knowledge of every contingent state of affairs which could possibly obtain and of what the exemplification of the individual essence of any free creature could freely choose to do in any such state of affairs that should be actual.

In the second moment, God possesses knowledge of all true counterfactual propositions, including counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. That is to say, He knows what contingent states of affairs would obtain if certain antecedent states of affairs were to obtain; whereas by His natural knowledge God knew what any free creature *could* do in any set of circumstances, now in this second moment God knows what any free creature *would* do in any set of circumstances. This is not because the circumstances causally determine the creature's choice, but simply because this is how the creature would freely choose. God thus knows that were He to actualize certain states of affairs, then certain other contingent states of affairs would obtain. Molina calls this counterfactual knowledge "middle knowledge" because it stands in between the first and third moment in divine knowledge. Middle knowledge is like natural knowledge in that such knowledge does not depend on any decision of the divine will; God does not determine which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true or false. Thus, if it is true that

If some agent *S* were placed in circumstances *C*, then he would freely perform action *a*,

then even God in His omnipotence cannot bring it about that *S* would refrain from *a* if he were placed in *C*. On the other hand, middle knowledge is unlike natural knowledge in that the content of His middle knowledge is not essential to God. True counterfactuals of freedom are contingently true; *S* could freely decide to refrain from *a* in *C*, so that different counterfactuals could be true and be known by God than those that are. Hence, although it is essential to God that He have middle knowledge, it is not essential to Him to have middle knowledge of those particular propositions which He does in fact know.

Intervening between the second and third moments of divine knowledge stands God's free decree to actualize a world known by Him to be realizable on the basis of His middle knowledge. By His natural knowledge, God knows what is the entire range of logically possible worlds; by His middle knowledge He knows, in effect, what is the proper subset of those worlds which it is feasible for Him to actualize. By a free decision, God decrees to actualize one of those worlds known to Him through His middle knowledge. According to Molina, this decision is the result of a complete and unlimited deliberation by means of which God considers and weighs every possible circumstance and its ramifications and decides to settle on the particular world He desires. Hence, logically prior, if not chronologically prior, to God's creation of the world is the divine deliberation concerning which world to actualize.

Given God's free decision to actualize a world, in the third and final moment God possesses knowledge of all remaining propositions that are in fact true in the actual world. Such knowledge is denominated "free knowledge" by Molina because it is logically posterior to the decision of the divine will to actualize a world. The content of such knowledge is clearly not essential to God, since He could have decreed to actualize a different world. Had He done so, the content of His free knowledge would be different.

Molina's doctrine has profound implications for divine providence. For it enables God to exercise providential control of free creatures without abridging the free exercise of their wills. In virtue of His knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and His freedom to decree that certain circumstances exist and certain free creatures be placed in those circumstances, God is able to bring about indirectly that events occur which He knew would happen as a direct result of the particular decisions which those creatures would freely make in those circumstances. Plantinga has provided an analysis of such providential control in terms of what he calls *strong* and *weak actualization*.<sup>[107]</sup> God is said to strongly actualize a state of affairs *S* if

and only if He causes *S* to be actual and also causes to be actual every contingent state of affairs *S\** included in *S* (where *S* includes *S\** if and only if it is impossible that *S* be actual and *S\** not be actual). God is said to weakly actualize a state of affairs *S* if and only if He strongly actualizes a state of affairs *S\** that counterfactually implies *S* (that is, were *S\** to obtain, then *S* would obtain). Then God can weakly actualize any state of affairs *S* if and only if there is a state of affairs *S\** such that (i) it is within God's power to strongly actualize *S\**; and (ii) if God were to strongly actualize *S\**, then *S* would be actual. Weak actualization is clearly compatible with human freedom, since the actualized state of affairs *S* obtains in virtue of the counterfactual of creaturely freedom which connects *S* to *S\**. Thus, God knew, for example, that were He to create the Apostle Paul in just the circumstances he was in around AD 55, he would freely write to the Corinthian church, saying just what he did in fact say. It needs to be emphasized that those circumstances included not only Paul's background, personality, environment, and so forth, but also any promptings or gifts of the Holy Spirit to which God knew Paul would freely respond.

The theological application to the doctrine of inspiration is obvious. By weakly actualizing the composition of the books of the Bible, God can bring it about that biblical inspiration is in the fullest sense confluent. The Epistle to the Romans, for example, is truly the work of Paul, who freely wrote it and whose personality and idiosyncrasies are reflected therein. The style is his because he is the author. The words are his, for he freely chose them. The argument and reasoning are the reflection of his own mind, for no one dictated the premisses to him. Neither did God dictate *levicula* like the greetings ("Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes," etc.); these are spontaneous salutations which God knew Paul would deliver under such circumstances; so also the interjection of his amanuensis Tertius (Rom. 16.22). Paul's full range of emotions, his memory lapses (I Cor. 1.14-16), his personal asides (Gal. 6.11) are all authentic products of human consciousness. God knew what Paul would freely write in the various circumstances in which he found himself and weakly actualized the writing of the Pauline corpus. Perhaps some features of Paul's letters are a matter of indifference to God: maybe it would not have mattered to God whether Paul greeted Phlegon or not; perhaps God would have been just as pleased had Paul worded some things differently; perhaps the Scripture need not have been just as it is to accomplish God's purposes. We cannot know. But we can confess that Scripture as it does stand is God-breathed and therefore authoritative. The Bible says what God wanted to say and communicates His message of salvation to mankind.

Some of the statements of the defenders of the classic doctrine of verbal, plenary, confluent inspiration fairly cry out for such a middle knowledge perspective. Here is what Warfield, for example, has to say about the inspiration of Paul's letters:

So soon, however, as we seriously endeavor to form for ourselves a clear



conception of the precise nature of the Divine action in this “breathing out” of the Scriptures--this “bearing” of the writers of the Scriptures to their appointed goal of the production of a book of Divine trustworthiness and indefectible authority--we become acutely aware of a more deeply lying and much wider problem, apart from which this one of inspiration, technically so called, cannot be profitably considered. This is the general problem of the origin of the Scriptures and the part of God in all that complex of processes by the interaction of which these books, which we call the sacred Scriptures, with all their peculiarities, and all their qualities of whatever sort, have been brought into being. For, of course, these books were not produced suddenly, by some miraculous act--handed down complete out of heaven, as the phrase goes; but, like all other products of time, are the ultimate effect of many processes cooperating through long periods. There is to be considered, for instance, the preparation of the material which forms the subject-matter of these books: in a sacred history, say, for example, to be narrated; or in a religious experience which may serve as a norm for record; or in a logical elaboration of the contents of revelation which may be placed at the service of God’s people; or in the progressive revelation of Divine truth itself, supplying their culminating contents. And there is the preparation of the men to write these books to be considered, a preparation physical, intellectual, spiritual, which must have attended them throughout their whole lives, and, indeed, must have had its beginning in their remote ancestors, and the effect of which was to bring the right men to the right places at the right times, with the right endowments, impulses, acquirements, to write just the books which were designed for them. When “inspiration,” technically so called, is superinduced on lines of preparation like these, it takes on quite a different aspect from that which it bears when it is thought of as an isolated action of the Divine Spirit operating out of all relation to historical processes. Representations are sometimes made as if, when God wished to produce sacred books which would incorporate His will--a series of letters like those of Paul, for example--He was reduced to the necessity of going down to earth and painfully scrutinizing the men He found there, seeking anxiously for the one who, on the whole, promised best for His purpose; and then violently forcing the material He wished expressed through him, against his natural bent, and with as little loss from his recalcitrant characteristics as possible. Of course, nothing of the sort took place. If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul’s He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul He brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters. [\[108\]](#)

Divine middle knowledge illumines such an interpretation, since God knew what Paul would write if placed in such circumstances and knew how to bring about such circumstances without extinguishing human freedom along the way. Warfield comments that when we give due weight in our thinking to the universality of providence, to the minuteness and completeness of its sway, to its invariable efficacy, then we may wonder that anything “is needed beyond this mere providential government to secure the production of sacred books, which should be in every detail absolutely accordant with the Divine will.”<sup>[109]</sup> Revelation will be needed in some cases for truths not accessible through natural reason. Moreover, we must never forget that the circumstances known to God include, not exclude, all those movements of the Holy Spirit in an author’s heart to which God knew the writer would respond in appropriate ways.

Given the doctrine of middle knowledge, then, we see how plenary, verbal, confluent inspiration can, *pace* Spinoza, Le Clerc, and Simon, be coherently affirmed. The distinction between strong and weak actualization reveals how the control described in (2) by Basinger and Basinger is possible.<sup>[110]</sup> We can understand how the divine/human confluence in the events of redemptive history as insisted on by Carson is possible without falling into determinism. Finally, we can see why Geisler was right to maintain that God’s ability to control the free composition of Scripture does not imply His ability to so control the free actions of all persons that a world containing as much good as the actual world but with less evil would be actualized. God might well have requisite control of the authors of Scripture to ensure that Scripture would be freely written without having requisite control of all human beings to ensure that less evil, but the same amount of good, would be freely wrought. In fact, God’s placing a premium on actualizing a world in which the requisite counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true for the free composition of Scripture are true might require Him to forego worlds in which counterfactuals requisite for an otherwise better balance of good and evil are true. Indeed, the existence of Scripture in the world might actually serve to increase the amount of evil in the world by exacerbating sinful desires (Rom. 7.7-8)! It all depends on which counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are true, a contingency over which God has no control. A world in which Scripture is freely composed and in which the balance between good and evil is more optimal than it is in the actual world may not be feasible for God. Basinger and Basinger are in effect claiming that

10. A world in which an inspired, inerrant Scripture is freely written is feasible for God

and

11. A world containing as much good as the actual world without as much evil is not feasible for God

are broadly logically incompatible or, at least, improbable each with respect to the other. But such claims are pure speculation; we are simply not in an epistemic position to make responsibility such pronouncements. Thus, in the area of biblical inspiration, as in so many other areas of theology, the doctrine of divine middle knowledge proves to be a fruitful resource in shedding light on seemingly irresolvable old conundrums.[\[111\]](#) The doctrine is, of course, controversial and has many detractors, but the objections lodged against that doctrine are far from compelling.[\[112\]](#)

### *Historical Precedents*

When one hits upon what one takes to be an original idea, it is somewhat deflating (but nonetheless encouraging) to discover that one is retracing largely forgotten paths explored previous thinkers. When I conceived the idea of enunciating a middle knowledge perspective on biblical inspiration, I was unaware that it, or something rather like it, had been done before.[\[113\]](#) Indeed, I was chagrined to learn from Burtchaell that it was, in fact, “the most venerable” of those “discredited views from which practically every writer [in the nineteenth century] took comfort in disassociating himself in his footnotes.”[\[114\]](#)

In 1588, the same year that saw the publication of Molina’s *Concordia*, a papal brief was issued declaring a moratorium on a controversy involving a young Jesuit theologian of the University of Louvain Leonard Leys (Lessius) concerning a long list of theological charges which had been brought against him.[\[115\]](#) The previous year, the theological faculty had extracted from his students’ notes 34 propositions which they publicly condemned. Three of these dealt with the subject of biblical inspiration. They read:

- i. For anything to be Holy Scripture, its individual words need not be inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- ii. The individual truths and statements need not be immediately inspired in the writer by the Holy Spirit.
- iii. If any book . . . were to be written through purely human endeavor without the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and He should then certify that there was nothing false therein, the book would become Holy Scripture.[\[116\]](#)

The theological faculty of the University of Louvain censured Lessius for these propositions, stating that Sacred Scripture is not the word of man, but the Word of God, dictated by the Holy

Spirit. The University of Douay joined in the censure, explaining that dictation is not just a suggestion in general, but of the words themselves: there is not a syllable or accent in Scripture which is trifling or superfluous.

Now among the other propositions condemned were statements concerning grace and free will which indicated that Lessius was groping for the doctrine of middle knowledge which Molina first succeeded in formulating clearly and accurately. According to Burtchaell,

The crux of the Louvain-Jesuit dispute was this issue of grace and free-will. The three censured propositions on inspiration formed but a small part of a total of thirty-two which bore on this larger problem. The faculty rightly saw that Lessius's inspiration hypotheses were the logical application of the general Jesuit idea of grace: they provided for both divine authorship and human literary freedom by making divine intervention only indirect.[\[117\]](#)

Whether we regard Lessius as, in Woodbridge's epithet,[\[118\]](#) a "slippery" theologian or a subtle dialectician will probably depend on our openness to the Molinist point of view. Claiming that he had been misunderstood, Lessius wrote an *Apologia* in which he explained how he interpreted the disputed propositions.[\[119\]](#) By (i) and (ii) he meant that the authors of Scripture did not need a new and positive inspiration or new illumination from God to write down each word of Scripture. As he later explained,

We are teaching that, for anything to be Holy Scripture, its every word and statement need not be positively and absolutely inspired in the author, with the Holy Spirit supplying and forming in his mind the individual words and statements. It is enough that the sacred writer be divinely drawn to write down what he sees, hears, or knows otherwise, that he enjoy the infallible assistance of the Holy Spirit to prevent him from mistakes even in matters he knows on the word of others, or from his own experience, or by his own natural reasoning. It is this assistance of the Holy Spirit that gives Scripture its infallible truth.[\[120\]](#)

He gave two reasons in support of his position: (1) The Evangelists did not need a new revelation to record the life of Jesus, since they either were witnesses themselves or had historical tradition of it. (2) The Holy Spirit chose competent instruments, gifted with the ability to express themselves, whom He then stirred to write of what they knew and whom He assisted to keep [them] from error.

Mangenot observes that taken literally Lessius's propositions (i) and (ii) would be incompatible with the inspiration of Scripture; but it is evident from the above that what he was

really exercised to do was to deny the dictation theory of inspiration.<sup>[121]</sup> Lessius insisted that the impulse and assistance of the Holy Spirit were compatible with the human author's recalling things from memory, organizing his material, utilizing his peculiar style of expression, and so on. He affirmed that the entire Scripture is the Word of God and was even, in a certain sense, dictated by the Holy Spirit. We have seen that even so redoubtable a champion of verbal inspiration as Warfield affirmed that dictation has reference to the result, not the mode, of inspiration, and Lessius seems to affirm the same.

According to Burtchaell, Lessius's three propositions reduce God's role in the production of Scripture to (i) the supplying of ideas, but not words, (ii) the protection from error, and (iii) the *post factum* guarantee of inerrancy.<sup>[122]</sup> Eventually these became the official party line of the Jesuits. But it seems to me that these inferences arise from misunderstandings of the nature of inspiration which are no part of a middle knowledge perspective. Lessius seems to be guilty of two confusions: (1) He conflates the notions of inspiration and revelation, and (2) he thinks of inspiration as a property of the authors, rather than of the text, of Scripture. Both of these are common mistakes which were gestating since the time of the Church Fathers and would finally find their ugly issue in Spinoza's *Tractatus*. With respect to (1) the mistake arises by treating all Scripture on the model of prophecy. As a direct revelation from God, prophecy communicates information which transcends natural knowledge; things naturally known by the human authors of Scripture have not, therefore, been directly revealed to them by God.<sup>[123]</sup> Thus, if inspiration is co-extensive with revelation, then when the authors of Scripture write of matters which they already know, it follows that they are not inspired. But since "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3.16) this conflation is clearly a mistake, for not all Scripture is of the genre of prophecy. Even Scripture which does not involve the direct revelation of supernatural knowledge by God is inspired. Thus, Lessius's point that the Evangelists did not need a new revelation to record Jesus's life is no proof that the gospels are not inspired. With respect to (2), the Scripture states that it is the *text*, not the authors, of Scripture which is inspired (2 Tim. 3.16). True, the prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak (1 Pet. 1.21), but it is a mistake to equate inspiration with this movement, so as to imply that because Scripture is verbally inspired therefore the authors were moved immediately by the Holy Spirit to write *that* or *this* particular word.<sup>[124]</sup> It is the Scripture which is God-breathed, not the authors. Thus, it is wholly erroneous to think that use of memory, research, effort, borrowing, and so forth, on the part of the author is incompatible with the final result of his labors, the text, being inspired. Thus, to speak, as Lessius does, of the authors' having no need of new and positive inspiration for writing what they did is to misconstrue inspiration as a sort of illumination of the author's mind--which, he rightly observes, seems unnecessary for much of Scripture--rather than as a quality of the final text, the quality of being God's Word. When Lessius denies that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write, "Luke alone is with

me; Trophimus I left ill at Miletus” (2 Tim. 4.20), he is tilting at windmills.

Once we understand that inspiration is a property of the text, not the authors, then we shall not be tempted to embrace the view, popular among Lessius’s successors until its condemnation at Vatican I, that inspiration consists merely in a sort of watchdog role for the Holy Spirit of preventing the biblical authors from falling into error.<sup>[125]</sup> Such a role is compatible with human freedom<sup>[126]</sup> and no doubt is part of the Spirit’s superintendence of the composition of Scripture along with the providential preparation of the authors; but it is not what inspiration is. Nor shall we be tempted to embrace another vestige of Lessius, what is known in German theology as *Realinspiration*, the theory that God inspired the propositional content of Scripture and the human authors supplied its linguistic expression.<sup>[127]</sup> Under the influence of the Jesuit tradition, this seems to have been the position adopted by Simon. This theory again misconstrues inspiration as a work of God in the authors’ minds, providing them with propositional content which they clothe with words. A little reflection reveals that such a theory, besides misconstruing the nature of inspiration, actually constricts the authors’ freedom, since they are not free to express whatever propositions they wish but only those God gives them. Moreover, the propositional content of Scripture may be so specific as to require certain words and expressions in a given language, so that we again approach dictation. The theory does nothing to explain the *levicula*. And it remains mysterious how God could communicate His propositional truth to someone wholly without linguistic formulation. Thus, once we distinguish inspiration from revelation and understand inspiration to be a property belonging to the text, we see that a middle knowledge perspective in no wise denies that the very words of Scripture are inspired nor does it limit the Spirit’s role to the merely negative role of protection from error.

Lessius’s third proposition and the inference drawn from it raise the issue of what distinguishes Scripture as God’s Word, if it is not dictated by the Holy Spirit. The proposition presents a clear *non sequitur* in implying that a book would become Scripture merely in virtue of the Spirit’s certifying it to be inerrant. Inerrancy is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition of being God’s Word. Lessius qualified his position by saying that a statement later certified to be true by the Holy Spirit would be as authoritative as if the Spirit had uttered it through a prophet. I see no reason to object; but again there is no reason to think that such a true statement should then be incorporated into the canon of Scripture. The real question raised by Lessius’s third proposition is whether some book of Scripture might not have been written without any special assistance by the Holy Spirit and yet still be inspired in virtue of the Spirit’s ratification of it as His Word. Lessius gives the very intriguing illustration of a King who by approving and signing a document his secretary has drawn up makes it his own royal decree. Now from a middle knowledge perspective, there is no question of God’s later ratifying a document which He did not

foreknow or did not providentially bring about. Rather the question is whether God could be confronted with counterfactuals of creaturely freedom which are such as to permit Him to produce a book of Scripture by means of His providence alone without His acting as a primary cause influencing the act of writing itself. I see no reason to think that this is impossible. But then what, we may ask, would distinguish such a book as Scripture as opposed to any other product of human effort equally under the general providence of God? Presumably the answer would lie in God's intent to bring about a book designed to make us wise unto salvation and ultimately by His ratification of that book as His Word to us.

Now if such a middle knowledge perspective on biblical inspiration found expression, however inchoately, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, why was it abandoned? Burtchaell mentions three reasons: (1) If the minimal requirement for biblical writing were divine preservation from error, then the Scripture are not distinguished from official Church proclamations which also enjoy this protection. Part of the answer to this objection, from a Protestant viewpoint, is that Scripture alone has this special protection and hence alone is authoritative (*sola Scriptura*). More fundamentally, what distinguishes a writing as Scripture is God's intent that that writing be His gracious Word to mankind. (2) Infallibility is insufficient to make a human utterance into the Word of God. I readily agree. Even if some book of Scripture were written without any special promptings or assistance of the Holy Spirit, it is Scripture, not in virtue of its inerrancy, but because God in His providence prepared such a book to be His Word to us. (3) The theory is too conservative and so was eclipsed. But it is not a middle knowledge theory of inspiration which is too conservative; rather what is deemed too conservative is the theory of verbal, plenary, confluent inspiration, since it implies the inerrancy of Scripture. That issue is not under discussion here; rather the question we have been exploring is whether the doctrine of the verbal, plenary, confluent inspiration of Scripture is coherent. Given a middle knowledge perspective, the coherence of the classical doctrine becomes perspicuous.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, it seems to me that the traditional doctrine of the plenary, verbal, confluent inspiration of Scripture is a coherent doctrine, given divine middle knowledge. Because God knew the relevant counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, He was able to decree a world containing just those circumstances and persons such that the authors of Scripture would freely compose their respective writings, which God intended to be His gracious Word to us. In the providence of God, the Bible is thus both the Word of God and the word of man.

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## NOTES

[1] For a survey of relevant texts, see *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, ed. A. Vacant and E. Mangenot (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1922), vol. 7, pt. 2, s.v. “L’inspiration de l’Écriture,” by E. Mangenot, cols. 2068-2266; William Sanday, *Inspiration* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1914); *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d ed., s.v. “Inspiration: II. Inspiration der hl. Schrift, dogmengeschichtlich,” by O. Weber; John F. Walvoord, ed., *Inspiration and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 60-64; Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, Theological Resources (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), pp. 20-42; John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, with a Foreword by Kenneth S. Kantzer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982).

[2] 1 Clement 45. Translation from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (herein after abbreviated as *ANF*), 10 vols, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (rep. ed.: Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 1: 17.

[3] *Ibid.* 53 (*ANF* 1: 19).

[4] *Ibid.* 13; cf. 22 (*ANF* 1: 8,11).

[5] *Ibid.* 47 (*ANF* 1: 18).

[6] Justin *Apologia prima pro Christianis* 33 (*ANF* 1: 174).

[7] *Ibid.* 36 (*ANF* 1: 175).

[8] Justin *Dialogus cum Trypone Judaeo* 16 (*ANF* 1: 202); *idem Apologia prima* 33 (*ANF* 1: 174).

[9] Justin *Apologia prima* 36 (*ANF* 1: 175). Thus, in Ps. 24 it is the Holy Spirit who speaks (*Idem Dialogus* 36 [*ANF* 1: 175]).

[10] Justin *Dialogus* 65 (*ANF* 1: 230).

[11] Clement of Alexandria *Exhortatio ad gentes* 9 (*ANF* 2: 195).



[12] *ibid.*

[13] Irenaeus *Adversus haeresis* 3. 4. 3-4 (ANF 1: 438-439).

[14] *ibid.* 3. 16. 2 (ANF 1: 441). Cf. 3. 11. 1; Tertullian *De monogamia* 11-12 (ANF 4: 69) for similar reliance on single words.

[15] Irenaeus *Adversus haeresis* 4. 2. 3 (ANF 1: 464).

[16] *ibid.* 2. 28. 2 (ANF 1: 399).

[17] Athenagoras *Legatio pro Christianis* 9 (ANF 2: 133). Kelly associates a similar view of inspiration with Alexandrian Judaism on the evidence of Philo's account of prophecy (Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 62).

[18] Athenagoras *Legatio* 7 (ANF 2: 132).

[19] Theophilus *Ad Autolyicum* 2. 10 (ANF 2: 98).

[20] *ibid.* Cf. 2. 9, where prophets inspired by the Holy Spirit are said to become "instruments of God."

[21] *ibid.*, 2. 12, 22; 3. 17 (ANF 2: 99, 103, 116).

[22] Pseudo-Justin *Cohortatio ad Graecos* 8 (ANF 1: 276). A plectrum is a sort of pick used to play the lyre.

[23] *ibid.*, 35 (ANF 1: 287).

[24] Irenaeus *Adversus haeresis* 3. 7. 1 (ANF 1: 420).

[25] *ibid.*, 3. 7. 2 (ANF 1: 421).

[26] It is often suggested that the eclipse of the motif of ecstatic possession is due to the church's reaction to Montanism, which featured such prophetic experiences. See Epiphanius *Panarion* (*Haeresis*) 48.

[27] Hippolytus *De Christo et antichristo* 2 (ANF 5: 204-205). Cf. *idem Contra haeresim Noeti* 11 (ANF 5: 227), where the prophets' speaking by the Holy Spirit is a matter of their being gifted with the inspiration of God's power.

[28] Jerome *Epistola* 120. 9.

[29]Jerome *Commentariorum in epistolam ad Ephesios* 2.3.

[30]Augustine *De consensu evangelistarum* 1. 35. 54 Translation from *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, (herein after abbreviated as *NPNF<sup>1</sup>*) 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff (rep. ed.: Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 6: 101.

[31]Augustine *Epistola* 82. 3, 24 (*NPNF<sup>1</sup>* 1: 350, 358); cf. idem *Epistola* 28. 3 (*NPNF<sup>1</sup>* 1: 251-252); idem *De civitate Dei* 21. 6 (*NPNF<sup>1</sup>* 2: 457).

[32]See A. Bea, “*Deus auctor Sacrae Scripturae: Herkunft und Bedeutung der Formel,*” *Angelicum* 20 (1943): 16-31. Vawter concludes, “the language of the Fathers both in the East and in the West, as well as their habitual handling of the Scripture, leaves little doubt that for many if not most of them God was, altogether simplistically, the *literary* author of the Bible. He had, through men, ‘written’ the Biblical work; He had ‘dictated’ it” (Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, p. 96).

[33]Origen *De principiis* 4. 9 (*ANF* 4: 357).

[34]C. J. Cadoux, *The Case for Evangelical Modernism* (New York: Clark, 1939), pp. 66-67.

[35]Herman Sasse, “The Rise of the Dogma of Holy Scripture in the Middle Ages,” *Reformed Theological Review* 18 (1959): 45.

[36]Thomas Aquinas *Quaestiones quodlibetales* 7. 16.

[37]Thomas Aquinas *Summa theologiae* 2a. 2ae. 172. 5 *ad* 3.

[38]*Ibid.* 1a. 1. 10 *ad* 3.

[39]*Ibid.* 1a. 1. 8.

[40]Martin Luther, “Kleine exegetische Schriften: Auslegung vieler schöner Sprüche heiliger Schrift,” in *Sämtliche Schriften*, 23 vols., ed. Joh. Georg Walsch, vol. 9: *Auslegung des Neuen Testaments* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, [1892]), col. 1818.

[41]*Ibid.*, col. 1775.

[42]Martin Luther, “Commentary on Psalm 90,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 13: *Selected Psalms II*, ed. J. Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 81.

[43]Martin Luther, “Treatise on the Last Words of David (2 Sam. 23: 1-7),” trans. Martin Bertram,

in *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., ed. J. Pelikan and H. C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 15: 275.

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 275.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 5: *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26-30*, ed. J. Pelikan and W.A. Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 352. For similar citations see E. F. Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 20.

[48] Martin Luther, "That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45: *The Christian in Society II*, ed. H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 208.

[49] Martin Luther, "Wider die Papisten," in *Werke*, vol. 15: *Reformationsschriften*, cap. 6, Abschn. 3, §448, col. 1481.

[50] Abraham Calov *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata* 2: 1547 (Citation from Robert D. Preuss, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. [St. Louis; Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1970], 1: 283).

[51] J. A. Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica, sive systema theologiae* 1. 4. 2. 4 (Citation from Preuss, *Theology*, 1: 281).

[52] For many references, see Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, p. 138.

[53] Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. W. Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1856), p. 249.

[54] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3 vols., trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 3: 166 (IV. viii. 9); *idem*, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 3: *Jonah, Micah, Nahum*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), p. 197.

[55] Calvin, *Minor Prophets*, vol. 1: *Hosea*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1846), p. 42; cf. p. 325. See also Calvin, *Second Epistle to Timothy*, p. 249: "we owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God; because it has proceeded from him alone, and has nothing belonging to man mixed with it."

[56]Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854), 1: 34

<sup>52</sup>Jean Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. and ed. W. Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 1: 127; cf. 1: xxxviii, xxxix.

[58]Timothy R. Phillips, "Francis Turretin's Idea of Theology and its Bearing upon his Doctrine of Scripture," 2 vols. (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1986), 2: 748.

[59]Ibid., 1: 86.

[60]Ibid., 1: 87-88.

[61]Voetius *Selectorum Disputationum Fasciculus*, p. 24 (Cited in Phillips, *Turretin's Idea of Theology*, 2: 758).

[62]Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 33d ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: 1965) 1501 (p. 364).

[63]Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), pp. 197-199 (11).

[64]Ibid., p. 201 (11).

[65]Ibid., p. 211 (12).

[66]Ibid., p. 209 (12).

[67]Jean Le Clerc, *Five Letters Concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (London: n.p., 1690), p. 34, this book being a translation of his *Sentimens de quelques théologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1685).

[68]Ibid., p. 126.

[69]Le Prieur de Bolleville, *Réponse au Livre intitulé Sentimens de quelques Theologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1686), pp. 122-132; Richard Simon, *Histoire critique du Texte du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam: Renier Leers, 1689; rep. ed.: Frankfurt: Minerva, 1968), chap. 23.

[70]Simon, *Histoire critique*, p. 192.

[71]R. S. P., *Nouvelles Observations sur le Texte et les Versions du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Jean Boudot, 1695), p. 35. (Citation from James Tunstead Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969], pp. 49-50).

[72]Le Prieur de Bolleville, *Réponse au Livre intitulé Sentimens*, pp. 127-128.

[73]Ibid., p. 128.

[74]Le Clerc, *Letters*, p.158; cf. idem, *Defense des Sentimens de quelques Theologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament contre le prieur de Bolleville* (Amsterdam: Henri Desbordes, 1686), p. 245.

[75]Le Prieur de Bolleville, *De l'Inspiration des Livres Sacrez; Avec une reponse au livre intitulé Defense des Sentimens de quelques Theologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire Critique du Vieux Testament* (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1699), pp. 167-168.

[76]Ibid., p. 160.

[77]Ibid., p. 3.

[78]Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 66; see pp. 86-95 for exposition.

[79]John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Scripture proofs of the Doctrines of the Church*, Tracts for the Times 85 (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1838), p. 30.

[80]Preus, *Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1: 290-291.

[81]Thomas Aquinas *Summa theologiae* 2a. 2ae. 171. 5.

[82]Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "Inspiration and Criticism," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. Samuel G. Craig with an Intro. by Cornelius Van Til (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), pp. 420-421. See also Phillips, *Turretin's Idea of Theology*, pp. 744-775, who states that the Reformed scholastics only vaguely characterized the mechanics of inspiration.

[83]Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (Oxford University Press, 1931; rep. ed.: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), p. 62.

[84]Warfield, "Inspiration and Criticism," p. 421. So also Phillips, *Turretin's Idea of Theology*,

2: 752.

[85] Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Biblical Idea of Inspiration," in *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, p. 153.

[86] Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Calvin and the Holy Scriptures," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, pp. 140-141.

[87] See Harry Frankfurt, "Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969): 829-839; Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 151-152.

[88] Randall Basinger and David Basinger, "Inerrancy, Dictation and The Free Will Defence," *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 177-180.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

[90] It is intriguing that this is the conclusion to which Pinnock, quoted above, was eventually driven. He says, "A text that is word for word what God wanted in the first place might as well have been dictated, for all the room it leaves for human agency" (Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984], p. 101). The problem is that God is said to have "controlled the writers and every detail of what they wrote" (*Ibid.*). "To hold that God predestined and controlled every detail of the text makes nonsense of human authorship and is tantamount to saying God dictated the text. It is quibbling over words to deny it so vigorously" (*Ibid.*). "If God is really in total control of all things, then he must have willed all the tragedies and atrocities that have happened . . . . God is the one responsible for everything that happens if he willed it so completely, and he must take the blame" (*Ibid.*, p. 102). I hope to show that none of these inferences is correct.

[91] D. A. Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986), p. 45.

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] *Ibid.*

[94] Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, p. 9.

[95] Carson, "Recent Developments," p. 45.

[96]Norman L. Geisler, "Inerrancy and Free Will: A Reply to the Brothers Basinger," *Evangelical Quarterly* 57 (1985): 347-353.

[97]David Basinger and Randall Basinger, "Inerrancy and Free Will: Some Further Thoughts," *Evangelical Quarterly* 58 (1986): 351-354.

[98]Geisler, "Inerrancy and Free Will," p. 351.

[99]On these conditions, see Alvin Plantinga, "Self-Profile," in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. James Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, Profiles 5 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1985), pp. 39-40.

[100]Basinger and Basinger: "Inerrancy and Free Will," pp. 353-354.

[101]Basinger and Basinger, "Inerrancy, Dictation, and the Free Will Defense," p. 179; cf. p. 180.

[102]Geisler, "Inerrancy and Free Will," p. 351.

[103]*Ibid.*, p. 352.

[104]See Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 235-269; Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986); Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction," in *On Divine Foreknowledge*, by Luis Molina, trans. with Notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 9-29; Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God: an Inquiry into Divine Attributes*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism I: Omniscience*, Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1990); Thomas Flint, *Providence*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[105]Geisler, "Inerrancy and Free Will," p. 352.

[106]For Molina's doctrine see Ludovici Molina *De liberi arbitrii cum gratia donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione concordia* 4. This section has been translated as Luis Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, trans. with an Introduction and Notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988).

[107]Plantinga, "Self-Profile," pp. 48-49.

[108]Warfield, "Biblical Idea of Inspiration," pp. 154-155.

[109]*Ibid.*, p. 157.

[110] This also helps us to see that the notion of “infallibly guaranteeing” is really a red herring. Weak actualization does not infallibly guarantee the result in the sense that there are possible worlds in which the strongly actualized state of affairs does not counterfactually imply the weakly actualized state of affairs, since counterfactuals of freedom are true/false relative to a possible world. Thus, there may be a possible world relative to which a world with a freely composed Bible and a more optimal balance of good and evil is feasible for God. The verbal, plenary, confluent inspiration of Scripture thus does not require that God’s guarantee be infallible, but merely that He in fact has the requisite control of free creatures to weakly actualize Scripture’s composition. He can guarantee inerrancy without infallibly guaranteeing it.

[111] For applications of middle knowledge to such issues as Christian exclusivism, divine sovereignty and human freedom, perseverance of the saints, infallibility, and creation/evolution see William Lane Craig, “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation through Christ,” *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 172-188; idem, “Middle Knowledge: a Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement ?” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. C. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 141-164; idem, “‘Lest Anyone Should Fall’: a Middle Knowledge Perspective on Perseverance and Apostolic Warnings,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991): 65-74; Thomas P. Flint, “Middle Knowledge and the Doctrine of Infallibility,” *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 5: *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. J. E. Tomberlin (Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgerway Publishing, 1991), pp. 373-393; Del Ratzch, “Design, Chance, and Theistic Evolution,” in *Mere Creation* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1998), pp. 289-312.

[112] See Alvin Plantinga, “Reply to Robert Adams,” in *Alvin Plantinga*, pp. 372-382; Kvanvig, *Possibility of an All-Knowing God*, pp. 121-148; Freddoso, “Introduction,” pp. 62-81; Wierenga, *Nature of God*, pp. 116-165; Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, pp. 237-278; Flint, *Providence*.

[113] Moreover, I discovered since writing the initial draft of this paper that it, or something like it, has been done again in our own day by Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflection on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). In his chapter 3, “The Many Modes of Discourse,” Wolterstorff has a fascinating discussion of what he calls “double agency,” which obtains when one person says something with words which he himself has not uttered or incribed (pp. 38-57). Exploiting examples reminiscent of those employed by the seventeenth century Jesuits, Wolterstorff focuses on what he calls “appropriated discourse” as a model for Scripture: human discourse appropriated by God and thus divine discourse (pp. 51-54). “All that is necessary for the whole [Bible] to be God’s book is that the human discourse it contains have been appropriated by God, as one single book, for God’s



discourse" (p.54). Such an understanding of Scripture is entirely consonant with the position defended in this paper. Unfortunately, Wolterstorff makes the same category mistake as did Lessius, equating inspiration with the movement of the Holy Spirit in or on the authors of Scripture rather than as a characteristic of the text itself (p. 54; cf. p. 301). This leads him to the view that the Scripture may not be in whole or in part inspired even though it is God's Word. But a providentially produced piece of discourse can be inspired, in the proper sense of that term, even in the absence of any special moving of the Spirit of God upon the human author. The question of *how* Scripture came to be produced exposes the greatest weakness of Wolterstorff's discussion, when in chapter 7 he asks whether God can cause the events generative of Scriptural discourse. This is the same issue raised by Warfield, which called for a middle knowledge solution. Intriguingly, Wolterstorff does consider ever so briefly a middle knowledge position, though without identifying it as such (pp. 121-122). Tragically, he rejects such a solution because he is inclined to think that there are no true counterfactuals of freedom. Eager to discover what would incline Wolterstorff to such a position, one turns to his attending endnote and is stunned to discover that no better reason is given for this scepticism than the misconceived and oft-refuted objections of William Hasker! In the end Wolterstorff is left without any explanation of how God, even given divine interventions in history, can bring about the writing of Scripture in the absence of divine middle knowledge--a weakness which draws bitter criticism on the part of Michael Levine, "God Speak," *Religious Studies* 34 (1998): 14, whose critique on this score is unfortunately skipped over in the interests of space in Wolterstorff's "Reply to Levine," *Religious Studies* 34 (1998): 22.

[114]Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration*, p. 44. He pronounces the theory "dead and buried."

[115]On the Lessius affair see *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, s.v. "Inspiration de l'Écriture," vol. 7, pt. 2, cols. 2135-2145; Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration*, chaps. 2 and 3.

[116](i.) Ut aliquid sit Scriptura sacra, non est necessarium singula ejus verba inspirata esse a Spiritu Sancto.

(ii.) Non est necessarium ut singulae veritates et sententiae sint immediate a Spiritu Sancto ipsi scriptori inspiratae.

(iii.) Liber aliquis . . . humana industria sine assistentia Spiritus Sancti scriptus, si Spiritus Sanctus postea testetur ibi nihil esse falsum, efficitur Scriptura sacra.

[117]Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration*, p. 91. "Indirect" is not technically correct; better would be "non-deterministic." His complete neglect of this context vitiates the adequacy of

Vawter's exposition of this controversy (Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration*, pp. 63-70). Quoting Suarez to the effect that "although everything in Scripture has been written by the Holy Spirit, nevertheless the Spirit left it to the writer to write everything in a manner accommodated to himself and according to his own talents, education, and language, although under his direction," a befuddled Vawter protests, "It may be asked whether such a sentence is not logically meaningless: the Spirit has 'written' words that he 'left to' the human writer to discover from his own resources" (Ibid., p. 66). But given a middle knowledge perspective, such dual authorship becomes perspicuous. Similarly, one can only smile at Vawter's allegation that Suarez, a great champion of middle knowledge, was "confused" because he affirmed both verbal inspiration and only negative assistance by the Holy Spirit: "Suárez was trying to harmonize into one system what were basically opposed conceptions of inspiration" (Ibid., p. 67). It is precisely the beauty of the doctrine of middle knowledge that it succeeds in reconciling seemingly opposed positions with respect to divine sovereignty and human freedom.

[118] Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority*, p. 70.

[119] See Livino de Meyer, *Historia controversiarum de divina gratia*, 6 vols., 2d ed. (Venetiis: Nicolaum Pezzana, 1742), Appendix III: *Apologia a R. P. Leonardo Lessio e Societate Jesu scripta adversus censuras Lovaniensem & Duacensem Responsio ad Censuram Facultatis sacrae Theologiae Lovaniensis*, pp. 756-757.

[120] Letter of Lessius to the archbishop of Machlin, in Joseph Kleutgen, "R. P. Leonardii Lessii Soc. Iesu Theologi de Divina Inspiratione Doctrina," in Gerardus Schneemann, *Controversiarum de Divinae Gratiae Liberi Arbitrii Concordia Initia et Progressus* (Friburgi Brisgoviae: Herder, 1881), p. 466 (cited in Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration*, p. 45).

[121] *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique*, s.v. "Inspiration de l'Écriture," vol. 7, pt. 2, col. 2144.

[122] Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration*, p.

[123] Wolterstorff likewise distinguishes between Scripture and revelation; this is a concept which needs more careful analysis than is usually given by defenders of biblical authority.

[124] See the particularly severe criticism by Phillips, "Turretin's Idea of Theology," 2: 761, who calls it a "blatant category mistake" to equate the description of inspiration's extent (*viz.*, verbal inspiration) with a description of its procedure.

[125] See discussion in Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration*, pp. 45-52.

[126] See references in note 83. See also Thomas P. Flint, "Middle Knowledge and

Infallibility.” Although Flint’s analysis concerns Papal infallibility, he rightly notes that it would apply to biblical infallibility as well.

[\[127\]](#) See Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration*, chap. 3.