

### **Preserved Text-v3. The nature of Inspiration**

Here I am again in the name of the Sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord Jesus Christ. Continuing with Inspiration, I will deal with its nature.

We use the term 'inspiration' to refer to the process that the Sovereign Creator used to produce his written Revelation. The Creator chose to use human authors, with the exception of the stone tablets containing the Decalog, that the Creator Himself engraved (Exodus 31:18, 32:16). By comparing the style of books written by different people, it is evident that the personality of the author was not squelched, or blocked: Paul writes in one way, John writes in a different way, and so on. And the same author will change style, depending on the intended audience, or recipient. So when Peter writes that the authors were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21), we may understand that the 'carrying' guaranteed that the words that were written expressed correctly the meaning that the Holy Spirit wished to convey. Both the living Word and the written Word involve a hypostatic union: how Jesus Christ can be 100% God and 100% man at the same time is a mystery; how the written Word can be 100% divine and 100% human at the same time is also a mystery.

But there is more to the story. The way inspiration works varies with the type of literature.

1) Strictly speaking, 'revelation' signifies information given directly to someone by the Creator (sometimes using an angel). True prophecy is a prophet repeating verbatim what the Creator said to him: "the word of the LORD came to me saying" (Jeremiah 1:4). Of necessity, the information contained in the first chapter of Genesis was given directly to Adam by the Creator. Similarly, the information contained in Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7 had to be given directly to the author of the book (perhaps Elihu, the son of Barachel— Job 32:2). Acts 1:16 says that the Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of David. With reference to the 'Lord's Supper', Paul wrote: "I received from the Lord that which I also transmitted to you" (1 Corinthians 11:23). I could add further references, but I have given enough to illustrate 'revelation'; such revelation is usually normative, it serves to orient our behavior.

2) Historical information is somewhat different; inspiration guarantees the veracity of what is described—things happened in just that way. It should be obvious that descriptions of sin, lying, crime, or perversity are not normative, although they serve as negative examples to warn us. Genesis 3:4 registers a lie; "Then the serpent said to the woman: You will not surely die". Obviously inspiration is not agreeing with the lie, it merely guarantees that the serpent said precisely that. Historical information, or record, may include normative

orientation. It is always necessary to pay close attention to the context, that may appropriately be called the 'king of interpretation'.

3) Poetic material is more difficult. It is a genre of communication that has its own rules, and the context is most important. The Song of Solomon is made up of thirteen 'canticles'; they are not presented as being normative. Since the relationship between man and woman is fundamental to human existence, it is natural that the subject finds a place in the written Revelation. That the Creator chose the poetic genre, was His prerogative, and it goes with the subject matter; emotion often finds expression in poetic form.

In contrast, the Proverbs are generally normative. In Ecclesiastes 12:9-11, Solomon declares the inspiration of the proverbs: they were "given by one Shepherd".

On the other hand, Solomon himself does not make the same claim for Ecclesiastes, another book that he wrote. The second verse, "Vanity of vanities, says the preacher, Vanity of vanities, all is vanity", obviously does not agree with the rest of the Bible. To serve God is not vanity, salvation in Christ is not vanity, and so on. Indeed, Solomon declares openly how the book came to be: "I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom" (1:13), "I communed with my heart" (1:16), "I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly" (1:17), "I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh" (2:3). The book is clearly an attempt to understand life and the world using a purely humanistic analysis, leaving the Sovereign Creator out of the picture. That analysis was undertaken by a man who was very intelligent. I take it that the book was included in the Canon precisely to show to what conclusion a purely humanistic analysis of life must arrive—to emptiness and despair. However, the author concluded the book by stating the true truth, so no one would be deceived: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil."

### **Illumination**

I submit that it is important that we distinguish between inspiration and illumination, with reference to Scripture. Inspiration refers to the writing of biblical material; illumination refers to the interpretation of biblical material. Both of them, inspiration and illumination, are the work of the Holy Spirit. Illumination is usually reserved for those who have been regenerated. "Now a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; indeed, he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). That is what the Text says. A 'soulish' person cannot understand spiritual things, which sounds rather like a

congenital defect. The concrete facts contained in an historical record can be understood by anyone. That David killed Goliath is a fact that anyone can understand. But to understand the Holy Spirit's purpose behind an inspired statement depends on illumination, and to receive it one must be spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:15).

### **The Canon**

I now come to the question of the canonicity of the Sacred Text: why does our Bible have the exact assortment of books that it has—no more, no less, and no others? Inspiration refers to divine activity in the act of writing the material, guaranteeing the result. In contrast, the canonizing of the Text refers to human activity, recognizing the divine quality of that material. The process of that recognition took place within the community of the Faith—the Hebrew community, for the OT, and the Christian community, for the NT. I have already referred to the attitude that the Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated with regard to the OT, which was all of the Bible that existed at that point. He evidently recognized the Canon of 39 books that had been defined by His time. He cited a number of books—taken from the Law, history, prophecy and poetry—and He did so as being God's Word, something true, holy and authoritative. The human authors of the NT demonstrated the same respect for the OT, which was their Bible as well.

I have said that the OT contains 39 books, and so it was until the sixteenth century of the Christian era. The Council of Trent was a reaction of the Roman Catholic Church against the Protestant Reformation. It started in 1545 and concluded its work in 1563. It added fourteen 'books' to the OT, although the fourteen had never been recognized by the Hebrew community. In Protestant circles, those books are generally referred to as the 'Apocrypha', while in Roman Catholic circles they are referred to as being 'Deutero-canonical'. The Canon of the NT was formally closed by the Council of Carthage in 397 AD, the Canon of the OT having been closed centuries earlier. Surely 1563 was altogether too late to be adding books to the Sacred Text.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Maccabees (c. 175-135 BC) makes no claim to be Scripture and indeed claims to be written after the age of the prophets (see 9:27; 4:46; 14:41). 1 Macc. 9:27 acknowledges that the succession of Old Testament prophets had already ceased. 1 Macc. 4:46 says that Israel was waiting till the Messiah when a prophet might arise to tell them what to do with the heap of stones. Apparently no prophet was in existence at the time of the writing. The absence of prophets can be seen in 1 Macc. 14:41; 2 Esdras 14:45; etc. Thus, in the Prologue to Sirach, the grandson makes clear that ben Sirach was simply a wise man and he was simply translating. See the apology of the author in 2 Macc. 15:38—"And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired: but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto." A prophet would speak with authority, not apologize for how poorly he wrote. [I owe this information to Dr. Phillip Kayser.]

Now then, canonization has everything to do with the preservation of the Text. Surely, because the community of the Faith would only concern itself to transmit and protect the ‘canonical’ books, those that were held to be inspired.<sup>1</sup> Going on, when I take up the question of preservation, below, I will argue that it is precisely the preservation of the Text that proves its canonicity. The human part in the transmission of the Text is obvious, but was there also divine activity, protecting the Text (including its exact wording)? And how might one ‘measure’ such divine activity? I see two relevant ‘tools’ to do the measuring: logic and history. I begin with the argument from logic.

Inspiration is a result or quality of Revelation—with that statement we are affirming that the Sovereign Creator decided to transmit some objective information to the human race. If the Creator was only concerned to transmit information to a given individual, or group, at a given point in time, for a specific purpose, it could be done orally. But if His purpose was to reach a sequence of generations (up to a thousand of them, 1 Chronicles 16:15), then the appropriate form would be in writing. Now then, if the Creator intended that His Revelation should arrive intact, or at least entire and in reliable condition, to the XXI century, He would absolutely have to watch over the process of transmission down through the centuries. He would have to forbid the irrecoverable loss of any genuine material, as well as forbid any unrecognizable insertion of spurious material. The original wording should be available, in whatever generation, to persons who were sufficiently interested in having that wording that they would pay the necessary price (time, travel, money) to obtain it. (In general, people would be satisfied with the wording they had, so long as they regarded it to be reliable.) So then, a person who believes in the divine inspiration of the NT, for example, should also believe in the divine preservation of the NT—it is a question of logic. But what about the historical evidences; do they agree with our logic, or do they not? To that question I now turn.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, there are those who argue that the Autograph of Matthew was written in Hebrew. But there is a small difficulty with that thesis: there is not even one known copy of that Gospel in Hebrew. Since it was only the Greek Matthew that the Church protected and transmitted, then the autograph was written in Greek, obviously. However, it seems to me to be equally obvious that Matthew, and anyone else who could write, filled ‘notebooks’ with his annotations of what Jesus said and did. Yes, because Luke 1:1 states that “many have undertaken to set in order a narrative concerning those things”. All notes taken on the spot would have to be in Hebrew, because that was the language Jesus used. As Matthew wrote his Gospel in Greek, he certainly consulted his notes written in Hebrew. The lack of even one Greek copy of such things as the gospel of Thomas, or Judas, or whatever, indicates that they were not inspired and were not recognized by the Church.