

# Biblical Inspiration and Inerrancy According to Joseph Ratzinger

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BIBLICAL INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY ACCORDING TO JOSEPH RATZINGER

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree  
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When upon a point of ritual or of dedication or special worship a man talks to you of the Spirit and Intention, and complains of the dryness of the Word, look at him askance. He is not far removed from Heresy.

—Hilaire Belloc

## Introduction

My attention was drawn to topic of biblical inspiration and inerrancy in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger for two reasons. First, it is timely. In his recent *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Joseph Ratzinger—now as Pope Benedict XVI<sup>1</sup>—calls upon theologians to renew their reflection on a topic long dear to him:

Certainly theological reflection has always considered inspiration and truth as two key concepts for an ecclesial hermeneutic of the sacred Scriptures. Nonetheless, one must acknowledge the need today for a fuller and more adequate study of these realities, in order better to respond to the need to interpret the sacred texts in accordance with their nature. Here I would express my fervent hope that research in this field will progress and bear fruit both for biblical science and for the spiritual life of the faithful.<sup>2</sup>

Benedict’s mention of “need” and “fervent hope” in his treatment of biblical inspiration and inerrancy suggests that he does not consider these topics to have received scholarly attention commensurate with their importance. Perhaps this explains why Ratzinger bestows only measured praise on the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*,<sup>3</sup> which dutifully affirms the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, but does not develop the meaning of these hallowed phrases.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper limits itself to the theology of Joseph Ratzinger. This means basically that it excludes those works that seem to be the product of a committee and those that were promulgated in official capacity as Pope. Works that are published in private capacity—even after his election as Pope—are included.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2010), s. 19.

<sup>3</sup> See Ratzinger’s “Preface” to *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*; Dean P. Bechard, ed. *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, trans. Dean P. Bechard (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 245. There Ratzinger comments, “The Pontifical Biblical Commission, in its new form after the Second Vatican Council, is not an organ of the Teaching Office, but rather a commission of scholars who . . . take positions on important problems of scriptural interpretation and know that for this task they enjoy the confidence of the teaching office.” Speaking of the authority of the same document, Ratzinger remarks that “the Holy Father with a carefully prepared address confirms the essential points [of *The Interpretation of Scripture in the Life of the Church*], thus assuming the essence of this text (as opposed to its details) into magisterial teaching.” See Ratzinger, *Modernità atea*,” pp. 67-68; cited in Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture: A Study of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's the Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001), 25.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, 34, where Williamson comments, “Although the *IBC* prescinds from presenting a theological treatise on Scripture, in the course of its exposition it repeatedly affirms traditional beliefs about Scripture, including its

In recent years, Catholic theologians have begun to show themselves more willing to re-engage these traditional terms. Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy, OCSO, has published several articles<sup>5</sup> and a monograph<sup>6</sup> on the matter. Several contributors to the most recent issue of the journal *Letter and Spirit* vigorously defend a version of inspiration and inerrancy very similar to that proposed by the biblical encyclicals of the early twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> Matthew Levering, who in this aforementioned issue laments contemporary neglect of the “once lively debate,”<sup>8</sup> has himself contributed a scholarly reflection on the metaphysics of biblical interpretation.<sup>9</sup> Ratzinger’s own contributions to the nature of the biblical text and its interpretation, moreover, have received not a little scholarly attention of late.<sup>10</sup>

Second, it is pastoral. The cultural conditioning of revelation has become a burning issue among Catholics sufficiently educated to enough to grapple with “historical consciousness.” To what extent can we expect Scripture—a text that seems so thoroughly human, so thoroughly stamped by the human circumstances of its production—to convey to us a truth valid for all

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inspiration (I.B.2.g; I.C.1.f; I.F.d; II.B.1.c), inerrancy (I.F.c), and the fact that Catholics recognize God as its ‘principal author’ (II.B.3.c).”

<sup>5</sup> Denis M. Farkasfalvy, "Inspiration and Interpretation," in *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Matthew Levering and Matthew L. Lamb (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 77-100.; Denis M. Farkasfalvy, "How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration?" *Nova Et Vetera* 4, no. 2 (2006), 231-253.; Denis M. Farkasfalvy, "The Biblical Foundation for a Theology of Inspiration," *Nova Et Vetera* 4, no. 4 (2006), 719-745.

<sup>6</sup> See Denis M. Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration & Interpretation : A Theological Introduction to Sacred Scripture* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> See esp. Robert L. Fastiggi, "Communal Or Social Inspiration: A Catholic Critique," *Letter and Spirit* 6 (2010), 247-263.; Brian W. Harrison, "Restricted Inerrancy and the 'Hermeneutic of Discontinuity'," *Letter and Spirit* 6 (2010), 225-246.

<sup>8</sup> For a brief treatment of this debate in Catholic circles, see Matthew Levering, "The Inspiration of Scripture: A Status Quaestionis," *Letter and Spirit* 6 (2010), 281-286.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis : A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame, Ind. : University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> For good book-length treatments of treatment of Ratzinger’s hermeneutics of faith, see especially Scott Hahn, *Covenant and Communion : The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids, Mich. : Brazos Press, 2009).; Dorothee Kaes, *Theologie Im Anspruch Von Geschichte Und Wahrheit : Zur Hermeneutik Joseph Ratzingers* (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1997), 261. For chapter-length treatments, see also Tracey Rowland, *Benedict XVI : A Guide for the Perplexed* (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 48-70.; Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI : An Introduction to His Theological Vision* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 65-84.; Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith : The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 48-66.

ages? If not every element of revelation is straightforwardly applicable to present circumstances; if, in short, scripture requires ongoing interpretation, how does one undertake this task without unduly subordinating Scripture to the limitations of our present perspective?

Related to the matter of Scripture's historical transcendence is the question of doctrinal continuity across the Church's cultural epochs. The period between Vatican Council I and Vatican Council II was marked by the Church's strong and repeated opposition to the admission of formal error in Scripture, and occasionally by official condemnations of certain exegetical positions. Ratzinger himself admits that, during these years, magisterial authority undermined its credibility by yielding—at least on occasion—to “narrow-minded and petty surveillance.”<sup>11</sup> He also admits quite candidly that

there are magisterial decisions which cannot be the final word on a given matter as such but, despite the permanent value of their principles, are chiefly also a signal for pastoral prudence, a sort of provision policy. Their kernel remains valid, but the particulars determined by circumstances can stand in need of correction. In this connection, one will probably call to mind both the pontifical statements of the last century regarding freedom of religion and the anti-Modernist decisions of this century, especially the decisions of the then Biblical Commission.<sup>12</sup>

What are the permanent “principles” and valid “kernel” of the Church's recent teaching on Scriptural interpretation?

If Ratzinger still holds the kernel of the Biblical Commission's decisions to be valid, then it seems safe to say that he would feel obliged by the “core” teachings of the biblical encyclicals as well.<sup>13</sup> But where does the “kernel” end and where do the “particulars determined by

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates* (San Francisco; San Francisco, Calif.: San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1995), 66.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 106.

<sup>13</sup> Even in the heyday of exegetical surveillance by the PBC, it was uncertain whether its *responsa*—many of which sought to settle questions of composition, authorship, dating and the like—were matters of “truth” (*veritas*) or “security” (*veritas*). On the strength of statements such as the one cited above, Bechard argues that Ratzinger reads the *responsa* as having always been about “security” (Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 328 fn38). For an illuminating discussion of the *responsa* of the PBC in general, see *ibid.*, esp.

circumstances” begin? Ratzinger answers this question only indirectly, that is, by developing his own theory of inspiration and inerrancy. Given Ratzinger’s ecclesial stature and unimpeachable reputation for doctrinal orthodoxy, such a study necessarily has implications for the correct interpretation of doctrine as well—especially for the doctrine formulated during the period between the Vatican Councils.

Though this question of doctrinal interpretation is not the main concern of this largely descriptive thesis, it does partially explain the structure of the whole. The first chapter of the thesis presents background information essential to understanding how Ratzinger stands vis-à-vis the major theological debates of the twentieth century on the subject of inspiration and inerrancy. We have chosen to explore three of the more important Catholic expositors of inspiration and inerrancy writing before the close of the Council: P. Benoit, OP, K. Rahner, SJ, and N. Lohfink, SJ. This chapter will also reference relevant documents of the Church’s magisterium, especially the biblical encyclicals promulgated between the First and Second Vatican Councils.

In the second chapter we will examine Ratzinger’s “traditionary” theology of inspiration, on the basis of which we conclude that Ratzinger’s thought resembles Rahner’s more than Benoit’s. However, will also draw attention to the subtle differences in theological sensibility that a close reading of both Ratzinger and Rahner uncover.

In the third chapter, will examine Ratzinger’s “traditionary” model of inerrancy. Here again, we note Ratzinger’s greater affinity for Lohfink’s model of inerrancy than for Benoit’s. Nonetheless, we also show how Ratzinger incorporates elements of both models by reimagining and “complexifying” the intending subject of Scripture. By casting the Church in the role of Scripture’s third intending subject (in addition God and the human authors), Ratzinger provides a

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318-322. No such doubt seems to have cast on the teachings of the biblical encyclicals, which therefore still deserve deference from contemporary theologians.



richer metaphysical rationale both for reading Scripture as a canonical whole and for using ecclesial faith to circumscribe the truth that Scripture properly intends to affirm.

We will conclude with by revisiting Ratzinger's theology of inspiration and inerrancy from the perspective of continuity of doctrine.

## Chapter 1

### Background to Ratzinger's Theology of Inspiration and Inerrancy

In order better to situate Ratzinger's contribution to the theology of inspiration and inerrancy, some background will prove useful. Toward that end, this essay will attempt to present succinctly two theories of inspiration, along with their corresponding theories of inerrancy, influential before the Second Vatican Council. The first, most ably defended by the Dominican P. Benoit and largely assumed into the preconciliar biblical encyclicals, can be broadly characterized as the Thomist-prophetic-instrumental model. The second, proposed by the Jesuit Karl Rahner and further elaborated by the Jesuit exegete Norbert Lohfink, can be broadly characterized as Molinist-ecclesial-predefinitive. Since each typology will receive fuller treatment below, it suffices for now to explain that the first category designates a theological "muse," the second a primary function for the sacred writer, and the third a model of divine-human interaction.

The argument will proceed in four stages. First, we will introduce the Thomist model of inspiration as Benoit presents it. However, since the Thomist model and the magisterial teaching seemed to develop in tandem, Benoit's personal theology and the Magisterium's official theology will often be presented alongside each other. With respect to magisterial theology, we will draw chiefly from the biblical encyclicals promulgated between the two Vatican Councils: *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) of Leo XIII, *Pascendi Gregis Domini* (1907) of Pius X, *Spiritus Paraclitus* (1920) of Benedict XV, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) of Pius XII. Second, we will study the understanding biblical inerrancy flowing from the Thomist model of inspiration. Here, again, we will present Benoit's personal theology and magisterial instruction together so as to suggest the close relationship between them. Third, we will present Rahner's Molinist model of

inspiration, which—since it finds relatively little magisterial echo—will be treated on its own terms. Finally, we will explore the Lohfink’s model of Old Testament inerrancy, which seems to presuppose Rahner’s theory of inspiration as its *point de départ*. Both of these models furnished important background for Joseph Ratzinger, who seems to have pursued the insights of Rahner and Lohfink in a more Bonaventurian and personalist vein.

We will, however, give more attention to the Thomist model. One motive for doing so is the fact that the aforementioned theory serves as a stronger counterpoint to Ratzinger’s own. Additionally, the Thomist model more deeply informed magisterial reflection on Scripture from Vatican I to Vatican II, inclusive. Though Rahner’s “ecclesial-predefinitive” theory of inspiration, as well as Lohfink’s related theory of inerrancy, emerged in advance of the Council’s closing, they were not sufficiently well-developed to produce positive new formulations in *Dei Verbum* (1965). Though one could say that the Dogmatic Constitution distances itself from specifically Thomist formulations, a somewhat pixillated version of the “prophetic-instrumental” still model undergirds the theology of the most authoritative teaching on Scripture.

#### [I] *Thomist-Prophetic-Instrumental Inspiration*

We will present Benoit’s neo-Thomist version of the process of inspiration, along with its magisterial echoes, in three steps: 1) an explanation of the typology “Thomist-prophetic-instrumental,” 2) an appreciation of its agreeable conclusion, and 3) an acknowledgment of its questionable assumptions.

##### [I.1] *Typology*

*Thomist:* The rise of the “Thomist-prophetic-instrumental” owed much to both historical circumstances and the perennial greatness of the Angelic Doctor. Providing an adequate conceptual frame for the phenomenon of Scriptural inspiration has long bedeviled theologians.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century actually witnessed the rise of various theories of inspiration, the most influential of which were worked out according to the tradition of Jesuit scholasticism.<sup>14</sup> This notwithstanding, under the impulse of Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which required all seminaries to teach theology *ad mentem sancti Thomae*, the Angelic Doctor began to receive greater scholarly attention. Unfortunately, Thomas never treated biblical inspiration in so many words. Hence, scholars interested in this topic were left to ransack the Angelic Doctor's considerable *oeuvre* for conceptual frames that bore a family resemblance. The Dominicans P. Synave and P. Benoit finally hit upon such serviceable frames in Thomas' treatments of instrumental causality and prophecy.<sup>15</sup> From the 1940s to the 1950s, the period of Ratzinger's theological formation, their theory enjoyed the status of a classic.<sup>16</sup>

*Prophetic:* The general Thomist approach was to treat scriptural authors as writing prophets, *mutatis mutandis*. On the reading of Synave and Benoit, Thomas understood prophecy to be "knowledge, supernaturally given to man, of truths exceeding the present reach of his mind, which God teaches for the benefit of the community."<sup>17</sup> Inspiration resembled prophecy inasmuch as it was presupposed an intellectual center, a supernatural influence, and a communal purpose. However, inspiration differed from prophecy inasmuch as it necessarily included an impulse to write but did not *necessarily* include "truths exceeding the present reach" of the human mind. Thomas distinguishes two aspects of the prophetic gift, with the principal element

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this shift away from the Jesuit theories of inspiration, the most eminent exponent of which was the Jesuit Cardinal Franzelin, see "Verbal Inspiration" in James Tunstead Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique* (London: London, Cambridge UP, 1969), 121-162.; Robert Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 42-46.

<sup>15</sup> See especially *Summa Theologiae* IIae-IIa, qq. 171-178.

<sup>16</sup> Writing in 1969, Burtchaell notes that "[Benoit's] theory has enjoyed a period of unchallenged popularity similar to that according to Franzelin's from 1870 until 1890." He goes on to note that, despite a few critical remarks here and there, "By and large, the Benoit position rises as the classic theory of the years immediate after *Divino Afflante Spiritu*" [Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique*, 244-45].

<sup>17</sup> Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, trans. Avery Dulles and Thomas L. Sheridan (New York: Desclee Co., 1961), 61.

being the supernatural light (*lumen*) guiding the formation of judgment, and the secondary element being the mental representation (*species*) upon which the enlightened intellect pronounces judgment.<sup>18</sup> Thomas thought it possible for God to grant the primary element without the secondary, that is, to take “human matters already represented in his mind, and to illuminate these naturally acquired representations without altering their intrinsically natural character.”<sup>19</sup> This influx of supernatural *lumen* without supernatural *species* Thomas called *inspiratio*.<sup>20</sup> Hence, when Thomas describes the hagiographers (a term for scriptural authors borrowed from St. Jerome) *ex inspiratione Spiritus Sancti scribentes*, he is affirming (minimally) that they enjoy supernatural *lumen*, not that they enjoy supernatural *species* (e.g., prophetic visions or locutions).<sup>21</sup> An important implication of this distinction is that hagiographers, unlike prophets, may work effectively without thematic awareness of being inspired.

*Instrumental*: Since Thomas occasionally speaks of prophets as divine instruments,<sup>22</sup> Benoit and Synave apply the notion of instrumental causality to the phenomenon of inspiration. By their own admission, however, they can do so only in a “broad and improper sense.”<sup>23</sup> By strict definition, an instrument operates according to its own nature but lacks its own source of movement. The chisel operates according to the hardness of its steel, but must nevertheless wait for the sculptor—the principal cause—to employ it. Hence, both the sculptor (principally) and the chisel (instrumentally) can be called causes of a given statue. But an inspired writer can be reckoned an instrument only “broadly and improperly” speaking since, as a conscious agent, he alone has an intrinsic source of movement. Nevertheless, the hagiographer does resemble an

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>20</sup> This was often contrasted with *revelatio* in the theology manuals up until the time of Vatican II. *Revelatio* involved a supernatural *species* as well as a supernatural *lumen*. See *ibid.*, 68-70.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 71. For St. Thomas’ presentation, see ST II-II, 174, 2, obj. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Synave and Benoit underscore that Thomas actually mentions instrumental causality in connection with prophecy only twice (ST IIae-IIa q. 172, a. 4, ad 1; q. 173, a. 4).

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, 80.

instrument in two important ways: 1) he cannot act as an inspired writer whenever he wills, but only when the principal cause so uses him; 2) the effect of his acts are proportionate not to his own natural power but to that of the principal agent—the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> This means that Scripture will contain traces of its divine authorship.

Though not adopted in every detail, the prophetic-instrumental model received broad support from the papal encyclicals during the period between the councils. *Providentissimus* spoke of the human authors as “inspired instruments.”<sup>25</sup> *Spiritus Paraclitus* evoked instrumental categories when it called God “*principal cause* of all that Scripture means and says.”<sup>26</sup> Even the specifically Thomistic contours of prophetic-instrumental inspiration were commended in Pius XII’s encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.<sup>27</sup> *Dei Verbum* was much more restrained, but continued to affirm that God “employed” men, who wrote “with God himself acting in them and through them.”<sup>28</sup> In more and less explicit ways, then, the prophetic-instrumental dominated the doctrinal history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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<sup>24</sup> Disproportionate effect seems, in fact, to be one of the key features distinguishing God’s instrumental causality and his general providence over creation. As Synave and Benoit point out, Thomas is most comfortable describing humans as instruments in sacramental ministry and thaumaturgy, in actions that beyond human capacity *simpliciter*. See *ibid.*, 77. Scriptural inspiration is *less* “instrumental” than thaumaturgy, for instance, because the effect is, in one sense, proportionate to the instrument: i.e., it is within human power to write. On the other hand, it is *more* instrumental than the general providence that God exercises through created causes, since Scripture exhibits certain properties surpassing human ability (i.e., *sensus plenior*, inerrancy). See J. T. Forestell, “Limitation of Inerrancy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (01/01, 1958), 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Providentissimus Deus* §41; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 55.

<sup>26</sup> §3; *ibid.*, 84.

<sup>27</sup> “... Catholic theologians, following the teaching of the holy Fathers and especially of the Angelic and Common Doctor, have examined and explained the nature and effects of biblical inspiration more exactly and more fully than was wanted to be done in previous ages. For having begun by expounding minutely the principle that the inspired writer, in composing the sacred book, is the living and reasonable instrument (ὄργανον) of the Holy Spirit, they rightly observe that, impelled by the divine motion, he so uses his faculties and powers that from the book composed by him all may easily infer ‘the special character of each one and, as it were, his personal traits.’” See *Divino Afflante Spiritu* §19; *ibid.*, 128.

<sup>28</sup> “In composing the sacred Books, God chose and employed (*adhibuit*) certain men (*homines*), who, while engaged in this task, made full use of their faculties and powers, so that, with God himself acting in them and through them, they as true authors committed to writing everything and only those things that he wanted written” [§11; *ibid.*, 24]. Commentators, however, note that the absence of language such as *auctor principalis* may represent a slight retreat from specifically Thomistic prophetic-instrumental model. See Alois Grillmeier, “The Divine Inspiration and the

## [I.2] *Agreeable Conclusions*

The Thomist model entails several conclusions agreeable to Catholic doctrine and practice, among which three stand out: 1) the distinctiveness of Scripture, 2) the unity and diversity of divine and human wills, and 3) the propriety of scientific exegesis.

*Distinctiveness:* First, by locating the uniqueness of Scripture in the transient and individual charism of inspiration, neo-Thomists were able to distinguish cleanly between hagiographers and the community at large—whether Israel or the Church. This gave a Scripture a distinctive and stable status and vis-à-vis the Church and her theology. If God really becomes Scripture’s principal author, then Scripture becomes God’s Word—not simply words *about* God.<sup>29</sup> This suggests why the teaching office of the Church is inferior in authority to Scripture.<sup>30</sup> In these regards, the prophetic-instrumental theory satisfies important doctrinal requirements laid down at Vatican I. On the Thomist model of inspiration, the Church would not be giving subsequent approval to a work of “simple human industry,” as if she were the sufficient author of Scripture; nor would she appear to be granting a *nihil obstat* to a book containing only “revelation without error.”<sup>31</sup> Otherwise, Scripture would differ in no way from theology or dogma.

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Interpretation of Sacred Scripture," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Glen-Doepf William, Vol. III (New York: New York Herder and Herder, 1967), 203.; Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 84.

<sup>29</sup> Dei Verbum seems to imply as much when it contrasts theology with the inspired Word: “Sacred theology rests upon the Word of God, together with sacred Tradition, as its permanent foundation ... The Sacred Scriptures contain the Word of God and, because they are inspired, they truly are the Word of God.” See *Dei Verbum* §24; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> “... This teaching office is not above the Word of God but serves it by teaching only what has been handed on.” See *Dei Verbum* §10; *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Scripture is, nonetheless, still especially entrusted to the Church. Vatican I distinguishes between Scripture and all statements producible by herself in the follow way: “These [books] the Church holds to be sacred and canonical, not because, having been composed by simple human industry, they were later approved by her own authority; nor merely because they contain revelation without error; but because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their author and were delivered as such to the Church” (*Dei Filius*, §2; *ibid.*, 17). On these grounds, Avery Cardinal Dulles speaks of the fixing of the Canon as an act of “reception” rather than

*Unity-in-Diversity*: Second, the prophetic-instrumental model associates the divine and human intentions without collapsing them. Because the divine influence is seen to operate “from within,” God becomes the *auctor principalis* of whatever the human instrument freely intends in composing his works. This means minimally that God’s sense must include the hagiographer’s sense, and that the literal sense—understood as the “mind of the [human] author”<sup>32</sup>—becomes the foundation for all exegesis.<sup>33</sup> Benoit’s theory consequently proved incompatible with most restrictions on inerrancy; for inspiration is thereby understood as an

impulse which totally subjects the mind of a man to the divine influence ... and which extends to the ultimate realization of the work “ad verba.” With such a close and complete compenetration of divine and human causality it is impossible that the writer express anything whatever contrary to the divine pleasure.<sup>34</sup>

These implications were not lost on the Magisterium. Leo XIII logically points out that, if one attempted to “save” God’s veracity by restricting responsibility for problematic passages to defective human instruments, one could no longer say that God “was the Author of the entire Scripture.”<sup>35</sup> Any error imputable to the human instrument is ultimately imputable to God, since, as *Dei Verbum* affirms, “everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers should be regarded as inspired by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>36</sup>

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authorship. See Avery Dulles, *Magisterium : Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2007), 102-104.

<sup>32</sup> *Divino Afflante Spiritu* §15; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Pius XII reminds Catholic exegetes that “their foremost and greatest endeavor should be to discern and define clearly that sense of the biblical words that is called ‘literal’” [*Divino Afflante Spiritu* §15; *ibid.*, 125], and enjoins them scrupulously to “refrain from proposing as the genuine meaning of Sacred Scripture other figurative senses” [*Divino Afflante Spiritu* §16; *ibid.*, 126]. While not linking authorial intention directly with the “literal” sense, *Dei Verbum* does re-affirm that “the interpreter of Sacred Scripture ... should carefully search out what the sacred writers truly intended to express and what God thought well to manifest by their words” [§12; *ibid.*, 24].

<sup>34</sup> Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 141.

<sup>35</sup> *Providentissimus Deus*, §41; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 56.

<sup>36</sup> §11; *ibid.*, 24. Here *Dei Verbum* reaffirms the principle used by the Pontifical Biblical Commission throughout the early twentieth Century, namely “the Catholic doctrine regarding the inspiration and inerrancy of Sacred Scripture, whereby everything the sacred writer asserts, expresses, and suggests must be held to be asserted,



At the same time, the prophetic-instrumental model could claim to explain Scripture’s “fuller sense.” Though God’s intention necessarily *includes* the author’s intention, the converse would not hold. The effects brought about by an instrumental cause are proportioned to the inner possibilities of the principal cause, not to those of the instrumental cause. Hence, Scripture may contain divine meaning exceeding—though not directly contradicting—what the human author consciously intended.<sup>37</sup> With such a strong regulatory role for intention of the human author, however, the space by which the *sensus plenior* could exceed the *sensus literalis* was by not self-evident.

*Exegesis:* Third, the Thomist model gives impetus to the scientific investigation of Scripture. Because the instrumental model supposes that Holy Spirit inspires without coercion, guiding the hagiographer freely and in harmony with his own genius, exegetes must expect Scripture to speak in an eminently human manner. Pius XII cites the Angelic Doctor in this connection: “In Scripture divine things are presented to us in the manner which is in common use among men.”<sup>38</sup> Extrapolating from this principle, Pius concludes that “no one with a correct idea of biblical inspiration will be surprised to find, even in the sacred writers ... so-called ‘approximations’ and certain hyperbolic, even at times paradoxical, modes of expression that, among ancient peoples and especially those of the East, human language used to express its

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expressed and suggested by the Holy Spirit ...” [*Responsa ad proposita dubia de parousia sue de secundo adventu D.N. Iesu Christi in epistolis S. Pauli Apostoli*, June 18, 1915; *ibid.*, 207].

<sup>37</sup> “For the language of the Bible is employed to express, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, many things which are beyond the power and scope of the reason of man - that is to say, divine mysteries and all that is related to them. There is sometimes in such passages a fullness and a hidden depth of meaning which the letter hardly expresses and which the laws of interpretation hardly warrant. Moreover, the literal sense itself frequently admits other senses, adapted to illustrate dogma or to confirm morality” [*Providentissimus Deus*, §27; *ibid.*, 47]. Benedict XV holds St. Jerome up as a model of those who “pass from the literal to the more profound meaning in temperate fashion” [*Spiritus Paraclitus* §14; *ibid.*, 102]. Pius XII enjoins exegetes to search out both the “literal meaning of the words intended and expressed by the sacred writer” as well as the “spiritual sense, provided it is clearly intended by God” [*Divino Afflante Spiritu* §16; *ibid.*, 126].

<sup>38</sup> *Divino Afflante Spiritu* §20; *ibid.*, 129. Pius XII cites Thomas’ *Commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews* cap. 1, lectio 4 [Parma ed. 13:678].

thought...”<sup>39</sup> Champions of scientific exegesis, in other words, could easily recruit the Angelic Doctor to their cause.

### [I.2] *Questionable Assumptions*

Despite its strengths, the Thomistic model also rested on two increasingly implausible assumptions, which—while never explicitly affirmed or even trotted out for debate—tended to shape the Catholic theological imagination. First, the sacred books were often presumed monographs. This was suggested, in the first place, by the attribution of books to particular authors (e.g., Moses, David, Solomon). However, modeling the charism of inspiration on the solitary prophetic vocation only reinforced this presumption of unitary human authorship.

The second assumption, i.e., the predominantly propositional character of Scriptural truth, followed from the first. Since Thomas described inspiration as a charism (*lumen*) for judging affairs (*species*) according to divine truth, the predominant model of Scriptural truth became *adaequatio rei et intellectus*.<sup>40</sup> The more inspired a book, the more replete it would be with enlightened propositional judgments. According to *Providentissimus Deus*, Scripture represented an “arsenal of heavenly arms” for those whose responsibility it is to “handle Catholic doctrine before the learned and the unlearned.”<sup>41</sup> And even though exegetes were exhorted to interpret each statement according to broader context and literary genres, these considerations seemed to enter the picture only inasmuch as they illumined the hagiographer’s thought

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<sup>39</sup> *Divino Afflante Spiritu* §20; *ibid.*, 129.

<sup>40</sup> Synave and Benoit proceed from this definition when they undertake to define the scope of inerrancy: “Truth is the ‘adequatio rei et intellectus.’ It exists only in the judgment. And by ‘judgment’ we obviously do not mean every proposition made up of a subject, verb, and predicate, but the formal act by which the intellect (*intellectus*) affirms its conformity (*adequatio*) to the object of knowledge (*res*).” See Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 134.

<sup>41</sup> This is the tendency of some passages of *Providentissimus*: “Let all, therefore, especially the novices of the ecclesiastical army, understand how deeply the sacred Books should be esteemed, and with what eagerness and reverence they should approach this great arsenal of heavenly arms. For those whose duty it is to handle Catholic doctrine before the learned or the unlearned will nowhere find more ample matter or more abundant exhortation, whether on the subject of God, the supreme Good and the all-perfect Being, or of the works which display His Glory and His love.” See *Providentissimus* §1; Bechar, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 39.

process;<sup>42</sup> for the “primary sense” of each passage was given by “*the meaning which the human author intended.*”<sup>43</sup> And because the meaning of each part amounted to what the inspired author intended, this principle gave the parts of Scripture a certain semantic stability and independence vis-à-vis the whole of Scripture. Despite such advantages, the fortunes of the propositional model of biblical truth were tied up with first assumption, that of monographic biblical composition. The Bible was plausibly read as a repository of inspired judgments only to the degree that a single, judging *intellectus* was supposed to stand behind any given passage.

### [II] Thomist Inerrancy and its Qualifications

The prophetic-instrumental model of inspiration left but a single domain open wherein the exegete, without implicating God in falsehood, could limit the inerrancy of Scripture—the domain of the author’s judgment. One could not even exclude Scripture’s “secular” (e.g., scientific, historical) judgments from the sphere of immunity, as the following syllogism makes clear:

- 1) Inspiration, understood as God’s instrumental use of sacred writers, requires that everything asserted by the sacred writers be asserted by the Spirit.
- 2) The Spirit, as both Creator and Sanctifier, can assert nothing false in any sphere of human knowledge.
- 3) Therefore, inspired writers cannot have asserted formal error according to any human science.

Compelled by such logic, the Church condemned—in no fewer than four encyclicals—all attempts to restrict the inerrancy of Scripture to those parts of the Bible treating faith and morals.

*Providentissimus Deus* condemns those who hold that “divine inspiration regards the things of

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<sup>42</sup> Benoit does not leave the role of the whole of Scripture out the analysis. In a statement that suggests both his propositionalism and his supposition of monographic authorship, Benoit notes that sometimes scriptural authors “do not vouch for their own private opinions, or even convictions, because God does not want them to and has them write accordingly. How will we know this? By objective study of *the book*; not of this or that *proposition* taken in isolation and considered as an absolute, but of the whole ensemble in which the intent of the author is expressed, and upon which depends the role of the *individual proposition.*” See Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 141 Italics mine.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, 147. Italics original.

faith and morals and nothing beyond.”<sup>44</sup> Pius X upbraids the modernists for holding that “in the sacred Books there are many passages referring to science and history where manifest errors are to be found.”<sup>45</sup> *Spiritus Paraclitus* closes another loophole when it condemns the position that the “effects of inspiration—namely, absolute truth and immunity from error—are to be restricted to the primary or religious element.”<sup>46</sup> Pius XII sums up the tradition, repeating Leo’s censure of “some Catholic writers,” who “ventured to restrict the truth of Sacred Scripture solely to matters of faith and morals, and to regard other matters, whether in the domain of physical science or history, as “obiter dicta” and - as they contended - in no wise connected with faith.”<sup>47</sup>

*Dei Verbum* did not directly gainsay the previous formulations.<sup>48</sup> The Dogmatic Constitution taught that “we must acknowledge the Books of Scripture as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error the truth that God wished to be recorded in the sacred writings for the sake of salvation (*veritatem, quam Deus nostrae salutis causa Litteris Sacris consignari voluit*).”<sup>49</sup> Though *nostrae salutis causa* (“for the sake of salvation”) has often been taken to mark a reversal of the position of the biblical encyclicals, recent analyses of both the Latin text<sup>50</sup> and its drafting history<sup>51</sup> suggest that the phrase pertains only to the *purpose* of scriptural truth—

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<sup>44</sup> §40; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 55.

<sup>45</sup> *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* §118; *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>46</sup> §5; *ibid.*, 88.

<sup>47</sup> *Divino Afflante Spiritu* §1; *ibid.*, 116.

<sup>48</sup> It is commonly reported that the council fathers, in order to achieve near unanimity, agreed not to decide anything “new” vis-à-vis the biblical encyclicals. Grillmeier notes, for instance, that Paul VI expressed his *perplexità* over penultimate draft of *Dei Verbum* because it seemed to offer a more restrictive view of inerrancy, a “doctrine not yet general in the scriptural and theological instruction of the Church.” See Grillmeier, *The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture*, 213. Fr. Dennis Farkasfalvy, OCSO observes, “Despite more than a century of bickering over the Bible’s antiquated notions about the physical world and events of history as errors, the experts of the Council did not manage to reformulate the issue of inerrancy.” See Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 87.

<sup>49</sup> §11; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 24.

<sup>50</sup> For a linguistic analysis see, Harrison, *Restricted Inerrancy and the 'Hermeneutic of Discontinuity'*, 233-236.

<sup>51</sup> Several scholars point out that, at the eleventh hour, the council fathers replaced the formulation *veritates salutare*s with *veritatem ... nostrae salutis causa* so as to avoid the impression of having narrowed the scope of inerrancy to matters of faith and morals. See Grillmeier, *The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture*, 211; Farkasfalvy, *Inspiration and Interpretation*, 87; Avery Dulles, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” in *Kirche Sein*, ed. Wilhelm Geerlings and Max Seckler (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 36-37.

not to its material scope. Nowhere, then, did the Church explicitly disavow her previous teaching: namely, that inspiration extends to all parts of the Bible and that inerrancy extends to every topic formally treated by the sacred authors.

Despite the Church's sweeping claims regarding the veracity of Scripture, theologians devoted considerable energies to qualifying them in the one safe realm—the mind of the hagiographer. This meant developing a sophisticated taxonomy of mental postures, which neo-Thomist rational psychology readily supplied. According to Thomas, one could incur formal error only to the extent that one judged erroneously. Moreover, the scope and strength of any judgment could be qualified in various ways. Synave and Benoit, writing in the years just after *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, consider the sacred author's judgment to be qualified primarily by the 1) *formal object*, 2) the *degree of affirmation*, and 3) the author's *communicative intention*. All three qualifications merit closer examination.

#### [II.1] *Formal Object*

By *formal object*, Benoit means simply the “point of view from which [the author] is treating his subject.”<sup>52</sup> The true object of the mind's judgment is not the material object, which would include every aspect of the reality in question, but the formal object, which includes only those aspects of a reality to which the intellect attends. A professor of geometry and a professor of art may, for instance, both look at the moon and declare it “perfectly round.” The professor of geometry, speaking from a geometrical point of view, would be in formal error (since the moon is, in fact, slightly elliptical); whereas the professor of art, speaking only from an aesthetic point of view, might be in material error only. For the purposes of art, which requires geometrical accuracy only to the tolerances of the naked eye, the moon is “perfectly round.” Hence, before

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<sup>52</sup> Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 137.

deciding whether any passage is formally erroneous, one must take into account the author's interest in and perspective on the event he relates.

Without using the technical language of *obiectum formale*, official Church documents seem to grant this criterion cautious approval. We can sense the caution in Leo's condemnation of attempts to restrict inerrancy to the soundness of the *further* purposes that God may have had in inspiring scriptural statements.<sup>53</sup> This would have been tantamount to reducing inerrancy to sincerity. Leo does, on the other hand, legitimate recourse to the *objectum formale*—albeit not in so many words—when he concedes that neither the sacred author nor the Holy Spirit was seeking to “penetrate the secrets of nature” and that they, therefore, saw fit to describe the world “in more or less figurative language.”<sup>54</sup> Leo also foresaw that the same principle could be applied to “cognate sciences and especially to History.”<sup>55</sup> *Dei Verbum* gives conciliar sanction to this approach when it describes the historicity of the Gospels as proportioned to the distinct interests of the evangelists.<sup>56</sup>

## [II.2] *Degree of Affirmation*

Authorial assertion could also be qualified according to the *degree of affirmation*. The varying degrees of affirmation were invoked mainly to account for phenomena such as unfulfilled, “minatory” prophecies (which, as the theory goes, the author affirmed only probably or

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<sup>53</sup> *Providentissimus* proscribes the idea that, “in a question of the truth or falsehood of a passage, we should consider not so much what God has said as the reason and purpose which He had in mind in saying it—this system cannot be tolerated” [§40; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 55]. This, at any rate, is the interpretation of Synave and Benoit to Leo's statement. See Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 143.

<sup>54</sup> “... [W]e must remember, first, that the sacred writers, or to speak more accurately, the Holy Ghost ‘Who spoke by them, did not intend to teach men these things (that is to say, the essential nature of the things of the visible universe), things in no way profitable unto salvation.’ Hence they did not seek to penetrate the secrets of nature, but rather described and dealt with things in more or less figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time, and which in many instances are in daily use at this day, even by the most eminent men of science” [§39; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 54].

<sup>55</sup> §40; *ibid.*, 54.

<sup>56</sup> “In composing the four Gospels, the sacred writers selected certain of the many traditions that had been handed on either orally or already in written form; others they summarized or explicated *with an eye* to the situation of the churches” [§19; *ibid.*, 28]. Emphasis mine.

conditionally) and “implicit citations” (which, again, the author mentioned but did not personally vouch for).<sup>57</sup> Because of the possibility of abuse, this qualification was little used and coolly received by the Magisterium. *Pascendi* listed “*tacit citations*” among the strategies employed by “certain other moderns who somewhat restrict inspiration.”<sup>58</sup> *Spiritus Paraclitus* censured those who “take too ready a refuge in such notions as ‘implicit quotations’ ...”<sup>59</sup> The Pontifical Biblical Commission approved such means only when internal citation could be “proved by solid arguments.”<sup>60</sup> Qualification of degree of affirmation was valid in principle, but typically employed as a last resort.

### [II.3] *Communicative Intention*

According to Benoit, an author’s *communicative intention* could also limit inerrancy. In contrast to both *formal object* and *degree of affirmation*, *communicative intention* qualifies authorial judgment in the volitional or “moral order” (as opposed to the “intellectual order”).<sup>61</sup> Since inspiration is a charism of knowledge with social finality, inerrancy extends only to that for which the sacred author assumes a social responsibility; and the author, in turn, “assumes a social responsibility only for what he submits to another for assent.”<sup>62</sup> The application of communicative intention in which the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Magisterium put most stock was attention to literary genre, which signaled the kind of assent for which an author was calling. *Divino Afflante*, for instance, expressed hope that the study of literary genre would resolve all remaining

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<sup>57</sup> See Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 134-135.

<sup>58</sup> §64; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 72.

<sup>59</sup> §7; *ibid.*, 90.

<sup>60</sup> *Reponsum circa citationes implicitas in Sacra Scriptura contentas*, Feb. 13, 1905; *ibid.*, 187.

<sup>61</sup> Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 135.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, 136.

doubts about the inerrancy of Scripture.<sup>63</sup> At the conciliar level, *Dei Verbum* enjoined exegetes to discover the author's expressive intention as embedded in "literary forms."<sup>64</sup> It therefore encouraged Catholic exegetes to undertake philological and cultural studies in defense of the Catholic faith.

In sum, the prophetic-instrumental model of inspiration and inerrancy—classically expounded by Benoit—preferred to speak of inspired and inerrant authors. Despite certain problematic assumptions, it had several strengths: it was respectful of magisterial definitions, spoke in a language familiar to the international body of theologians, and used the sophistication of Thomist rational psychology to avoid wooden literalism. Perhaps not surprisingly, it became something of a "classic" in the years of Joseph Ratzinger's theological formation.

### [III] *Molinist-Ecclesial-Predefinitive Inspiration*

Despite these advantages, the Thomist model did not entirely satisfy Karl Rahner, who responded to the new exegetical situation with his own Molinist-ecclesial-predefinitive model of inspiration. We characterize Rahner's approach as "Molinist" (as opposed to "Thomist") because his principal "theological muse" seems to be the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Jesuit Luis de Molina (1536-1600); as "ecclesial" (as opposed to "prophetic"), because the human author functions primarily as bearer of the Church's primitive consciousness; and as "predefinitive" (as opposed to "instrumental"), because the mode of divine-human interaction is explained through the Molinist

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<sup>63</sup> "Hence the Catholic commentator, in order to comply with the present needs of biblical studies in explaining the Sacred Scripture and in demonstrating and proving its immunity from all error, should also make a prudent use of this means, determining, that is, to what extent the manner of expression or the literary mode adopted by the sacred writer may lead to a correct and genuine interpretation . . . By this knowledge and exact appreciation of the modes of speaking and writing in use among the ancients can be solved many difficulties that are raised against the veracity and historical value of the Divine Scriptures . . ." [§21; Bechar, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 129-130].

<sup>64</sup> "... The interpreter must search for what meaning the sacred writer, in his own historical situation and in accordance with the condition of his time and culture, intended to express and did in fact express with the help of the literary forms that were in use during that time" [§12; *ibid.*, 25].



notion of formal predefinition. In the order of presentation, however, we will explain how Rahner's model is 1) Molinist, 2) predefinitive, and 3) ecclesial.

### [III.1] *Typology Explained*

*Molinist:* Several commentators have pointed out Rahner's indebtedness to the specifically Jesuit tradition of scholasticism. Ratzinger, for his part, cites the influence of the Francisco de Suárez, SJ (1548-1617).<sup>65</sup> Burtchaell divines, at least in the specific matter of inspiration, the wraith of Luis de Molina, SJ (1536-1600),<sup>66</sup> the father of the "distinctively Jesuit school of philosophy and theology."<sup>67</sup> Molina was best known for the position—broadly shared with Suárez<sup>68</sup>—that "efficacious grace infallibly led to human assent, not from its own internal nature, but from the free consent of the created will, which consent God foreknows ..."<sup>69</sup> This contradicted "what was accepted as the Thomistic theory of God's physical predetermination of acts to a definite outcome,"<sup>70</sup> and thereby touched off the *De auxiliis* controversy that dominated the 17<sup>th</sup> Century theology.

*In nuce*, followers of Molina (and Jesuit theologians generally) tended to view human and divine responsibility as mutually exclusive, whereas the Dominicans tended to view them as co-extensive. In keeping with this general sensibility, Molinists tended to carve out distinct

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<sup>65</sup> Speaking of his collaboration with Karl Rahner to circulate an alternative schema to *De Fontibus Revelationis*, Ratzinger recalls, "As we worked together, it became obvious to me that, despite our agreement in many desires and conclusions, Rahner and I lived on different theological planets ... Despite his early reading of the Fathers, his theology was totally conditioned by the tradition of Suarezian scholasticism and its new reception in light of German idealism and of Heidegger. His was a speculative philosophical theology in which Scripture and the Fathers in the end did not play an important role and in which the historical dimension was really of little significance" See Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs, 1927-1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 128.

<sup>66</sup> For his comments on Rahner's "Molinist proclivities," see Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique*, 224.

<sup>67</sup> John P. Doyle, "Hispanic Scholastic Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 261.

<sup>68</sup> "Broadly speaking Suárez's account of the divine concurrence runs parallel to the account published by Luis de Molina ..." See Alfred J. Freddoso, "Introduction," in *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20, 21, and 22*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), cxv.

<sup>69</sup> Doyle, *Hispanic Scholastic Philosophy*, 260.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, 261.

contributions for God and man in any joint project. The classic 19<sup>th</sup> century expression of Molinist-flavored biblical inspiration was the Jesuit Cardinal Franzelin's *res et sententia* theory, which attributed inspired ideas to the Holy Spirit but left the choice of words to the ingenuity of the human author.<sup>71</sup>

Rahner, for his part, challenges the Thomist theory out of this same typically Jesuit concern for legitimate freedom. There is, first of all, the legitimate freedom of the theologian vis-à-vis the teaching of Trent that Scripture has God as its *auctor*.<sup>72</sup> Rahner notes that this particular definition has often been interpreted too narrowly. The word *auctor* can be construed as narrowly as “literary author” (*Verfasser*) or as broadly as “originator” (*Urheber*).<sup>73</sup> One could, therefore, satisfy doctrinal requirements simply by affirming God as Scripture's *Urheber*—provided, of course, that one could show God to be *Urheber* in sufficiently a unique way.

Secondly, there is the legitimate freedom of the human author. As Rahner sees it, truly human authorship remains irreconcilable with instrumental subordination. For if God is *causa principalis*, then He cannot help but be sole “literary author”; for the principal cause is always pre-eminently responsible for any work achieved via instruments. Furthermore, comprehensive “literary authorship” cannot be attributed to both God and the hagiographers, since the “same work under the same angle” cannot be ascribed to two causes.<sup>74</sup> Despite all Benoit's protests that God employs His instruments “*d'une façon libre et personnelle*,”<sup>75</sup> strict adherence to instrumental model logically reduces human authorship to a “secretarial” function. A space for

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<sup>71</sup> Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique*, 46, 88.

<sup>72</sup> Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, trans. Charles Henkey (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), 12.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 12 fn 2.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 16. Benoit, incidentally, seems to agree. He insists that Scripture is “entirely the work both of God and of the human author, each in different respects.” He fails, however, to describe these aspects. See Pierre Benoit, “Inspiration and Revelation,” *Concilium* 10 (1965), 9.

<sup>75</sup> Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, 17 fn 7.

genuinely human authorship opens only when one can point to the distinct contribution of divine authorship to the total effect. For Rahner, inasmuch as instrumental causality effectively makes God the *Verfasser* of every aspect of Scripture—even “ad verba”—it precludes truly human authorship.

*Predefinitive:* As an alternative to instrumental causation, Rahner proposes that God’s influence over Scripture be conceived as variety of efficacious grace—i.e., “formal predefinition (*predeterminatio formalis*)”:<sup>76</sup>

What is required for the sufficiency of grace (as distinct from merely sufficient grace) may depend on some extrinsic circumstances, which, according to the Molinists, has been foreseen by God ... foreseen and willed by him as material to man’s decision. Why should we not assume this also to be the case in inspiration, both in regard to the divine influence on human reason and on the human will? For it is, in fact, this absolutely willed efficiency of the influence, that is, a predefining efficiency, that is required by God to be the author of the Scriptures.<sup>77</sup>

Applying the model to the question inspiration, God’s inspiration of Scripture becomes equivalent to his arrangement of “external” circumstances in such fashion that the human authors would both freely and infallibly follow his will. He might, for instance, “accomplish the motioning of the writer’s will by causing him to be asked through other people to produce [biblical] writings.”<sup>78</sup> Formal predefinition, moreover, would allow for true authorship since it would allow for distinct contributions. In an echo of Franzelin’s *res et sententia* theory, Rahner allows that the bible’s “literary form is not God’s own work.”<sup>79</sup>

Despite the ostensible simplicity of this solution, Rahner is aware that it raises new problems. Most notably, Rahner must further specify the Molinist theory of efficacious grace in order to account for the distinctiveness of Scripture. For if God brings about Scripture only as

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>77</sup> Rahner mentions the Molinist inspiration of this term in *ibid.*, 22 fn 12.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 77.

infallibly as he brings about any other good deed, how Scripture would differ from any other edifying—or even merely unobjectionable—writing? How would Scripture be the *Word of God* and not merely words *about* God? Rahner answer this objection by adding two specifications. First, he notes that God’s influence is not simply an act of formal predefinition; it is an act of “redemptive-historical” predefinition.<sup>80</sup> If Scripture is to be uniquely God’s word, then God’s influence over it must also demonstrate a certain spatio-temporal concentration:

A formal predefinition of the human act springing from the transcendental world, as it were, anonymously, would not constitute the result and work in a special degree really God’s own. The predefining act of God may not only support the world as a whole and its single happenings, as divine causality supports everything in its totality and each thing individually, but it must operate *from a particular point in space and time in preference to any other*.<sup>81</sup>

Though speaking at a high level of abstraction, it is clear that Rahner is here referring to what is more commonly known as salvation history. Whatever God achieves by salvation-historical predefinition belongs to Him in a qualitatively unique way; for “the ‘works’ of the history of redemption are God’s in some other, higher way than the works of nature.”<sup>82</sup> Salvation history thus becomes, in a certain sense, God’s own history in the world.

*Ecclesial:* Second, Rahner notes that the stream of salvation history does not exhibit uniform depth. Some redemptive-historical works are simply “more God’s” than others. Indeed, salvation history finds “its unique climax in Christ and the Church,” where—in contrast to the Synagogue—the “dialogue between God and man” no longer bears the “possibility of frustration

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, 55.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, 55-56 fn 33. Italics mine. Cf. his similar explanation: “. . . [I]f something comes into being which is a free act of man or results from it, and, nevertheless, is absolutely pre-defined by God, and thus miraculously delimited from the normal run of things, we can no longer speak merely of the world as something willed by God, but must recognize that, within the world, at certain spatio-temporal points, there is some qualitatively preferential will at work, the terminus of a divine action having spatio-temporal distinctiveness within the world, and thus assigning this quality to the divine action itself” [*ibid.*, 40-41].

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, 41.

or revocation.”<sup>83</sup> The Church, in turn, locates her golden age in her Apostolic era, which “in a qualitatively unique manner is subject to divine intervention also as distinct from the Church in the course of history.”<sup>84</sup> The Apostolic age differed from subsequent ages in that she was then more *norma normans* than *norma normata*, more the recipient of ongoing revelation than the guardian of a settled deposit.<sup>85</sup> In a certain sense, then, one could say that God was *auctor* of the Apostolic Church in a “higher way” than He was *auctor* of Israel or is *auctor* of the post-Apostolic Church.

Rahner introduces the last premise of his argument by reclassifying Scripture as one of the “constitutive elements of this Apostolic Church.”<sup>86</sup> As a necessary concomitant to her swelling fund of revelation, God granted the *Urkirche* a sure instinct for “pure self-expression and clear and univocal self-delimitation against ... pseudo-ecclesiastical and pseudo-Christian phenomena.”<sup>87</sup> The permanent fruits of such inspired discernment appear in the fixed Scriptural canon. Rahner argues that we can reckon even the Old Testament a “constitutive element” inasmuch as Israel’s book finds completion only in the New Testament era and as an element of the Church.<sup>88</sup> Israel’s book is inspired as the Church’s pre-history. Scripture thus turns out to be “more God’s” than any other writing—whether council, creed, or encyclical—because the Apostolic Church, whose fundamental intuitions it permanentized, was “more God’s” than any other redemptive-historical work.

We are now in a position to be more specific about the respective contributions to the Biblical text of God and the human authors. According to Rahner, God “did not write a letter to

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<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 42.

<sup>85</sup> “She had yet to receive revelations anew, and she could not as yet guard and conserve all that she has today, because it was not yet revealed to her” [*ibid.*, 46].

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, 51-54.

Philemon,” since he is not Scripture’s *Verfasser*.<sup>89</sup> However, God became the *Urheber* of the letter to Philemon—from a distinct angle—by superimposing the Apostolic Church’s vision upon Paul’s, which is to say, by “willing absolutely and effectively that the Church as a community of love should manifest for all ages ‘canonically’ her nature, her faith, her love, even in such a letter.”<sup>90</sup> Paul may have authored the letter *qua* letter, but God authored the letter *qua* ecclesial self-expression. Through such acts of divine authorship, God ensures that the sacred books represent the “adequate objectivity of the primal consciousness of the Church”<sup>91</sup> and preserve the “sediments” of the early Church’s faith.<sup>92</sup> One can say that God has “inspired” the sacred authors, that is, has uniquely appropriated their action to himself, because he plunged them into the deepest point of salvation history’s stream: the Apostolic Church.

In final analysis, Rahner proposes a dialectical tension between individual and ecclesial intentionality. The *Urkirche* expresses herself in Scripture, yet her self-expressive activity is always carried out by individual persons. Rahner suggests that that we hold both poles of authorship in tension: the human author “writes as *member* of the Church,” and he “writes as a member of the *Church*.”<sup>93</sup> As a *member*, no author could represent the Church’s total theology. Nonetheless, as a member of the *Church*, every author was “open to the whole of the Church ... and was in his own theology always integrated ... into the universal theology of the one and whole Church of his times.”<sup>94</sup> God, in an act of formal predefinition, causes ecclesial intention

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, 77.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, 77. L. Schökel analyses Rahner’s view of inspired authorship in this way: “Paul is the author of the note [to Philemon] as such and God is the author of the action by which the Church, through this note, gives expression to her charity—a constituent factor of her being. There is one common effect of the two activities, but there are two diverse formalities” See Luis Alonso Schökel, *The Inspired Word*, trans. Francis Martin (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 221.

<sup>91</sup> Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, 37.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, 79.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, 79-80.

to supervene upon personal intentions. As Rahner envisions it, the bearers of inspiration are neither divine secretaries nor mystical collectives. They are ecclesial persons.

### [III.2] *Advantages*

For Rahner, the “ecclesial-predefinitive” model was doubly advantageous. First, it articulated divine-human cooperation in such a way as to allow for true human authorship. Second, by making Scripture an element of the Apostolic Church, the Munich divine could solve the problem of redundancy. He asks pointedly, “[W]hat is the point of an infallible teaching authority if there is an infallible Bible? What is the point of an infallible Bible if there is an infallible authority?”<sup>95</sup> Yet, if Scripture and Magisterium were self-expressions of the same Church over whom God exercises special providence, neither could function without the other. The former would represent the self-expression of the Church in her “receptive” (i.e., apostolic) era; the latter the self-expression of the Church her “interpretive” (i.e. post-apostolic) era.<sup>96</sup> Scripture and Tradition, inspiration and infallibility, thus become something like a single ecclesial consciousness operating in receptive and interpretive modes. Since Scripture would be suffused with ecclesial consciousness, the Church—on the basis of her privileged and “connatural”<sup>97</sup> knowledge—could claim a special interpretive role. If the explication of Scripture were simply the “formal-logical analysis” of propositional content, on the other hand, no intelligent person would need a Church.<sup>98</sup> One could simply work out the deductions oneself. Rahner’s theory can therefore be seen as something of an apologetic for the Church as interpretive community.

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>96</sup> “Infallibility of the teaching authority of the later Church is, by definition, the inerrant interpretation of the Scripture, because it includes by definition the link with the teaching of the early Church, which necessarily teaches the later Church and has expressed her teaching in the Scripture” [*ibid.*, 72].

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, 75.

### [III.3] *Objections*

Naturally, features of Rahner's emendation came in for criticism. The proposal for which he caught most flak was his notion of "ecclesial" inspiration. So called "collective" notions of inspiration began to emerge as the findings of critical exegesis, which traced the evolution of certain canonical books over the length of eight centuries, slowly permeated the consciousness of the Church.<sup>99</sup> Benoit, for example, in response to the new exegetical situation, was willing to go so far as to speak of "analogies of inspiration," by which he meant that the many biblical actors could claim a part-share in the charism of inspiration.<sup>100</sup> Benoit seems to have preferred the language of analogy because it allowed him to account for collaborative biblical authorship without invoking what he considered the dubious notion of "collective" inspiration.<sup>101</sup> Benoit perhaps criticizes Rahner obliquely when he associates "collective inspiration" with a false "philosophy of sociology which would impart to a group an autonomous, overriding existence which submerges the individual."<sup>102</sup> As Benoit sees it, the "number and anonymity of these Biblical workers" need not "gainsay the fact that that they were individuals, moved by the Spirit to carry their stone, big or small, and contribute it to the building up of the monument of revelation."<sup>103</sup> Schökel, for his part, defends Rahner against such objections up to a point, noting that Rahner's theory does not really preclude personal inspiration.<sup>104</sup> However, even he found

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<sup>99</sup> Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique*, 254 Burtchaell himself points to an influential article by the Canadian Jesuit R. A. F. Mackenzie as the beginning of this shift in perspective: Roderick A. F. MacKenzie, "Some Problems in the Field of Inspiration," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (01/01, 1958), 1-8.

<sup>100</sup> This was the title of an address that given at the 1958 International Biblical Conference, translated and incorporated as the first chapter of the book, Pierre Benoit, *Aspects of Biblical Inspiration* (Chicago: Priory Press, 1965), 13-35.

<sup>101</sup> Benoit, *Inspiration and Revelation*, 16 Cf. Benoit, *Aspects of Biblical Inspiration*, 25-26. For more recent critiques of Rahner along the same lines, see Fastiggi, *Communal Or Social Inspiration: A Catholic Critique*, 250-253; Levering, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Status Quaestionis*, 286.

<sup>102</sup> Benoit, *Inspiration and Revelation*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>104</sup> "We should note here that, according to Rahner, this activity of self-expression is accomplished in the Church by individual persons responding to specific occasions within her life, and under the impulse of the unifying direction



that such recourse to collective “consciousness” smacked too much of the *Volksgeist* of German Romanticism.<sup>105</sup>

Various other concerns were also raised. Fr. Yves Congar and others felt that portraying Scripture as the literary monument of the Church’s primal consciousness did not sufficiently explain the Church’s awareness of having received Scripture from charismatic individuals.<sup>106</sup> Some doubted that Rahner’s ecclesial inspiration theory could adequately account for the inspiration of the Old Testament.<sup>107</sup> In short, despite having tied up some loose ends in the theory of inspiration, it left others more frayed.

Rahner’s proposal seems to have impacted official doctrinal formulations but little. At the level of private theology, however, Rahner’s “ecclesial-predefinitive” model did introduce the Church as a sort of third party to the phenomenon of inspiration. Since Scripture and the Apostolic Church emerged from the same divine milieu, the Church must have something to say about Scripture’s proper interpretation. The final version of *Dei Verbum* shows some sympathy

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of the Spirit. Those who accuse Rahner of denying the fact of personal inspiration either have not read him or have not understood him. It is simply that he does not enter into the question as to how God actuated this formal predefinition in each human author.” See Schökel, *The Inspired Word*, 221.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, 224.

<sup>106</sup> “Simply to say that Scripture is the written formulation of the faith of the Church, albeit the primordial Church, fails to appreciate how conscious that Church was that she did not merely *possess* Scriptures as a faith-formula permanentized in writing, but that she had *received* them from men chosen by God, spiritually gifted by him, and given a mission and authority by him for this purpose” [‘Inspiration des écritures canoniques et apostolicité de l’Eglise’, *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 45 (1961), p. 41; cited in Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique*, 255]. Fr. Dennis McCarthy, SJ objects that “to subsume all the various forms of inspired writing under an anonymous social form of production is to apply a univocity with its own dangers of distortion.” See Dennis J. McCarthy, “Personality, Society, and Inspiration,” *Theological Studies* 24, no. 4 (12/01, 1963), 554.

<sup>107</sup> Declaring the Old Testament “inspired” inasmuch because God prepared it for fulfillment in the Church comes dangerously close to the condemned theory of “subsequent approbation” mentioned above. Fr. John McKenzie, SJ proposed that the “corporate personality” might be the real bearer of inspiration—a notion flexible enough to include both Israel and the Church and, therefore, the Old and New Testaments John L. McKenzie, “Social Character of Inspiration,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (04/01, 1962), 115. A-M. Dubarle complains that the New Testament books did not in fact close and complete an open Old Testament canon. The Old Testament was already fixed in Jesus’ day. See “Bulletin de Théologie Biblique,” *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 45 (1959), 106-108; cited in Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique*, 255. More recently, Cardinal Vanhoye complains that Rahner’s theory of formal predefinition says nothing “of the Old Testament, or the salvation of the world.” See Albert Cardinal Vanhoye, “The Reception in the Church of the Dogmatic Constitution “*Dei Verbum*,”” in *Opening Up the Scriptures: Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 117.

to this conclusion. It affirms, for instance, the organic interpenetration of Scripture and Traditions. The two sources of revelation, “flowing out from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way come together into a single current and tend toward the same end.”<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, *Dei Verbum* received diversely Rahner’s proposal that Tradition represented the Church’s infallible interpretation of Scripture. It clearly affirmed that ecclesial tradition had an interpretive function,<sup>109</sup> but—in order to avoid acrimonious debate—refused to decide whether tradition had an *exclusively* interpretive function, that is, whether tradition contained material content not found in Scripture.<sup>110</sup> *Dei Verbum* was not therefore a wholesale endorsement of Rahner’s thoughts on inspiration.

#### [IV] Lohfink’s Critically-Correlative Inerrancy

One notable lacuna in Rahner’s treatment of inspiration was the matter of inerrancy. The few hints that he did drop on this subject pointed to a propositional theory of inerrancy little different from that of *Divino Afflante*.<sup>111</sup> It fell to N. Lohfink, Rahner’s German Jesuit confrère, to develop a hermeneutic of inerrancy adequate to an “ecclesial-predefinitive” model of inspiration.<sup>112</sup> In his influential essay, “The Inerrancy of Scripture,” Lohfink presumes the nearly unanimous verdict of 20<sup>th</sup> Century exegesis: most books of the Bible are “curated” texts.

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<sup>108</sup> Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 23.

<sup>109</sup> In his commentary on *Dei Verbum*, Ratzinger, without mentioning Rahner, ascribes the articulation of the roles of Tradition and Scripture to Y. Congar. See Joseph Ratzinger, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter II: The Transmission of Divine Revelation,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. Glen-Doepl William, Vol. III (New York: New York Herder and Herder, 1967), 190.

<sup>110</sup> See *ibid.*, 194.

<sup>111</sup> In matters of inerrancy, Rahner’s Molinism differed from Benoit’s Thomism only insofar as it absolves God from responsibility for literary expression: “It still holds true that whatever the human writer wishes to say as true is true and is his opinion, and he expects us to accept that as true—that too is what God said and, therefore, free from error. Regarding the literary form, however, for which the man alone is responsible and which is not God’s, it will be necessary in many cases to limit closely and carefully what the writer wanted to say” [Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, 77-78]. Burtchaell notes that Rahner later took up inerrancy, but that his “treatment of that subject was so maladroit that his critics have generally withheld comment upon it” [Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique*, 256]. Burtchaell is referring to Karl Rahner, “Exegesis and Dogma,” in *Dogmatic Vs. Biblical Theology*, ed. J. D. Holmes (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), 31-65.

<sup>112</sup> Gnuse attributes to Lohfink a “variation of [Rahner’s] position” in Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible*, 56.

Books were produced by an anonymous and “organic” process: each new author reinterpreted previous versions in such wise that stable meaning belonged only to the final product.<sup>113</sup> Not even individual books could be considered a stand-alone bearers of meaning. The fact that each book was situated in a complex web of allusions and cross-references suggests that the ancient authors both wrote and read the bible within the “*analogia scripturae*—within the unity and meaning of the whole scripture.”<sup>114</sup> And each new addition to the canon so altered the meaning of the parts as to be “equivalent to an act of authorship.”<sup>115</sup>

From his observations on layered authorship, Lohfink could better show how the Church played a role even in the inspiration of the Old Testament. The German Biblicist defines authorship broadly enough that the Church’s decision to read the Old Testament with “christological intention,” along with her decision to expand the Old Testament with Christological writings, could be considered acts of authorship *par excellence*.<sup>116</sup> Lohfink puts the matter somewhat provocatively when he quips that, “in the sense of the dogmatic doctrine of inspiration the New Testament was one of the ‘sacred writers’ of the Old Testament.”<sup>117</sup> Here Lohfink seems to assume Rahner’s notion of an ecclesial “consciousness” and his distinction between Apostolic and post-Apostolic Church. However, his notion of layered authorship suggests how the Church could become “author” of a text that antedated it without thereby approving a “work of simple human industry.” Because the apostolic Church represented more than a “work of simple human industry,” the same would go for the works that it authored—

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<sup>113</sup> Norbert Lohfink, “The Inerrancy of Scripture,” in *The Christian Meaning of the Old Testament* (Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co, 1968), 31.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, 38.

including the Old Testament. The Old Testament was not just destined for the Church, it was authored by her.

From his observations on cumulative textual meaning, Lohfink concludes that we need not assign inspiration or inerrancy to any single author (who is but a layer of the redactive process anyway), nor even to single books, but only to the Bible read as a whole.<sup>118</sup> In this connection, Lohfink notes that too many interpreters confuse the exegete's literal sense, which usually refers to "transitory layers of meaning of the Old Testament," with the theologian's literal sense, which refers to "nothing other than the meaning of Scripture read as a whole and in the *analogia fidei*."<sup>119</sup> According to Lohfink, the Church holds only the theologian's literal sense inerrant.

Of course, there are no wholes without parts. Hence, the layers of meaning intended by individual authors are not to be "wholly rejected," but must be "critically related to the whole" in such wise that they are "restored to a real significance in the light of the whole."<sup>120</sup> Lohfink advises his reader to keep this hermeneutic in mind when evaluating such phenomena as holy wars, imprecatory psalms, the concentration of Israel's hope on immanent salvation, the primitive cosmology of Genesis 1, and anachronisms in Joshua's campaign against Jericho. We must identify the core, inerrant assertion of each passage by bearing in mind the book's end and the whole religious trajectory of God's People. In this way the supervenience of ecclesial self-expression upon personal self-expression, first proposed in Rahner's inspiration theory, is transposed into a hermeneutical method.

#### [IV.2] *Advantages*

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<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, 40-42.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, 43.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, 46-48.

The obvious advantage of Lohfink's account was its ability to account plausibly for two sets of data: historical and doctrinal. On historical end, Lohfink's method of critical correlation does not make the hagiographer's intention the ultimate arbiter of the literal sense. This holistic approach to the literal sense was more palatable to practitioners of scientific exegesis, who were keenly aware that the concepts "author" and "book" were not as controllable as was once thought. On the doctrinal end, several things could be said in Lohfink's favor. Respecting the multiple condemnations of the biblical encyclicals, Lohfink does not divide Scripture quantitatively into "sacred" and "profane" truths or into inerrant and fallible passages. Rather, he submits biblical assertions of every kind to "critical correlation." Furthermore, by commending critical correlation, Lohfink can plausibly claim to be respecting both hermeneutical principles outlined in *Dei Verbum*: 1) the interpreter must search out "what meaning that the sacred writer ... intended to express and did in fact express with the help of literary forms that were in use during that time"; and 2) the interpreter must pay "no less serious attention to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the entire living tradition of the Church and the analogy of faith."<sup>121</sup> Finally, Lohfink presents a way of linking the Church and Scripture without slighting the inspiration of Old Testament.

Though Lohfink admits that his theory exhibits a certain "novelty" vis-à-vis the biblical magisterium of the twentieth century,<sup>122</sup> he nonetheless considers himself to have departed only from its implicit assumptions rather than its explicit doctrinal definitions. Regarding the orthodoxy of his project, Lohfink writes: "As with the first attempt at a solution, it necessarily departs from the underlying assumptions and from the language used in the older teaching

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<sup>121</sup> §12; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 25.

<sup>122</sup> Lohfink, *The Inerrancy of Scripture*, 40.

documents of the Church, but it thereby safeguards their actual doctrine.”<sup>123</sup> In contrast to official documents, the German biblicist speaks of inerrant texts rather than inerrant authors. Moreover, he cleanly distinguishes between the “theological” literal sense and the intention of a particular historical author. The former becomes something of a moving target, discernible only in “con-tuition” with the complex whole of Scripture. As a result, Lohfink can propose a new method for qualifying inerrancy. This method no longer turns on reconstructing the diverse mental postures its original authors, but on attending to a given passage’s standing within the canonical whole. He suggests, in fact, that Church has already countenanced a great deal “critical correlation”—albeit under the approved titles of form and genre criticism.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps for these reasons Lohfink’s theory met with a generally sympathetic hearing, both among theologians critical of Benoit’s theory and among certain Bishops at Vatican II.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, it seems to have arrived too late to affect the formulations of the council.

### *Conclusion*

The theological treatment of inerrancy between Vatican I and Vatican II was dominated by both the conclusions and assumptions of the prophetic-instrumental model. The important conclusion was that Scripture was unfailingly inerrant in its literal sense, provided, of course, that one

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<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>124</sup> Lohfink, for instance, refers to the common conclusion on the part of Catholic form critics that Genesis 1 intended to affirm no more than the mere fact of creation. However, the judgment that the passage’s metaphysical assertion of *creatio ex nihilo* (as opposed the same passage’s cosmological assertions) constitutes the kernel of Genesis 1, depends more on the exegete’s “smuggled” knowledge of the New Testament than on any objective application form criticism. From the same New Testament perspective (according to which salvation is no longer envisioned as land), Lohfink offers that one might account the geographical details of Joshua 6-8 “so marginal that they can be neglected.” Many exegetes have concluded to the negligibility of this historical data through the (doctrinally) safer expedient of genre criticism, inevitably finding that the battle was a “legend” or a “saga” whose sole intention was to give a theological interpretation of the promised “land”—not to furnish a historical chronicle. Lohfink finds such conclusions to be unwarranted on purely literary grounds. See *ibid.*, 46-48.

<sup>125</sup> For favorable reviews of Lohfink, see Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: A Review and Critique*, 260ff. For a complaint that the Lohfink’s position represents an “unnecessary denigration of the OT and its writers,” see Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1972), 149. For at least a warm reception of Lohfink’s theory at Vatican II, see the *oratio* of Bishop Simons during the council’s third session in *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II* (Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970), vol. III, pt. 3, 294.

understood the literal sense as what the hagiographer properly intended to affirm and communicate. The most important assumptions were 1) that inspiration was a charism of divine influence upon individual minds and 2) that inerrancy was a property of discrete, authorial judgments. The Thomist model was for the most part presupposed in magisterial pronouncements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In attempts to draw out the genuinely human and communal dimensions of biblical composition, Rahner developed his neo-Molinist model. He distinguished Scripture and the Church's dogmatic tradition in order to unite them more closely, and did so by arguing that God was true *auctor* of Scripture by being, in the first place, true *auctor* of the Apostolic Church, to whose faith Scripture serves as a permanent literary monument. Lohfink supplemented this inspiration theory with a critically-correlative model of Scripture's literal sense and its inerrancy. Although these models perhaps had a restraining influence on the *formulae* of Vatican II, they were not yet sufficiently mature to assist the council Fathers in reframing the questions of inspiration and inerrancy.

As we shall see, Ratzinger is much closer to the models of inspiration and inerrancy proposed by Rahner and Lohfink, than he is to the models proposed by Benoit. Though Ratzinger reaches similar conclusions, he does so from a different theoretical point of departure—one which we would characterize as “Bonaventurian-traditionary-dialogical.”

## Chapter 2

### Ratzinger on Inspiration

Typologies, even if they do not capture every nuance of an author's theology, can be useful for situating him or her within a broader theological conversation. Until now, we have been using tripartite nomenclature to evoke the major contours of inspiration: the first term designating the theological "muse," a second term designating the sacred author's primary function, and a third term designating the model of divine-human interaction. Accordingly, we characterized Benoit's theory of inspiration (along with that of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Magisterium) as Thomist, prophetic, and instrumental; and Rahner's as Molinist, authorial, and predefinitive. In keeping with this scheme, we would characterize Ratzinger's understanding of inspiration—not unjustly, it is hoped—as Bonaventurian, traditional, and dialogical.

This typology will, of course, want some unpacking. First, we will briefly recap Ratzinger's Bonaventurian *ressourcement* in four points. Secondly, using an address that Ratzinger delivered in his capacity as *peritus* to Cardinal Frings at the Second Vatican Council, we will show how these four Bonaventurian points become the basis for Ratzinger's critique of the neo-Scholastic treatments of revelation and Scripture. Third, after having surveyed Ratzinger's archaeological and critical phase, we will discuss his attempt at constructive *aggiornamento*. In this phase we will elaborate how Ratzinger attempts to remedy the alleged four-fold deficiency of the prophetic-instrumental model of inspiration by recourse to a traditional anthropology, an anthropology that understands God, history, and community to be deeply etched upon human interiority. Finally, we will conclude with some reflections on Ratzinger's achievement and with a brief comparison to Benoit and Rahner.



Through such an exposition we hope to show that Ratzinger understands “inspiration” to be more or less coterminous with sacred tradition, perhaps with the qualification that “inspiration” seems to be sacred tradition viewed from a certain angle—i.e., Scriptural production and interpretation. As this brief definition already suggests, Ratzinger uses “inspiration” in a sense at once stipulative and broad. Inspiration and tradition operate along the whole length of salvation history. Hence, a comprehensive treatment of inspiration as Ratzinger defines it would also include the history of Scripture in the life of the Church, that is, a treatment of dogma and its development. Such a treatment would take us far afield. Hence, we will limit our exposition, insofar as possible, to field of inspiration as more commonly defined, that is, to the nature and function of inspiration up to the close of the scriptural canon.

[I] *Ressourcement and Critique*

By his own appraisal, Ratzinger owes his fundamental insight into the relation between Scripture and revelation to his early encounter with Bonaventure, on whose theology of history he wrote his *Habilitationschrift*. In sketching the “essence of his thoughts” on the heated debates at the Second Vatican Council over the proper relation between Scripture, revelation, and tradition, Ratzinger recalls the new perspective that his medieval research had furnished:

Revelation, which is to say, God’s approach to man, is always greater than what can be contained in human words, greater even than the words of Scripture. As I have already said in connection with my work on Bonaventure, both in the Middle Ages and at Trent it would have been impossible to refer to Scripture simply as ‘revelation’, as is the normal linguistic usage today. Scripture is the essential witness of revelation, but revelation is something alive, something greater and *more*: proper to it is the fact that it *arrives* and *is perceived*—otherwise it could not become revelation... Revelation has instruments; but it is not separable from the living God, and it always requires a living person to whom it is communicated. Its goal is always to gather and to unite men, and this is why the Church is a necessary aspect of revelation... And what we call “tradition” is precisely that part of revelation that goes above and beyond Scripture and cannot be comprehended with a code of formulas.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ratzinger, *Milestones : Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 127. What Ratzinger had “already said” in connection with his work on Bonaventure was this: “I had ascertained that in Bonaventure (as well as in theologians of the thirteenth

As we shall see, without using so many words, Ratzinger is here elaborating his own theory of “inspiration.” We have it from Ratzinger’s pen that Bonaventure stimulated his thinking on matters of revelation, Scripture, and tradition; and that his own thinking had matured to stable conviction by the time of the Council. These reasons alone, perhaps, justify a brief review of Ratzinger’s research on the Seraphic Doctor and of his matching, conciliar critique.

### [I.1] *Bonaventure*

In Ratzinger’s *Habilitation* research, we find several keys to unlocking Ratzinger’s later thought on inspiration: namely, the 1) living, 2) mystical, 3) ecclesial, and 4) historical character of inspiration according to the Seraphic Doctor. Though he fourfold enumeration is more mine than Ratzinger’s, it serves the interest of clarity to present them in this order.

*Living:* Ratzinger arrived at his aforementioned conclusion—namely, the vital and transcendent quality of revelation—by careful attention to the Seraphic Doctor’s terminology. He noticed, for instance, that Bonaventure tended to speak of “revelations” (*revelationes*) rather than “revelation” in its totality (*revelatio*).<sup>127</sup> In another pre-modern quirk, the Seraphic Doctor employed the terms “inspiration,” “revelation,” and “prophecy” more or less interchangeably.<sup>128</sup> This contrasted with the later neo-Thomist habit of distinguishing *inspiratio* as *lumen* for

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century) there was nothing corresponding to our concept of “revelation”, by which we are normally in the habit of referring to all the revealed contents of the faith: it has even become part of linguistic usage to refer to Sacred Scripture simply as “revelation”. Such an identification would have been unthinkable in the language of the High Middle Ages. Here, “revelation”, is always a concept denoting an act. The word refers to the act in which God shows himself, not to the objectified result of this act. And because this is so, the receiving subject is always also part of the concept of “revelation”. Where there is no one to perceive “revelation”, no re-vel-ation has occurred, because no *veil* has been removed. By definition, revelation requires a someone who apprehends it. Because, if Bonaventure is right, then revelation precedes Scripture and becomes deposited in Scripture but is not simply identical with it. This in turn means that revelation is always something greater than what is merely written down. And this again means that there can be such thing as *sola scriptura* (“by Scripture alone”), because an essential element of Scripture is the Church as understanding subject, and with this the fundamental sense of Tradition is already given” [ibid., 108-109].

<sup>127</sup> ibid., 57-58.

<sup>128</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure* (Chicago, Ill.: Chicago, Ill. : Franciscan Herald Press, 1989), 54.

practical judgment, *revelatio* as speculative intellect's supernatural *species*, and full-blown prophecy as their compresence. Ratzinger's hunch that neo-scholastic *revelatio* and Bonaventuran *revelatio* did not entirely coincide was confirmed by a third anomaly usage: *revelatio* also referred to the spiritual interpretation of Scripture. From these clues Ratzinger inferred that, for Bonaventure, that "which truly constitutes revelation is accessible in the word written by the hagiographer, but... it remains to a degree hidden behind the words and must be unveiled anew."<sup>129</sup> Inspiration represented both the power by which divine meaning was inserted *into* human language and the power by which this divine meaning was re-actualized for interpreters of every generation. Just as creating and preserving in being are but different aspects of same divine power, so are composing and receiving Scripture but different aspects of aspects of the same *revelatio-inspiratio*.

On the basis of such terminological observations, Ratzinger reached his main conclusions regarding Bonaventure's notion of *revelatio-inspiratio*. Perhaps most importantly, revelation exists for Bonaventure only *in actu*, only in the personal exchange between God as revealer and human person as receiver. This being the case, it follows that a properly disposed, "receiving subject" belongs by definition to the concepts *inspiratio-revelatio*. Scripture as text can therefore be reckoned only a partial condition for *revelatio*, not *revelatio* itself. Ratzinger sums up, "Only Scripture understood in faith is truly Holy Scripture."<sup>130</sup>

*Mystical:* On Ratzinger's reading of Bonaventure, Scripture owes its living and actual character to its origin in the "mystical contact of the hagiographers with God."<sup>131</sup> The great Franciscan describes the mystical quality of revelation from various angles: as the reception of a *visio intellectualis*, as the insight of a "mind illuminated by the Spirit of God" (*mens Dei spiritu*

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<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, 69.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, 65.

*illuminata*)<sup>132</sup>, as the “penetration through the peripheral-sensible to the spiritual and real.”<sup>133</sup>

Since the hagiographers wrote on the basis of such a mystical insight, and since such insight was of its very nature partially ineffable, they could only try to “wrap it in the ‘swaddling clothes’ of the written word.”<sup>134</sup> Noteworthy in this regard is that Bonaventure locates divine-human cooperation more in the hagiographer’s mystical receptivity rather than in his instrumental subordination. In keeping with his mystical bent, Bonaventure stresses the distance between the spiritual content and the verbal content of Scripture. The gap falls between the divine mind and the human minds, as well as between the illumined human mind and the language it employs.

*Ecclesial*: At the same time, Ratzinger is keenly aware that Bonaventure, by making reception a constitutive element of revelation and inspiration, risks dissolving the objectivity of faith into a brine of subjective actualizations.<sup>135</sup> Ratzinger anticipates this objection by showing that, for the latter, a true understanding of *revelatio* “demands the attitude of faith by which man gains entrance into the living understanding of Scripture in the Church. It is in this way that man truly receives ‘revelation’.”<sup>136</sup> In keeping with this ecclesial attitude, Bonaventure presented the *Symbola* of the Catholic faith as basic principles of exegesis,<sup>137</sup> and treated the Fathers as “inspired” interpreters, apart from whom one could not approach Holy Scripture.<sup>138</sup>

Bonaventure, in other words, never entertained the idea of private faith. And though “mere faith is only the lowest level of such a mystical penetration into Scripture,” it was nonetheless the

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<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, 64-65.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>135</sup> In fact, he narrowly escaped being failed by one of his *Habilitation* readers, M. Schmaus, for this very reason. See Ratzinger, *Milestones : Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 108-109.

<sup>136</sup> Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 68.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*, 67.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, 77-78. Ratzinger cites Bonaventure’s *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, xix, 10 in support of this thesis: “By himself, man cannot come to this (spiritual) understanding (of Scripture). He can do this only through those to whom God revealed it, i.e., through the writings of Saints such as Augustine, Jerome, and others.”

foundation for any future progress.<sup>139</sup> Scripture, in sum, is unveiled only to those who have internalized the faith of the Church, the “objective” subject of revelation.

*Historical:* Up until this point, Ratzinger sees himself pitting the approach of *both* Bonaventure and the “historical” Thomas, on the one hand, over against that of the neo-Thomists.<sup>140</sup> However, Ratzinger indicates that Bonaventure parts company with even the historical Aquinas on one significant point—the theological significance of time and history. “For Aristotle and Thomas, time was a neutral measure of duration, an ‘an accident of movement.’”<sup>141</sup> Consequently, history remains “the realm of chance. It cannot be treated in a truly scientific manner not only because of the mystery of human freedom that is at work in history, but because history as such belongs to the realm of accidentally ordered causality found in created things.”<sup>142</sup>

“For Bonaventure,” on the other hand, “time was “not merely a measure of change.”<sup>143</sup> It was, rather, “one of the four structural elements from which the world was built.”<sup>144</sup> Ratzinger considers Bonaventure’s construal of time and history more thoroughly Christian: “With keen perception, Bonaventure sees that this concept of history is incompatible with the Christian view... For him, the world is ordered in an *egressus* and a *regressus*; in the center of these stands

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<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, 68.

<sup>140</sup> See Ratzinger’s 1962 address to the German speaking Bishops in Jared Wicks, “Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as *Peritus* before and during Vatican Council II,” *Gregorianum* 89, no. 2 (2008), 276. Here Ratzinger argues that “neither Bonaventure nor Thomas are scripturalists, since they both know well that revelation is always more than its material principle, the Scripture, namely, that it is life living on in the Church in a way that makes Scripture a living reality and illumines its hidden depths.”

<sup>141</sup> Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 141.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, 140-141.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*, 141.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, 141.

Christ.”<sup>145</sup> If Christ came in the “fullness of time,” then history must be ordered toward some fulfillment in Him.<sup>146</sup>

The relevance of history to theological method thus becomes clear. If time is a “structural element” of an intelligible world, then history can be intelligible as well. It can, in other words, constitute “structural element” of theology. And if Christ fulfills history, then to plumb the intelligible order of history is also to plumb the depths of Christ.

These four points gathered from the Seraphic Doctor—revelation’s vitality and unobjectifiability, its mystical provenance, its ecclesial orientation, and its historicity—all become deep wells from which Ratzinger would later draw.

#### [I.2] *Critique of Neo-Scholastic Models of Inspiration at Vatican II*

These four “planks” form the platform, in fact, from which Ratzinger would criticize the treatments of inspiration standard before the Second Vatican Council. On the eve of the Council’s opening, Cardinal Frings of Cologne invited the young professor at Bonn to address the bishops of the German speaking world. Ratzinger offered a preliminary evaluation of *De Fontibus Revelationis*, the draft of the Schema on Divine Revelation prepared by the Preparatory Theological Commission for discussion on the council floor.<sup>147</sup> He raised two major concerns: first, the schema’s strict identification of Scripture with revelation was hardly traditional and, therefore, hardly required by orthodoxy; second, the schema’s presentation of the inspiration process was more pagan than Christian. Faced with these misgivings, he advised against binding

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<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, 141.

<sup>146</sup> On Christ as the “fullness”, “center”, and “end” of history, see *ibid.*, 109-110.

<sup>147</sup> For more details of this meeting, see Wicks, *Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, 241-245.

the whole Church, *via* conciliar definition, to what was really rather recent and rather mediocre textbook theology.<sup>148</sup>

Explaining his first concern, Ratzinger noted that *De Fontibus* tended instead to identify “revelation with its material principles” rather than present it as a living reality.<sup>149</sup> Ratzinger was here referring to the tendency to think of revelation as fund of propositional truths. Under this model of revelation, Scripture served largely as a cache of revealed premises for later doctrinal deductions. When dogmas turned out not to be deducible from Scripture alone, appeal was made to tradition—conceived as “a series of affirmations being passed on alongside Scripture”<sup>150</sup>—in order to supply the missing premises. This became known as the *partim-partim* theory, since revealed data points were contained *partly* in Scripture and *partly* in tradition. While sharing the same informational model of revelation, an opposing camp championed the *totum-totum* theory of the Tübingen *Dogmatiker* J. R. Geiselman. This latter theory presented revelation—understood in the same propositional manner—as present *wholly* in Scripture and *wholly* in tradition. Catholic theologians opposed it for understandable reasons: if Scripture enjoys “material completeness” in matters of faith, ecclesial tradition becomes superfluous. Luther wins.<sup>151</sup>

Ratzinger advised against enshrining either approach in *De Fontibus*, and this for three main reasons. First, neither approach was historically plausible. With respect to the *partim-partim* theory, there is “no affirmation that is not found in Scripture but can be traced back with

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<sup>148</sup> “It would be unfortunate for theology and the Church if the Philonian-Augustinian doctrine of inspiration, after centuries of life only in textbooks, were today to receive an ecclesial sanction, at the very time when we finally have the possibility of developing an inspiration doctrine that is authentically biblical in character.” See *ibid.*, 279. His reaction against *De Fontibus* comes across somewhat milder in later recollections: “Naturally I took exception to certain things, but I found no grounds for a radical rejection of what was being proposed, such as many demanded later on in the Council and actually managed to put though” [Ratzinger, *Milestones : Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 121].

<sup>149</sup> Wicks, *Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, 276.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, 275.

<sup>151</sup> This is how our author interprets Geiselman’s theory in Ratzinger, *Milestones : Memoirs, 1927-1977*, 125.

any historical probability to the time of the Apostles.”<sup>152</sup> With respect to the *totum-totum* theory, many dogmas proved impossible to demonstrate on the basis of historically probable interpretations of Scripture. Second, it was unnecessary. If one simply grants that, with respect to Scripture, “revelation is prior and greater, then there is no trouble in having only *one* material principle, which even so is still not the whole, but only the material principle of the superior reality revelation, which lives in the Church.”<sup>153</sup> Presumably,<sup>154</sup> the emergence of new dogmas would be explained as judgments made in the living faith of the Church. Third, as Ratzinger discovered in preparing his *Habilitationschrift*, the teaching was not traditional. As it stood, *De Fontibus* would

not only condemn Geiselmann but as well most of the Fathers and the classical scholastic theologians, beginning with Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. But that should not happen. One cannot in the name of tradition condemn as wrong the largest and most venerable part of the tradition.<sup>155</sup>

Ratzinger proposed, as an alternative to both the (historically untenable) *partim-partim* theory and the (crypto-Protestant) *totum-totum* theory, what he considered the perennial tradition: namely, “that the three realities, Scripture, Tradition, and the Church’s magisterium, are not static entities placed beside each other, but have to be seen as the one living organism of the Word of God.”<sup>156</sup> In doing so, he brings Bonaventure’s idea of revelation as a “living” and superior reality to bear on a contemporary *quaestio disputata*.

With respect to his second concern, the proposed schema’s account of the process of scriptural inspiration, Ratzinger cautioned that it risked canonizing a purely neo-Platonic theory of inspiration, a theory that Augustine borrowed uncritically from Philo. This Philonian (read:

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<sup>152</sup> Wicks, *Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, 275.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, 276.

<sup>154</sup> Ratzinger does not give a positive statement of his theory of doctrinal development here.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, 277.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, 277.



neo-Scholastic) theory of inspiration came up short in three—typically Bonaventuran— respects. First, being “based on the Greek mysticism of identity, it assumes that the divinity wholly overpowers the human person.”<sup>157</sup> Ratzinger felt that the schema could not help but give the impression of coercion so long as it spoke of the hagiographer as “*organon* and *instrumentum*.”<sup>158</sup> Ratzinger seems to oppose chiefly the instrumental (as opposed to the prophetic) aspect of neo-Thomist inspiration theory. Second, the Bavarian *peritus* observed that a “timeless divine dictation theory” inevitably conceives the process of inspiration a-historically. Stenographic inspiration is more characteristic of the non-Christian religions, “whereas the Bible is the result of God's historical dialogue with human beings and only from this history does it have meaning and significance.”<sup>159</sup> Here we can see Ratzinger’s attentiveness to the historical dimension and even historical growth of *revelatio* (as reception). Third, it follows that, once the historical dimension of inspiration is taken seriously, the hagiographer can exercise his function only within the Church. The inspired author “is certainly God's ‘organ’, but he is this at a quite definite place in history, that is, only by being at the same time ‘organ’ of the Body of Christ and of the people of God in their covenant with God.”<sup>160</sup> Here Ratzinger already hints at what he will affirm more explicitly in later writings, i.e., that the influence of the community extends even to the interior of the inspired author, to the depth where he interacts with God. Ratzinger recapitulates the three elements in this way: “An inspiration doctrine developed from what is properly Christian embraces these basic categories: the person, whom God calls personally, not as an «organ», and takes into his service; history; and the people of God.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, 278.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, 278.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, 279.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, 279.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, 279

In the foregoing exposition of Ratzinger's research on Bonaventure and his early critique of neo-Scholastic theories of inspiration, we find the cornerstones upon which he constructs his theological edifice. His four *desiderata* seem to be the living and transcendent nature of revelation as compared to written Scripture, the personal freedom and vocation of the hagiographer, the historical dimension of the process of inspiration, and the organic interpenetration of hagiographer and community. It is worth noting that only the latter three correspond to traditional subject areas of treatises on "inspiration," which described the process by which biblical texts were produced rather than as the ongoing process by which they are received and vivified.

### [II] *Constructive Aggiornamento*

Not content simply to snipe at deficient theories, Ratzinger himself began to develop a model of Scriptural inspiration responsive to the defects indicated above. At the heart of this project is what we would call a "traditionary" anthropology, a vision of the human person as a thoroughly relational, historical, and communal being. When the traditionary person encounters God in a privileged way, sacred tradition is born. Tradition depends in its turn upon a trans-generational community, from whom and to whom a vision of life can be transferred. For Ratzinger, inspiration is more or less co-extensive with sacred tradition in this broader sense,<sup>162</sup> and its communal bearer is the Church.

We will thus treat the topics in the order suggested above. First, we will begin with an exposition of Ratzinger's traditionary anthropology. Second, we will describe how the influence

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<sup>162</sup> I say "broader sense" because Ratzinger sometimes speaks of tradition as the surplus reality of revelation as compared to written Scripture (see, for instance, his reflections above on the debate over Scripture and Tradition at Vatican II), and at other times he speaks of this surplus as only one "root" of the complex, historical phenomenon known as tradition. We are speaking of tradition in the latter sense. See Joseph Ratzinger, *God's Word : Scripture, Tradition, Office*, ed. Peter Hunermann and Thomas Söding, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 62.

of *revelatio* elevates human tradition to the level of sacred tradition and, thereby, to the level of inspiration. Third, we will explore how the Catholic Church serves as the “subject” or “agent” of inspiration and tradition. Along the way, we intend to show how Ratzinger’s treatment addresses his aforementioned *desiderata*.

### [II.1] *Traditional Anthropology*

The key to Ratzinger’s constructive project turns out to be his personalist anthropology, which—in contrast to “substantialist” anthropologies—underscores the open, historical, and relational character of the human person. As we shall see, the Ratzingerian person does not just *engage in* dialogue and *have* relations; he *is* dialogue; he *is* relation. This relativity extends in both vertical and horizontal directions, with the vertical serving as the foundation for the horizontal.

In the vertical direction, we detect a certain desire to rethink the “higher” faculties of the human person in biblical and personalist terms. Ratzinger declines, for instance, to be guided by the Aristotelian definition of the human person as a “rational animal,” or by the careful distinction of the human spirit—characteristic of Benoit’s rational psychology—into speculative and practical intellect. For Ratzinger, the specific difference lies more in the human person’s capacity for relationship with God:

The distinguishing mark of man, seen from above, is his being addressed by God, the fact that he is God’s partner in a dialogue, the being called by God. Seen from below, this means that man is the being that can think of God, the being opened on to transcendence.<sup>163</sup>

In proposing this relational anthropology, Ratzinger sees himself taking seriously the biblical teaching that the human person is created *ad imaginem Dei* and, therefore, *ad imaginem Trinitatis*. Reflecting on the traditional definition of Trinitarian persons as “subsistent relations,” Ratzinger draws the anthropological conclusions:

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<sup>163</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco, Calif.: San Francisco, Calif. : Ignatius Press, 1990), 274.

I believe a profound illumination of God as well as man occurs here, the decisive illumination of what person must mean in terms of Scripture: *not* a substance that closes itself in on itself, but the phenomenon of complete relativity, which is, of course, realized in its entirety only in the one who is God, but which indicates the direction of all personal being.<sup>164</sup>

Ratzinger does not allege that there is no place for the category of *relatio* in “substantialist” philosophy. He merely finds its importance underplayed: “To Aristotle [*relatio*] was among the ‘accidents’, the chance circumstances of being, which are separate from substance, the sole sustaining form of the real.”<sup>165</sup> In the Trinity, by contrast, *relatio* is “equally primordial.”<sup>166</sup> And only the Trinity can inspire a truly Christian vision of the human person.

Ratzinger is aware that such an anthropology of “complete relativity” butts up against even some of the most venerable phrases of Christian anthropology. Even the notion of “soul” needs to be rethought: “What we call in substantialist language ‘having a soul’ will be described in a more historical, actual language as ‘being God’s partner in dialogue’”<sup>167</sup> And though he does not consider such attributes as “immortal soul” simply false, he doubts that they can finally “do justice to the dialogic and personalistic view of the Bible.”<sup>168</sup> In proposing the dialogical soul, Ratzinger affirms both the transcendence of the human person above the material world and the reality of the personal encounter with God, but does so in relational rather than “substantialist” categories.

But the human person is not just vertical, spiritual transcendence. Even though the *anima* “goes beyond this world in going beyond itself,” it is no less true that the soul “belongs completely to the material world.”<sup>169</sup> And, if to the material world, then it belongs to the

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<sup>164</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” *Communio* 17, no. 3 (1990), 445.

<sup>165</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 131.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, 131.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, 275.

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, 275.

<sup>169</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein and Aidan Nichols (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1988), 153.

historical and communal world as well; for “existence in a corporal form necessarily also embraces history and community, for if pure spirit can be thought of as existing strictly for itself, corporality implies descent from another: human beings live and depend in a very real and at the same time very complex sense on one another.”<sup>170</sup> Neither pure matter nor pure spirit exhibits such interdependence, but only embodied spirits. It is this intersection of vertical and horizontal transcendence makes “tradition” possible.

In uncovering the precise meaning of tradition, Ratzinger adverts to the historical and communal dimensions of reason—most evident in the human capacity for memory and speech. He contends that the point of contrast between animals and humans—turning as it does on the historical and social texture of human intellect—is subtler than has often been supposed. Ratzinger cites studies showing that certain primates also show a capacity for problem solving and “invention”; what they lack, as compared with humans, is the ability to *hand on* these “inventions” from one generation to the next. As it turns out, the element distinctive to the human spirit is not so much inventiveness as memory, a “context that fosters unity beyond the limits of the present moment.”<sup>171</sup> By its transtemporal transcendence, memory makes tradition possible:

...The most distinctive characteristic of tradition is, in fact, the ability to recognize my *now* as significant also for the tomorrow of those who come after me and, therefore, to transmit to them for tomorrow what has been discovered today. On the other hand, a capacity for tradition means preserving today what was discovered yesterday, in that way forming the context of a way through time, shaping history. This means that tradition properly understood is, in effect, a transcendence of today in both directions.<sup>172</sup>

As the importance of memory suggests, human reason always has an historical dimension.

Reason carries within itself a reference to past, present, and future.

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<sup>170</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 184.

<sup>171</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 87.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, 87.

Speech, for its part, mirrors the historical dynamic of memory and completes it. Like memory, speech suggests the way in which history comes to mark even the inner life of the human person. Ratzinger muses that our

mental life depends entirely on the medium of language, and ... language was not invented today. It comes from a long way off; the whole of history has contributed to it and through it enters into us as the unavoidable premise of our present, indeed as a constant part of it.<sup>173</sup>

Speech parallels memory by its trans-temporal continuity, that is, by “faithfully preserving the past and ... by understanding this past in a new way in light of present experiences and thus facilitating man’s advance into the future.”<sup>174</sup> Speech completes memory, however, by adding “communicability,” an element essential to tradition.<sup>175</sup> Only through speech can private memories become communal traditions, and only together can “memory and speech offer a model of the relationship of tradition and time.”<sup>176</sup>

From these reflections on speech, memory, history and tradition, the extent to which the human person depends upon the community becomes clear. “Tradition,” says Ratzinger, “requires a subject in whom to adhere, a bearer, whom it finds (not only, but basically) in a linguistic community... [Tradition] is possible only because many subjects become, as it were, *one* subject in the context of a common heritage.”<sup>177</sup> If tradition can survive only in a linguistic community, and if the inner life of the human person rests on tradition and language, it follows that the human person cannot fully awaken to his own humanity except through others and in community. Ratzinger quotes the great Tübingen theologian A. Möhler in this connection:

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<sup>173</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 185.

<sup>174</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology : Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 88.

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*, 88.

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, 88.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, 88.

“Man, as a being set entirely in a context of relationship, cannot come to himself by himself, although he cannot do it without himself either.”<sup>178</sup>

The four Bonaventuran qualities of *revelatio*, which reappeared as four *desiderata* for Schema on Divine Revelation, thus find a sort of *Anknüpfungspunkt* in human tradition. In locating the divine-human dialogue at the core of human existence, Ratzinger already provides the basis for human person’s openness to revelation—a living and conceptually inexhaustible reality. This, in turn, paves the way for a personal and mystical approach to divine-human cooperation. At the same time, by stressing the “corporality”—i.e., the communal and historical stamp—of the human spirit, Ratzinger suggests the mechanism by which divine inspiration can become a phenomenon both historical and ecclesial.

#### [II.2] *Inspiration as Sacred Tradition*

Having surveyed Ratzinger’s traditional anthropology, we are now in a position to see why he can present inspiration as but a special case of tradition. Sacred traditions emerge more or less when the divine-human dialogue, present to some degree in every person, finds privileged intensity in a charismatic individual. Since such individuals are always socially embedded, their singular religious experience also becomes a treasure for the whole community.

Ratzinger tries to evoke the richness of religious experience through the personalist language of dialogue and encounter. Even though there is no dialogue without meaningful content,<sup>179</sup> dialogue always conveys more—union, person, presence. Commenting on the

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<sup>178</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 184.

<sup>179</sup> Ratzinger stresses the definite content of Christianity more in later writings than in earlier. He claims that Christian faith “wants to open men’s eyes, to open their eyes to truth. On a purely linguistic level, this is demonstrated in the New Testament by the fact that faith is almost always expressed there by the formula πιστεύειν ὅτι: to believe *that* such and such is so. Precisely there lies the difference between the faith of the New Testament and that of the Old; Martin Buber, as we know, made this ‘rationalizing’ of faith an object of reproach.” See Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 337. Cf. his wariness of the “Hinduization” of the faith in Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debates*, 91-92.

“nature of revelation” in *Dei Verbum* §4, Ratzinger insists that “the purpose of this dialogue is ultimately not information, but unity and transformation.”<sup>180</sup> Such encounters are always more an event of “relationship” and “encounter” than a “system of propositions.”<sup>181</sup> And even if Christian faith includes and even depends upon linguistic formulations, “its central formula is not ‘I believe in something’, but ‘I believe in thee’.”<sup>182</sup> Here we catch a glimpse of the supra-conceptual fullness of revelation, to which only faith is adequate to respond.

The very richness of the experience makes it an apt center of tradition. Being partly ineffable, the content of the religious experience cannot be exhausted by any particular mode of expression or even the aggregate modes of expression of any particular generation. New facets always emerge, and the tradition is thus renewed. Moreover, even mystics, embedded as they are in the tissue of history and society, must draw from their own culture. They take up the symbols and language both most familiar to them and least inadequate for expressing their religious experience, and—after enriching them with the depth of their vision—return them as a communal heritage. The inexhaustible becomes at least partly accessible through this process.

The renewability and communicability of breakthrough experiences becomes important in view of the rarity of the religious “talent.” Ratzinger admits that, just as one meets people of diverse musical talent, so also

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<sup>180</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter I: Revelation itself," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. William Glen-Doepl, Vol. III (New York: New York Herder and Herder, 1967), 175.

<sup>181</sup> In a work dating back to 1966, Ratzinger argues that the “decisive thing” [*das Entscheidende*] of Revelation is not so much that it allows me to “know” [*wissen*] more. Rather, “The decisive thing is much more that the believer is placed in a relationship [*Beziehung*] with the reality [*Wirklichkeit*] of God through the word of the message, and therefore an encounter with God [*die Begegnung mit Gott*], not a Summa of insights.” See Joseph Ratzinger, *Das Problem Der Dogmengeschichte in Der Sicht Der Katholischen Theologie* (Köln ; Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1966), 39. Or again, “Revelation is not conceived in Scripture as a system of propositions [*ein System von Sätzen*], but as the event—completed yet ever occurring—of a new relation between God and humanity” [*ibid.*, 19].

<sup>182</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 47. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), 20.



one meets people who are religiously ‘talented’ and those who are ‘untalented’; here too those capable of direct religious experience and thus of something like religious creativity are few and far between. The ‘mediator’ or ‘founder’, the witness, the prophet, or whatever religious history likes to call such men, remains here too the exception. Over against these few, for whom the divine thus becomes undisguised certainty, stand the many whose religious gift is limited to receptivity, who are denied the direct experience of the holy, yet are not so deaf to it as to be unable to appreciate an encounter with it through the medium of the man granted such an experience.<sup>183</sup>

The religious level of whole communities is elevated by the religious life of charismatic individuals, who thus become fountainheads of sacred tradition.<sup>184</sup> This sacred tradition originates in divine encounter, yet both draws from and enriches the language and symbols of the people to whom the original tradent belonged. Since sacred tradition incrementally “divinizes” the language of a community, one can see how scriptural inspiration might be seen as a special case thereof.

Ratzinger is not without examples of this traditionary process. As paradigm cases of religious “geniuses” who become sources of religious tradition, Ratzinger presents to us Adam, Abraham, and Jesus.<sup>185</sup> Ratzinger almost treats Adam as a necessary deduction, as the mysterious *primum mobile* of the chain of tradition. Presuming that the religious sense is epidemic among humanity, and presuming again that religious sensitivity spreads like a contagion from original carriers, the logical conclusion is that there must have been a first carrier—a first recipient of “primordial revelation”:

Obviously [primordial revelation] cannot be just the transmission of the first man’s fragmentary memory of a conversation with God. If this were so, man’s history would be quite different... From what has been said, we may conclude that the origin of “humanity” coincides in time with the origin of man’s capacity for tradition. Primordial revelation would mean, then, that there occurred in the formation of subjects who would

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<sup>183</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 60.

<sup>184</sup> Tracey Rowland detects in Ratzinger’s theory the influence of the Jewish personalist philosopher Martin Buber, who taught that “every great culture rests on an original relational incident.” See Rowland, *Benedict XVI : A Guide for the Perplexed*, 13.

<sup>185</sup> Ratzinger speaks of the “face-to-face” conversation between Moses and God as well, though he presumes more than describes its traditionary significance for Israel. See Joseph Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 24-27.

be bearers of tradition primordial realities that were beyond the native understanding of any individual but were open to new revelations experienced in obedience by the great patriarchs, by those great ones who kept themselves open to transcendence and assured its acceptance.<sup>186</sup>

Ratzinger describes his deduction in a rather open way, without committing to an individual or collective interpretation of “Adam.” In either event, religious sensibility represents one way in which each person “is deeply marked by his membership of the whole of mankind—the one ‘Adam’.”<sup>187</sup>

Among the “great patriarchs” who opened themselves to transcendence, Ratzinger singles out Abraham, whom he paints in the colors of a German Romantic poet.

Abraham heard God’s call, he enjoyed some kind of mystical experiences, a direct eruption of the divine, which pointed his way for him. This man must have had something of the seer about him, a sensitivity to being, which enlarged his perception beyond the bounds of what is accessible to our senses. This extension of the realm of perception, which men in all ages ... have sought to acquire by artificial means, was obviously enjoyed by him, as by all religious geniuses, in a pure, effortless, and original manner. He had a faculty for perceiving the divine.<sup>188</sup>

Far from isolating Abraham in lonely splendor, his receptivity made him “father of his faithful posterity who from him and through him shared in this broadening of the horizon which was granted to him.”<sup>189</sup> Israel, in other words, became the extension of “Abraham’s sonship,”<sup>190</sup> the bearer of his tradition. And as the human source of this tradition, Abraham becomes one of the “inspired authors” of the Old Testament—even if he never picked up a pen.

What holds for the first “Adam” and for Abraham holds *a fortiori* for Jesus, the “last Adam.”<sup>191</sup> Jesus was not simply a *tabula rasa*; he stood downstream from Abraham, and “lived

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<sup>186</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology : Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 89.

<sup>187</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 184.

<sup>188</sup> Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, 33-34.

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*, 34.

<sup>190</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Many Religions, One Covenant : Israel, the Church, and the World* (San Francisco, CA; San Francisco: San Francisco, CA : Ignatius Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>191</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 175.

his religious life within the framework of the faith and tradition of God's people Israel."<sup>192</sup>

However, Jesus is more than a second Abraham. His mission "consists of bringing together the histories of the nations in the community of the history of Abraham, the history of Israel."<sup>193</sup>

This higher and more universal mission becomes manifest in Jesus' treatment of tradition, toward which he waxes, by turns, both submissive and dismissive. For Ratzinger, only "on the basis of his intimate communion with God" could Jesus claim the right both to affirm and critique his ancestral heritage:<sup>194</sup>

... Both his freedom and his strictness proceed from a common source: from his prayerful intercourse with the Father, from his personal knowledge of God, on the basis of which he draws the dividing line between the center and the periphery, between the will of God and the work of man.<sup>195</sup>

The Son does not simply design his own existence; he receives it in a most profound dialogue with God... It is this dialogue that teaches him, without school or teacher, to know Scripture more deeply than anyone else—to know it truly from God himself.<sup>196</sup>

Only someone interpreting "with divine authority" could definitively discern between divine core and human accretion and, by such discernment, renew tradition without destroying it.<sup>197</sup> By planting himself firmly in the great web of history and tradition, Jesus made his filial mysticism available to all who followed in his wake. "Jesus has entered into the already existing subject of a tradition, God's People of Israel ... and by doing so has made it possible for people to participate in his most intimate and personal act of being, i.e., his dialogue with the Father."<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One : An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1986), 29.

<sup>193</sup> Ratzinger, *Many Religions, One Covenant : Israel, the Church, and the World*, 26.

<sup>194</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology : Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 99.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*, 98.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>197</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Gospel, Catechesis, Catechism : Sidelights on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1997), 90.; Ratzinger, *Many Religions, One Covenant : Israel, the Church, and the World*, 39.

<sup>198</sup> Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One : An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, 32.

Christianity turns out then to be nothing other than participation, though sacred tradition, in the Christ's own divine sonship.

The first Adam and the last Adam are the two truly universal religious “founders.” However, just as the patriarchs and prophets were able to access and rejuvenate the first Adam's primordial dialogue, so also subsidiary Christian “founders” (i.e., apostles and saints) are able to gain access to the “last” Adam's filial dialogue through the power of the Holy Spirit. In both cases, tradition hands on personal reality in addition to words and symbols.<sup>199</sup> It is within this broad delta of pneumatic and Christological tradition that Scripture has both emerged and been preserved as a portal for entering this divine-human dialogue. Commenting on *Dei Verbum* §21, our author explains that the

resonance of the voice of the apostles and prophets throughout Scripture is important to it because the voice itself resounds with the Holy Spirit, because in them we encounter the dialogue of God with men. Thus the reference to the original colour of Scripture is placed in the context of the idea of dialogue, and the latter again is to be seen against the background of the original dialogue of the Spirit of God, which created men, with them.<sup>200</sup>

Inspiration, then, is nothing other than a privileged dialogue with God that has become permanently accessible *via* sacred tradition. Put another way, inspiration is nothing other than sacred tradition viewed from the angle of the production and interpretation of the canonical Scriptures.

We find great consistency, then, between the theology of the later Ratzinger and the *desiderata* of the earlier Ratzinger. The mystical origin of revelation in Bonaventure, becomes the dialogical origin of inspiration in Ratzinger. The language of dialogue evokes the

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<sup>199</sup> “The entire mystery of Christ's presence is in the first instance the whole reality that is transmitted in tradition, the decisive and fundamental reality that is always antecedent to all individual explications, even those of Scripture, and which represents what in actual fact has been transmitted.” See Ratzinger, *God's Word : Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 63-64.

<sup>200</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter VI: Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, trans. William Glen-Doepl, Vol. III (New York: New York Herder and Herder, 1967), 263.

interpersonal quality of revelation and its irreducibility to verbal *formulae*. The analogical nature of religious language thus binds it to both community and history. Since it is partly effable, religious writings can be passed on as the common heritage of a particular language group. However, since these writings point beyond themselves to the ineffable, they can be taken up anew by each successive generation without violating the meaning of the text. And it is Ratzinger's reframing of inspiration as tradition that holds these transcendent, personal, historical and communal aspects together.

### [II.3] *Inspiration as Ecclesial Tradition*

Ratzinger's traditional theory of inspiration naturally opens new perspectives on the Church as well. As the whole of humanity is, in one sense, the bearer of Adam's religious tradition, and as Israel is the bearer of Abraham's religious tradition, so is the Church (minimally) the bearer of Christ's tradition. For Ratzinger, once tradition is properly understood, this claim is indisputable:

Tradition, we said, always presumes a bearer of tradition, that is, a community that preserves and communicates it, that is a vessel of a comprehensive common tradition and that becomes, by the oneness of the historical context in which it exists, the bearer of concrete memory. The bearer of tradition in the case of Jesus is the Church. This is not a theological judgment in the true sense of the word but a simple statement of fact. The Church's role as bearer of tradition rests on the oneness of the historical context and the communal character of the basic experiences that constitute the tradition. This bearer is, consequently, the *sine qua non* of the possibility of a genuine participation in the *traditio* of Jesus, which, without it, would be, not a historical and history-making reality, but only a private memory.<sup>201</sup>

The Church's status as bearer of Jesus' *traditio* already suggests her uniqueness among religious traditions. For, to the degree that Jesus' intimacy with the Father surpasses that of the great patriarchs and other religious geniuses, to that same degree the tradition of the Church will surpass other great religious traditions.

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<sup>201</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 100.

Nevertheless, even to present the connection between Jesus and the Church as an instance of a general anthropological pattern, that is, as an example of the complex relationship between religious geniuses and their spiritual posterity, does not quite do justice to the depth of relationship between Christ and the Church. By Ratzinger's own admission, presenting the Church as Christ's tradition in a sociological sense is not a "theological judgment in the true sense of the word but a simple statement of fact." If she were merely a curatrix of Christ's religious artifacts or repository of His historical memories, then the figure of Christ would be doomed to recede ever farther into the mists of the past.

The Church must be "one subject," therefore, in a more than sociological way. She must receive her unity *qua* subject from Christ, with respect to whom she can possess only a relative autonomy. Ratzinger drives this point home in his reflections on a famous Pauline metaphor: the Church as Christ's body. In this metaphor,

Paul does not say "as in an organism there are many members working in harmony, so too in the Church", as if he were supposing an purely sociological model of the Church, but at the very moment when he leaves behind the ancient simile, he shifts the idea to an entirely new level. He affirms, in fact, that, just as there is one body but many members, "so it is with Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). The term of comparison is not the Church since, according to Paul, the Church is in no wise a separate subject endowed with its own subsistence. The new subject is much rather "Christ" himself, and the Church is nothing but the space of this new unitary subject, which is, therefore, much more than social interaction.<sup>202</sup>

The Church's existence is continuous with Christ's existence; and she is therefore subject in both a sociological and uniquely theological sense. As a sociological subject she is historically bound to Christ, her charismatic founder. As a theological subject, however, she is existentially united

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<sup>202</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, 53-54. For a similar distinction between the Church as "sociological subject" and as "truly new subject," see *ibid.*, 94-95.

to Christ, who remains ever alive and active in her.<sup>203</sup> For Ratzinger, the “Church is that new and greater subject in which past and present, subject and object come into contact. The Church is our contemporaneity with Christ: there is no other.”<sup>204</sup>

Only when the Church is seen as a subject in both senses—as the sociological bearer of Christ’s tradition and as the theological subject of His power and presence—does the proper relationship between Church and Scripture come to light. The Church then becomes both a transcendent and historical “subject” of Scripture; she appears as something like a “traditionary person” writ large. This is a point that Ratzinger returns to repeatedly from different angles. Sometimes he underscores the historical and sociological nature of this connection: “Scripture is one by reason of the historical subject that traverses it, the one people of God”;<sup>205</sup> the Church is “the human subject (*das menschliche Subjekt*) of the Bible”;<sup>206</sup> the “New Testament, as a book, presupposes the Church as its subject.”<sup>207</sup> At other times Ratzinger stresses the transparency of the Church to the divine: the “Bible originates from one subject formed by the people of God and, through it, from the divine subject himself.”<sup>208</sup> Most often Ratzinger uses the term to underscore the contemporary relevance of the Church for Scripture: the “Holy Scriptures come from a subject that is still very much alive—the Pilgrim People of God...”;<sup>209</sup> Scripture arose “within the People of God guided by the Holy Spirit, and this people, this subject, has not ceased

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<sup>203</sup> In addition to the priority of revelation over Scripture and faith over Scripture, Ratzinger lists a “third root” of tradition in the Christian sense: “the character of the Christ-event as present and the authoritative presence of Christ’s Spirit in his body, the Church ...” [Ratzinger, *God’s Word : Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 63].

<sup>204</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debates*, 60.

<sup>205</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Conflict,” in *Opening Up the Scriptures : Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Luis Sánchez Navarro (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids, Mich. : William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 6.

<sup>206</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung* (Munich: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1973), 22.

<sup>207</sup> Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One : An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, 30.

<sup>208</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today’s Debates*, 64.

<sup>209</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Exegesis and the Magisterium of the Church,” in *Opening Up the Scriptures : Joseph Ratzinger and the Foundations of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Luis Sánchez Navarro (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids, Mich. : William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 135.

to exist”;<sup>210</sup> without this “surviving and living agent, the Church, Scripture would not be contemporary with us ...”<sup>211</sup> Examples could be multiplied.

Ratzinger makes abundantly clear, at any rate, that the Church is the privileged venue for the interplay between Spirit and history and, therefore, the privileged locus of inspiration:

At this point we get a glimmer, even on the historical level, of what inspiration means: The author does not speak as a private, self-contained subject. He speaks in a living community, that is to say, in a living *historical movement* not created by him, nor even by the collective, but which is led forward by a *greater power that is at work*.<sup>212</sup>

It is only at this point that we can begin to understand the nature of inspiration; we can see where God mysteriously enters into what is human and purely human authorship is transcended... Certainly Scripture carries **God’s thoughts** within it”; that makes it unique and constitutes its “authority”. Yet it is **transmitted by a human history**. It carries within it the life and thought of a historical society that we call the “People of God”, because they are brought together, and held together, by the coming of the divine word. There is a reciprocal relationship: This society is the essential condition for the growth of the biblical Word; and, conversely, this Word gives the society its identity and its continuity.<sup>213</sup>

Just as human tradition is both the receiving and the giving of memory and language, so is sacred tradition both the receiving and the transmission of sacred stories and sacred language. The “memory” of sacred tradition is basically the living consciousness of the Church,<sup>214</sup> and the “language” of sacred tradition is basically the canonical books. Human tradition and inspiration are analogous.

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<sup>210</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Introduction," in *From "Inter Insigniores" to Ordinatio Sacerdotalis": Documents and Commentaries*, trans. L'Osservatore Romano English Edition (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 12.

<sup>211</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith : The Church as Communion* , ed. Henry Taylor translator (San Francisco, Calif.: San Francisco, Calif. : Ignatius Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>212</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian Walker, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), xx. Italics mine.

<sup>213</sup> Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith : The Church as Communion* , 33. Emphasis original.

<sup>214</sup> “The seat of all faith is, then, the *memoria Ecclesiae*, the memory of the Church, the Church as memory. It exists through all ages ... never ceasing to be the common situs of faith... [W]ithout this believing [believing] subject, which unifies the whole, the content of faith is neither more nor less than a long catalogue of things to be believed...” See Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology : Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 23.



We see Ratzinger's four *desiderata* again well represented in his treatment of inspiration in the Church. When he brings the historical and ecclesial dimension to the fore, the role of the individual hagiographer naturally occupies the background. Nonetheless, Ratzinger never denies or even overlooks personal authorship. Ratzinger also takes care to underscore the actuality and transcendence of revelation over its textual objectification, by insisting on the active presence of Christ in the Church and by describing a symbiosis between the Bible and its communal subject.

### [III] *Concluding Remarks: Achievements and Comparisons*

Having outlined Ratzinger's presentation of inspiration as sacred tradition, we now hope to conclude with a brief assessment of Ratzinger's achievement and a few points of comparison with Rahner and Benoit. Ratzinger's achievement is to have recast biblical inspiration, through both *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, in a way that is at once orthodox and plausible. It would make most sense to organize our evaluation of his achievement according to his own criteria, the four *desiderata* he mentioned early in his career.

1. *Living*: By showing that the Seraphic Doctor understood revelation to be not only a body of divinely revealed theses but also—and even primarily—a living reality, he could argue that orthodoxy did not require the thoroughgoing identification of revelation with propositional content. Moreover, the priority and superiority of revelation over Scripture as written text gave Ratzinger a new way of conceiving tradition and Scripture: that is, as revelation's formal and material principle, respectively. Extrapolating from Ratzinger's language a bit, we might say that Scripture and tradition supply, respectively, the "body" and "soul" for the living organism of revelation. On this basis, one no longer need to suppose that the historically ascertainable meaning of Scripture was sufficient to ground every subsequent doctrine (*pace* Geiselman);

nor, failing this, that a hypothetical collection of unwritten, apostolic premises could fill the gap (*pace* the neo-Scholastics). Both approaches strained historical credibility.

Ratzinger's constructive formulation differs from Benoit's and Rahner's. It contrasts most clearly with the former's informational definition of inspiration, that is, as a divine enlightenment of propositional judgment. It does, however, have clear points of contact with Rahner's model, which likewise treats tradition as a vital principle rather than as a material principle. Nonetheless, Rahner and Ratzinger arrive at the conclusion differently. Rahner understood Scripture to be *the only adequate* objectification of the Church's primal consciousness, whereas Ratzinger understood Scripture as *only the inadequate* objectification of a privileged, personal dialogue with God. In both cases, however, tradition becomes necessary for entry into an encompassing fullness—whether the fullness of the Church's primal consciousness (Rahner's take), or the fullness of a charismatic founder's relationship with God (Ratzinger's take).

2. *Mystical*: Through his dialogical anthropology, Ratzinger is able to present inspiration as the non-competitive cooperation between divine and human wills. Since the essence of the human soul is its being addressed by God, there is no question of God "intervening" where He was not previously. Moreover, Ratzinger's tendency to link inspiration more closely to mystical dialogue allows him to portray the charism as a heightening of natural human capacities rather than their suppression. The "hagiographer" comes off as more rather than less human.

This approach differs from both Benoit and Rahner in three notable ways. First, neither Benoit nor (perhaps) Rahner makes the psychological awareness of being inspired a condition

for inspiration.<sup>215</sup> Ratzinger, on the other hand, places religious experience squarely at the heart of religious tradition and, therefore, at the heart of inspiration.

Second, Ratzinger presents, on the whole, a more cooperative model of divine-human cooperation. Though such a non-competitive *concursum* characterizes Thomist philosophy in general, it does not characterize the specific relationship between principal cause and instrumental cause, which served as the paradigm for the neo-Thomist treatment of inspiration. As Rahner points out, two causes cannot be authors of the whole of Scripture in the same respect. Hence, on the instrumental model, the more one emphasizes true divine authorship, the less can one emphasize true human authorship. It is true that Ratzinger and Rahner, share a common antipathy toward the model of instrumental causality, which they reject as menacing to human freedom. Nonetheless, Rahner's appeal to "formal predefinition" already presupposes the competitive relationship between the divine will and human freedom characteristic of Molinism. "Formal predefinition" refers, after all, to the process by which God pre-arranges circumstances "from the outside," as it were, so that the agent might freely and infallibly do God's will. God's closeness is perhaps still seen to threaten human freedom.

Third, because Ratzinger describes inspiration as a charism of mystical receptivity rather than as a charism of textual production, the term "hagiographer" fits Ratzinger's paradigm less than either Benoit's or Rahner's. It is true that, on Ratzinger's model, mystical penetration gives rise to sacred tradition and then to sacred texts. And it is also true that Benoit's later proposal of "analogies of inspiration" would accord a part-share in inspiration to all who contributed to the final text—whether by thought, word or deed. Nonetheless, for both Rahner and Benoit, the

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<sup>215</sup> Rahner seems to be saying that the author's own consciousness of being inspired is more fitting, but not absolutely necessary: "We repeat that inspiration need not at all be a conscious process. In our theory, however, the conscious elements are part of the essential meaning of inspiration, and not only its remote conditions. Inspiration is thus a conscious process" [Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, 63].

paradigm case always remains the inspired writer—no matter how anonymous or obscure. For Ratzinger, on the other hand, the paradigm case is the religious genius in whose traditionary stream the writers stand. Using Rahner’s terms, we might say that the model for divine-human synergy is not *Verfasser-Verfasser* (pace Benoit), nor *Urheber-Verfasser* (pace Rahner), but *Urheber-Urheber*.

One possible objection to Ratzinger’s *Urheber-Urheber* model is that it seems to present inspiration as different in degree rather than in kind from other divine encounters: e.g., consolations in prayer, visions, locutions. Is inspiration simply a very intense form of mysticism? And, if such religious experiences continue, why should the canon not remain open? Ratzinger, following what he takes to be Bonaventure’s position, upholds a *qualitative* difference between Scripture and all subsequent theologizing. He insists that

the writers of Holy Scripture speak as themselves, as men, and yet, precisely in doing so, they are “theologoi”, those through whom God as subject, as the word that speaks itself, comes into history. What distinguishes Holy Scripture from all later theology is thus completely safeguarded, but, at the same time, the Bible becomes the model of all theology, and those who are bearers of it become the norm of the theologian, who accomplishes his task properly only to the extent that he makes God himself his subject.<sup>216</sup>

Ratzinger insists on the unique status of the writers of Holy Scripture, through whom God speaks as “subject.” However, our author considers any person a theologian only “*to the extent* that he makes God himself his subject,” theologians come across as lower grade of hagiographer. It would seem that God can become the subject of our language by degrees.

Ratzinger’s thoughts on this matter seem to run in different directions. On the one hand, Ratzinger upholds the uniqueness of Scripture by strongly resisting the suggestion that its

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<sup>216</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology : Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 321.

language be updated in an ongoing process.<sup>217</sup> Sacred tradition is no substitute for Scripture, but merely “interpretation ‘according to the Scriptures.’”<sup>218</sup> He grounds the permanence of Scriptures in “the concrete activity of God in this history and its historical uniqueness: the ἐφάπαξ, the ‘once only’ aspect, which is just as essential to the reality of Christian revelation as the ‘forever’.”<sup>219</sup> The limited scope of the incarnation, in other words, correlates with the limited scope of the Church’s canon.

On the other hand, Ratzinger struggles to give an account of the qualitative difference between Scripture and Creed. Ratzinger resists the movement to update hallowed creedal and dogmatic formulations, for example, no less vigorously than he resists scriptural paraphrasing.<sup>220</sup> Hence, one cannot point a difference of permanence. Moreover, he characterizes even the “proclamation of Christ himself,” the ἐφάπαξ, as “fulfillment and thus as interpretation of something, though as authoritative interpretation, of course.”<sup>221</sup> The interpreted itself turns out to be a kind of interpretation. Consequently, when it comes to distinguishing between Scripture and ecclesial dogma, Ratzinger again presents a separation of degree:

True, [the proclamation of the Church] too is not interpretation in the sense of mere exegetical interpretation, but in the spiritual authority of the Lord that is implemented in the whole of the Church’s existence . . . Yet it does remain, *far more than* the Christ-event that founded the Church, interpretation, linked with what has happened and what has been spoken.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> “Though it is not the general practice to contest dogma formally, it is usual to point out that all human speech is culturally conditioned. . . . Precisely in order to transmit the identical content, it is supposedly necessary to find constantly new ways of expressing it. This naturally raises a question about the status of Holy Scripture: supposing this theory to be true, do we have to rewrite the Bible as well? Or is it not the more correct approach to interpret it unceasingly anew—which, however, implies that we know the Scripture as it is and its inherent inexhaustibility.” See Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, 90.

<sup>218</sup> Ratzinger, *God's Word : Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 65.

<sup>219</sup> *ibid.*, 65.

<sup>220</sup> See, for instance, his opposition to Rahner’s proposal to replace creeds with contemporary *Kurzformeln* in Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology : Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 122-130.

<sup>221</sup> Ratzinger, *God's Word : Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 65.

<sup>222</sup> *ibid.*, 65. Italics mine.

Does Ratzinger have any way of distinguishing more clearly between Scripture and doctrine?  
Perhaps so, but he is hard to pin down on this point.

3. *Historical*: Ratzinger manages to incorporate historical consciousness rather seamlessly into his inspiration theory. He does so by making history a dimension of reason—by presenting intellect basically as memory. Hence, there can be no “timeless dictation theory” (*pace* Benoit) because there is no “timeless intellect” to receive such dictation. Moreover, each “hagiographer” will be marked by a particular historical tradition, not just by “historicity” as a general category.

This latter point separates Ratzinger subtly from Rahner.<sup>223</sup> The latter admittedly emphasizes history as a general category when he emphasizes God’s redemptive-historical acts of formal predefinition. For only when such an influence operates “from a point of space and time in preference to any other” does the resultant work truly become God’s own.<sup>224</sup> Rahner, however, seems very little concerned with particular historical sphere in which the inspired authors moved. We can see a different sensibility in Ratzinger, who presents Jesus as both the “inspired author” *par excellence* and as inwardly marked by the specific history and tradition of Israel. It is Israel’s history that Christ renews and universalizes. By Christ’s purifying re-reading, Israel becomes the Church, and the Old Testament becomes “inspired.” Rahner, by contrast, explains that the Old Testament is inspired by virtue of its being destined for

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<sup>223</sup> Ratzinger alleges that, in Rahner’s thought, “the role of history in the shaping of man’s being is shown to be necessary in a universal sense. However, this is not the real problem, which is, rather, that the Christian faith claims universality for a *particular* history” [Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 164].

<sup>224</sup> “A formal predefinition of the human act springing from the transcendental world, as it were, anonymously, would not constitute the result and work in a special degree really God’s own. The predefining act of God may not only support the world as a whole and its single happenings, as divine causality supports everything in its totality and each thing individually, but it must operate *from a particular point in space and time in preference to any other*” [Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible*, 55-56 fn 33]. Italics mine.

completion in the New Testament, not by virtue of its being the book of the people into which Christ was born.

4. *Communal*: Finally, Ratzinger also manages to lay out the basis for a non-competitive relationship between the three great actors in the process of inspiration: the “founder”, the community, and God. Through language and culture, the community and (*a fortiori*) the Church are always already interior to the sacred “author.” The hagiographer is an “*anima ecclesiastica*.”<sup>225</sup> In the opposite direction, the most intimate dialogue with God takes on communal and ecclesial import when expressed in language or otherwise objectified. On this basis, Ratzinger manages to present inspiration as a balanced interplay between the three interpenetrating agents mentioned above. Perhaps because theology has emphasized for so long God’s influence upon the mind of the individual authors, our author occasionally seems to slight the role of the “individual.”<sup>226</sup> Nonetheless, and with growing clarity in his later writings, Ratzinger describes inspiration as a work resting upon the aforementioned tripod.<sup>227</sup>

Again, we see obvious differences between Ratzinger and Benoit, on the one hand, and subtler differences between Ratzinger and Rahner on the other. Benoit, being more concerned to show how God acts directly and non-coercively upon the psyche of the individual author, makes little reference to the Church’s role in the process of inspiration. Both agree that the Church is intrinsic to the process of inspiration and, therefore, that the Church has a unique and

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<sup>225</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, trans. Robert Nowell (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 127.

<sup>226</sup> “It becomes ever clearer to us that inspiration is no individual-charismatic (*kein individuell-charismatischer*) process, but an ecclesial-historical process, embedded in the whole process of tradition, *Formgeschichte*, and redaction” [Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 22].

<sup>227</sup> “Once could say that the books of Scripture involve three interacting subjects. First of all, there is the individual author or group of authors to whom we owe a particular scriptural text. But these authors are not autonomous authors in the modern sense; they form part of a collective subject, the “People of God,” from within whose heart and to whom they speak. Hence this subject is actually the deeper ‘author’ of the Scriptures. And yet likewise, this people does not exist alone; rather, it is led, and spoken to, by God himself, who—through men and their humanity—is at the deepest level the one speaking” [Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, xxi].

sympathetic understanding of Scripture. They differ, however, in their manner of relating the individual and the Church. Rahner coordinates ecclesial and authorial consciousness by a sort of divine *fiat*, an act of formal predefinition arranging circumstances such that the human author freely aligns his vision with the Apostolic Church's. Ratzinger, by contrast, presents the "We" of the Church as already interior to the "I" of the individual.<sup>228</sup> Again, by his traditionary anthropology, Ratzinger can evoke a non-competitive dynamic between each agent.

It thus appears that, over the 55 years during which Ratzinger has been treating matters of Scripture and Inspiration, he has remained remarkably faithful to the fundamental intuitions discovered in Bonaventure. Moreover, by means of his traditionary anthropology, he has been able to recast inspiration as the sacred tradition of Israel-Church, and has thus managed to transpose a problematic doctrine into a key at once biblical and contemporary. Here especially, Ratzinger shows himself a master of the *ressourcement-aggiornamento* so characteristic of the twentieth century theologians.

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<sup>228</sup> Speaking of the way in which the Episcopal office is exercised only in a college, Ratzinger concludes that, "Although the Christian faith has set forth the infinite meaning of the individual, who is called to everlasting life, it is still manifest that the 'I' is ordered to an everywhere encompassing 'We' (*allenthalben umgreifendes Wir*), from which and for which it lives." See Joseph Ratzinger, *Das Neue Volk Gottes* (Dusseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1972), 57.



## Chapter 3

### Ratzinger on Inerrancy

Having surveyed Ratzinger's traditional model of inspiration, we are now in a somewhat better position to understand his understanding of biblical inerrancy. This theoretical background proves to be especially important, since Ratzinger's recasting of both inspiration and inerrancy is sufficiently radical to render certain terms nearly obsolete. "Inspiration," as we have seen, can be replaced by "tradition" almost without remainder—provided that one understands tradition Ratzinger's stipulative sense. Still, he occasionally continues to use "inspiration," especially when attempting to speak within the horizon of other theologies.

The same goes *a fortiori* for "inerrancy," which—as far as I am aware—appears nowhere in Ratzinger's considerable *oeuvre* after opening of the Second Vatican Council. In his 1962 address to the German speaking Bishops on *De Fontibus*, however, Ratzinger was still speaking within the horizon of theologians (i.e., the German speaking bishops) trained in the tradition of scholastic manuals. In his critique of *De Fontibus*, he therefore uses the constellation of classic terms, already familiar to us through the writings of Benoit: "inerrancy," "intention," and "affirmation." Nonetheless, Ratzinger uses them in a stipulative and somewhat revolutionary way—changing both the locus and object of intention. This document provides precious clues as to how Ratzinger understands both the continuity and discontinuity of his own project with the scholastic and magisterial framework. It also foreshadows the position on inerrancy that Ratzinger will develop *propria voce*.

We will present Ratzinger's constructive project in two major stages. First, we will argue that Ratzinger's traditional model of inspiration allows him to retool the notion of intention in three important ways: by identifying the People of God as an intending "subject"

internal to Holy Scripture; by calling attention to the complex layers of this corporate intentionality; and by reimagining Scripture's mode of intending Christ as its last truth.

In the second stage we will treat the question of method. How does Ratzinger discern what Scripture properly intends and what, therefore, enjoys inerrant status? There we will show Ratzinger to be an equal-opportunity “demythologizer”—one who neither automatically excludes nor automatically includes any field of knowledge—whether scientific, historical, ethical or religious—from Scripture's intentional horizon. Ratzinger instead measures every claim materially contained in Scripture against the criterion of the substance of living faith. In order to depict this process more concretely, we will examine Ratzinger's treatment of a *quaestio disputata*—the inerrancy of Scripture's claims about the Devil. We will conclude with some evaluation of Ratzinger's achievement.

#### [I] *Critique of Neo-Scholastic Inerrancy*

In a presentation delivered to the German speaking Bishops on *De Fontibus Revelationis* (1962), the draft schema for the Constitution on Divine Revelation prepared in advance of the Second Vatican Council, Ratzinger offered a sharp critique of the theory of inerrancy contained therein. His basic complaint was that it was not sufficiently supple to accommodate the findings of critical historiography. Amid the criticism, we also find the two kernels of his solution: a reframing of both authorial intention and Scripture's relationship to Truth.

#### [I.1] *Challenge of Critical Historiography*

In his evaluation of *De Fontibus*, Ratzinger expressed the fear that adopting the aforesaid schema, at least as the Preparatory Commission proposed it, could not meet the challenges posed by critical historiography. This was due in part to the brittleness of the schema's rather

undifferentiated and mechanical theory of inerrancy. When addressing “the topic of Holy Scripture’s inerrancy and historicity,” for instance, Ratzinger cautioned that

the schema speaks very sharply, as it works out this deduction: God is supreme truth and cannot err; but God dictated the Scripture; therefore, the Scripture is precisely just as free of error as is God himself - «*in qualibet re religiosa vel profana*»... Here however the dictation theory that is assumed, as just indicated, expresses no single thought that is specifically Christian.<sup>229</sup>

For Ratzinger, the schema’s lack of a truly Christian theological horizon was nowhere more evident than in its inability to cope with the evidence of history. If the “dictation theory” of inspiration were true—that is, if inspiration refers to God’s historically unmediated instrumentalization of human mental faculties—then it follows that any and all affirmations that a hagiographer makes are on a par. Any truth claim that a human author formally intends must be equally immune from error—regardless what subject they treat or in what part of Scripture they are found.<sup>230</sup> On such a supposition, one would expect to find no historical or factual errors in Scripture, and no affirmations of the Old Testament repugnant to Christian sensibilities. Nonetheless, it was clear to Ratzinger that such factual errors and problematic passages abounded. He in fact proposes a list: Mark’s confusion of the High Priest Abiathar and his father Achimelech (Mk 2:26), the historical discrepancies between Chronicles and Kings, and Daniel’s unhistorical identification of Belsazar as Nebucadnezar’s son.<sup>231</sup> According to Ratzinger, even hagiographers nod.

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<sup>229</sup> Wicks, *Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, 280.

<sup>230</sup> See my summary of the prophetic-instrumental model of inerrancy above in Ch 1, s. I.

<sup>231</sup> *ibid.*, 280. Intriguingly, Ratzinger’s list somewhat resembles the list of “errors” that the Austrian Cardinal König produced during his famous intervention from the council floor on Oct. 2, 1964. König lists, for example the misappellation in Mk 2:26 and the unhistorical claims of Daniel—though with respect to the date of Nebucadnezar’s siege of Jerusalem rather than to his paternity of Belsazar. See *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. III, pt. 3, 275. Fr. Aloys Grillmeier considered König’s the “most important contribution” to the debate on inerrancy at the Council. See Grillmeier, *The Divine Inspiration and the Interpretation of Sacred Scripture*, 205.

The problem this posed to the “dictation theorists” was clear enough: if the hagiographer sincerely meant to affirm that Belsazar was the son of Nebucadnezar, then to admit the contrary would make the Holy Spirit as much a liar as to admit that Christ was not the son of Mary. Yet, from Ratzinger’s perspective, not to concede such historical infelicities was to run the risk of stubborn fideism and to consign the Church to an intellectual ghetto.<sup>232</sup>

[I.2] *Intentionality Reconceived*

In light of both the strong magisterial affirmations of inerrancy and the ostensibly contrary evidences of critical historiography, Ratzinger proposes the officially sanctioned criteria for delimiting Scripture’s inerrant content in a somewhat novel way. He acknowledges that “according to a practically irrefutable consensus of historians there definitely are mistakes and errors in the Bible in profane matters of no relevance for what *Scripture* properly intends to affirm.”<sup>233</sup> In keeping with his neo-Scholastic contemporaries, Ratzinger uses “communicative intention” and “degree of affirmation” to qualify the scope of inerrancy.<sup>234</sup> But at the same time, he subtly transfers the locus of the intention and affirmation from the hagiographers (*pace* proponents of the prophetic-instrumental model) to Scripture itself. He elaborates,

*Scripture* is and remains inerrant and beyond doubt in everything that it properly intends to affirm, but this is not necessarily so in that which accompanies the affirmation and is not part of it. As a result, in agreement with what no. 13 says quite well, the inerrancy of Scripture has to be limited to its *vere enuntiata* [what is really affirmed]. Otherwise historical reason will be led into what is really an inescapable conflict.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Ratzinger comments retrospectively that, if *De Fontibus* had simply reiterated the prohibitions of earlier magisterial statements, this would have resulted “not in the rescue of the faith but in dooming it to sterility, by separating theology once and for all from modern science and confining it in an ivory tower where it would have gradually withered away.” See Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: New York, Paulist Press, 1966), 99.

<sup>233</sup> Wicks, *Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, 280. Italics mine.

<sup>234</sup> See my summary of Benoit’s strategies for limiting inerrancy above in Ch 1, II.1-II.3.

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.*, 280. “No. 13” here refers to the paragraph of *De Fontibus* entitled *Quomodo inerrantia diiudicanda sit*—“How inerrancy is to be discerned.” See *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. I, pt. 3, 18-19.

There is, it would seem, a basic agreement between Ratzinger and scholastic theologians that the scope of immunity from error is coterminous with the scope of intentional affirmation. The major disagreement turns on the identity of the bearer of that intention.<sup>236</sup>

[I.3] *Intention as Christologically Differentiated*

Ratzinger gives attention not only to the coherence between Scripture and modern science, but also to the problem of Scripture's internal coherence and, more specifically, to the inveterate tension between the Old and New Testaments. As Ratzinger sees it, the basic deficiency of the prophetic-instrumental model in this regard is that its leveling and de-historicizing tendencies actually problematized the inspiration of the Old Testament books "in all their parts."<sup>237</sup> No one denied that perpetual cultic commands given in Old Testament—coinciding, it would seem, with the explicit intention of the historical authors—no longer bind Christians. Yet, enshrining a "dictation" model would force the Church into dividing the Old Testament somewhat crudely into abiding and obsolete statements. Ratzinger marked this tendency in *De Fontibus* no. 15,<sup>238</sup> which taught that "the authority of the Old Testament continues in force in those matters that are related to the founding of the Christian religion." For Ratzinger, this "says both too little and too much."<sup>239</sup> It says too little because it suggests that some parts of the Old Testament are simply

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<sup>236</sup> Nor is this personification of Scripture unique to Ratzinger's earliest writings. Speaking of abiding content of the Creation account, for example, Ratzinger claims that "Scripture would not wish to inform us about how the different species of plant life gradually appeared or how the sun and the moon and the stars were established. Its purpose was ultimately to say one thing: *God* created the world." Italics original. See Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1995), 5.

<sup>237</sup> I am here supplying the phrase to which Ratzinger alludes. After listing all the books of Scripture, the Council of Trent concludes, "If ... anyone should not accept as sacred and canonical these books in their entirety and with all their parts ... let that one be anathema." See Trent, Sess. IV, Decr. 1; Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 4.

<sup>238</sup> No. 15 of *De Fontibus* was the paragraph entitled *De Auctoritate Veteris Testamenti in Ecclesia*—"On the Authority of the Old Testament in the Church." The statements to which Ratzinger alludes reads as follows: "Itaque in iis praesertim quae ad Christianae religionis fundamenta sive in verbis sive in historiae rebus, ad finem usque temporis spectant, Veteris Testamenti vis, auctoritas et emolumentum minime enervata sunt." See *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. I, pt. 3, 20.

<sup>239</sup> Wicks, *Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, 282.

consigned to the past. It says too much because it implies that some parts of the Old Testament were already “directly Christian and as such continue in force.”<sup>240</sup>

Ratzinger, for his part, argues that the “whole Old Testament ... speaks of Christ, for its intention is Christological and as such it is the basis and foundation of the Christian religion.” Nevertheless, every part of the Old Testament must undergo a “Christological transformation and it then has force not from itself but from Christ and in reference to Christ, who is the one who removes the veil that covered the face of Moses (2 Cor 3:12-18).” If the Old Testament is indeed inspired in all its parts, it is derivatively inspired rather than directly so. Here we see not so much a theory of “degrees of affirmation” (*pace* Benoit)<sup>241</sup> as a theory of “modes of affirmation”—directly and indirectly Christological. Ratzinger presents this internal, Christological normativity as essential to a genuinely Christian theory of inerrancy.

Globally speaking, Ratzinger called for a theory of inerrancy that was both historically credible and internally differentiated according to specifically Christian criteria. As he saw it in 1962, the Church needed to limit inerrancy not according to a quantitative division but according to a *tantum-quantum* model. *To the extent* that Scripture’s content pertains to the truth of Christ, *to that same extent* it is inerrant. Though this line of thought would require further development, we can already detect a basic *desideratum* as well as the faint outlines of a constructive proposal in his critique of inerrancy as treated in *De Fontibus*,

### [II] *Traditional Intentionality and Inerrancy*

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<sup>240</sup> *ibid.*, 283.

<sup>241</sup> In Benoit’s earlier work we find something analogous to a gradations of affirmation according to standing within a given book (which he still seems to envision as a monograph): “But [God] authorizes [the human author]—or rather impels him—to limit his own inquiry and subsequently his personal assent, to the degree of certitude demanded by the subject’s importance in the over-all plan of the book... The reduction of cognitive activity may reach a point where all speculative judgment is suspended.” See Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 138.

When Ratzinger undertakes to satisfy his own *desideratum*, he does so in a manner consistent with his traditional understanding of inspiration. As we shall see, his understanding of inspiration as sacred tradition provides the theoretical groundwork for 1) the transfer of the locus of intention from the historical author to Scripture as a whole; 2) his presentation of the complexity interior to that intention; and 3) his explication of the Scripture's holistic mode of intending the truth of Christ. We will present the theoretical underpinnings for Ratzinger's positive project in that order.

### [II.1] *Locus of Intention*

An immediate objection confronts Ratzinger's constructive project. Everything that follows depends on the legitimacy of the move already evident in 1962: namely, the transfer of the intention from the historical author to Scripture itself. Yet can Scripture be considered the bearer of its own intention in any meaningful way? Or is this simply a poetic dodge? From what has been in the last chapter about Ratzinger's understanding of inspiration as the textual dimension of sacred tradition, the outlines of an answer are clear.<sup>242</sup> First, the bible—considered as inert text—cannot be properly identified with revelation but only with the “material principle of revelation” (*Materialprinzip der Offenbarung*).<sup>243</sup> This follows from the fact that Ratzinger understands revelation as a “living reality that requires a living person as the locus of its presence.”<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, to this living reality mediated by Scripture, only the attitude of faith can respond adequately: “[R]evelation has only arrived where, in addition to the material assertions witnessing to it, its inner reality has itself become effective after the manner of faith.”<sup>245</sup> Finally, only the bible received in faith constitutes “Holy Scripture,” which alone is

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<sup>242</sup> For a more detailed treatment of Ratzinger's notion of Scripture as “living,” see Ch 2, ss. I and I.1.

<sup>243</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Offenbarung-Schrift-Überlieferung,” *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 67 (1958), 27.

<sup>244</sup> Ratzinger, *God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 52.

<sup>245</sup> *ibid.*, 52.

Scripture in the theological sense, that is, in the sense pertinent to issues of inerrancy. Hence, the believing subject belongs to the very definition of Holy Scripture, and Holy Scripture may be said to have an inerrant “intention” on the basis of its living subject.

In his writings after the Council, Ratzinger makes this same point through the image of Scripture’s “living voice.” In its naked verbalness, the true intention of the bible is not discernible; rather, it is analogous to an unvoiced word. Ratzinger points to the many exegetical about-faces of the last century as evidence that Scripture (*qua* text) lacks the “transparent clarity” (*durchsichtigen Klarheit*) or “*perspecuitas*” that Luther ascribed to it.<sup>246</sup> Since faith cannot stand on such unstable ground, the very nature of the word calls for the confirmation of a “living voice.”<sup>247</sup> It requires a “*viva vox*” to “**preserve its proper *perspecuitas*, its clear meaning, from the conflict of hypotheses.**”<sup>248</sup> For reasons that will become clear below, the authoritative bearer of this living voice is the Church. For now it is sufficient to mark Ratzinger’s insistence upon “muteness” of Scripture materially considered.

On the basis of this stipulative definition of *Holy* Scripture as text-plus-living-subject, Ratzinger can speak of Scripture’s intention in a fashion that is more than simply poetic. It goes without saying that such a “personification” of Scripture would be inconsistent with any model of inspiration that identified revelation too closely with the material content of the Bible (as Ratzinger considers the neo-scholastics to have done). Being formless and inanimate, texts in themselves can “speak” only in conjunction with an intending subject, much as an arrow can only “seek” what an archer first intends. In the absence of a living subject internal to Scripture, proponents of the prophetic-instrumental model had no alternative but to hold up the intention of the historical author as last court of appeals in interpretive disputes. Ratzinger, on the other

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<sup>246</sup> Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 28.

<sup>247</sup> Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, 80.

<sup>248</sup> Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith : The Church as Communion* , 35. Emphasis original.



hand, buttressed by his traditional theory of inspiration, felt little obligation to uphold the mind of the author as Scripture's highest hermeneutical tribunal.

[II.2] *Intention as Complex*

Having briefly reviewed Ratzinger's argument for the *existence* of Scripture's "living subject," it behooves us to explore the complex identity of said subject and how this identity sheds light on Scripture's complex intentionality. This will require us briefly to review Ratzinger's traditional anthropology and to show how his adoption of this model entails both an intensive and an extensive "complexification" of Scripture. Extensively, as we shall see, it implies the multiplication of Scripture's subjects; intensively, it requires a differentiation of intentional layers within the one subject that Ratzinger refers to as the People of God.

*Extensive:* The most obvious consequence of Ratzinger's traditional anthropology is the addition of a third agent, the People of God, to the two agents already affirmed in Medieval and neo-scholastic schema—namely, God and the sacred author. As Ratzinger presents it, the transcendent, the historical, and the communal all constitute inner dimensions of the human person, dimensions deeply marking his spiritual and intellectual life.<sup>249</sup> Consequently, God's word cannot truly express itself *modo humano* unless it indwells a particular communal history.<sup>250</sup> This communal history cannot in turn remain a present and vital reality unless it is passed on as tradition, that is, unless it accumulates in the memory of a single trans-historical subject: the People of God.<sup>251</sup> Ratzinger quite explicitly suggests that we do better to imagine three interlocking subjects of Scripture—the individual author, the Church, and God. Enumerating them in order of authorial "depth," he concludes,

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<sup>249</sup> See Ch 2, s. II.1.

<sup>250</sup> See Ch 2, s. II.2.

<sup>251</sup> See Ch 2, s. II.2.

One could say that the books of Scripture involve three interacting subjects. First of all, there is the individual author or group of authors to whom we owe a particular scriptural text. But these authors are not autonomous authors in the modern sense; they form part of a collective subject, the “People of God,” from within whose heart and to whom they speak. Hence this subject is actually the deeper ‘author’ of the Scriptures. And yet, likewise, this people does not exist alone; rather, it is led, and spoken to, by God himself, who—through men and their humanity—is at the deepest level the one speaking.”<sup>252</sup>

Though there are three subjects, it is evident nonetheless that the intentions of the three subjects can never ultimately clash. The coherence of Scripture’s message depends on the unity of God, who is mostly deeply the subject and the truth of Scripture. The sacred author<sup>253</sup> and the Church<sup>254</sup> are subjects of Scripture only to the extent that God has first made himself their subjects.

At the same time, this multiplication of subjects is not without consequence for our understanding of inerrancy—and this for two reasons. First, the People of God functions more deeply as the subject of Scripture than does the individual author. The words of individuals survive only if they are recognized as having import for the community. This gives the words of Scripture a plasticity of meaning, since here

the author is not simply speaking for himself on his own authority. He is speaking from the perspective of a history that sustains him and that already implicitly contains the possibilities of its future, of the further stages of its journey. This process of continually rereading and drawing out new meanings from words would not have been possible unless the words themselves were already open to it from within.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, xxi.

<sup>253</sup> “The normative theologians are the authors of Holy Scripture. The statement is valid not only with reference to the objective written document they left behind but also with reference to their manner of speaking, in which it is God himself who speaks.” See Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology : Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 321.

<sup>254</sup> Ratzinger explains that the Bible is the Church’s book, “not through a statistical accident, but because the Spirit builds the Church and thereby equally builds her central and universal self-expression, in that the Church does not express herself, but him from whom she comes. This makes it once again evident why one cannot *ultimately* understand the Bible against the Church, [why] one is still in a position to recognize so many particulars without her.” See Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 41 See also Ratzinger’s claim that “the Church is in no wise a separate subject endowed with its own subsistence. The new subject is much rather ‘Christ’ himself, and the Church is nothing but the space of this new unitary subject ...” See Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, 54.

<sup>255</sup> Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, xx.

The interplay between the different subjects of Scripture, in other words, is evident in the self-transcendent character of Scripture's language.

*Intensive:* The mention of “further stages of the journey” brings us to the second root of the complexification of Scripture's intention: the historical diversity of its subject. Though the People of God has never lost her identity—thanks to her ongoing union with Christ—she has nonetheless passed through diverse “stages” and “modes” of union with the divine subject:

[The Church] is, in a certain respect, comparable to a human being, who, by physiological and psychological norms, is but a succession of states yet who knows, for all that, that he is always himself. We must ask, then, What constitutes the Church as subject? What makes her what she is? If we recall that Paul formulated the concept of the Church as a subject that remains constant in the midst of change when he called her a “body” (a “self”), we can look to him also for the answer. From being an amorphous mass of individuals, the Church is constituted as a subject by him whom Paul names the head, namely, Christ... She exists as Church by reason of her union with Him.<sup>256</sup>

If the People of God, as the believing (or intending) subject of Scripture, can show internal diversity yet remain unified in Christ, it follows that her intentionality can also show internal diversity yet remain unified in Christ. Her affirmation of the content of Scripture varies according to the “layer” in which the content is located. This is what is meant by intensive complexity.

Concretely, Ratzinger offers four fundamental layers of Scriptural intention and interpretation, from which one can infer a tripartite division of the People of God.<sup>257</sup> Among the interpretive layers, there is first the *Old Testament theology of the Old Testament*. This is basically what “the historian ascertains within the Old Testament and which has of course already developed a number of overlapping layers even there, in which old texts are reread and reinterpreted in light of new events.” Second, there is a *New Testament theology of the Old*

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<sup>256</sup> Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology : Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, 132.

<sup>257</sup> Ratzinger also offers a more finely graduated succession of states. For further references to Ratzinger's treatment of the succession of Old Testament covenants and their relation to the New Covenant, for instance, see Hahn, *Covenant and Communion : The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, 115-136.

*Testament*. This is a “new interpretation, in light of the Christ event, that is not produced by mere historical reflection on the Old Testament alone.” Ratzinger notes that such a reinterpretation is not “completely foreign to the nature of the Old Testament ... which itself lives and grows through such reinterpretations.” Third, there is the *New Testament theology of the New Testament*, which is basically the “theology that the historian can derive as such from within the New Testament, which—until the close of the canon—“derives its structure from the same kind of growth” as the Old Testament witnessed. Finally, there is the *ecclesial theology of the New Testament*, which represents the “extra” element of ecclesial tradition, the unobjectifiable presence of Christ in the Church. This theology finds its linguistic expression in dogma, which is neither “simply identical with the inner, historically ascertainable New Testament theology of the New Testament” nor “something merely exterior to it.” Dogma simply continues along the developmental path evident within Scripture itself. In sum, Ratzinger presents the interrelation between the various intentional “layers” in a complex analogy: Old Testament : New Testament :: New Testament : Dogma.<sup>258</sup>

On the basis of these four layers, the three phases of the People of God are manifest: Old Testament Era, New Testament era, and the Church.<sup>259</sup> She knows, in other words, three modalities of being Scripture’s subject. Each historical modality corresponds to a distinct modality of the language of faith, a distinct manner of expressing the truth of Christ. Each intentional layer retains its own integrity; it is neither abrogated nor wrenched from its original meaning. Yet, each layer is correlated with the whole, and is in this way opened to future possibilities already implicit within it: “Thus every individual part derives its meaning from the

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<sup>258</sup> All citations in this paragraph are drawn from Ratzinger, *God's Word : Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 60-62.

<sup>259</sup> Ratzinger—at least in 1965—considered the decision to “create a Church rather than a kingdom” a new phase in salvation history. He traces it to the decision “in the Holy Spirit” made by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) to extend their missionary activity to the Gentiles. Hence, the beginning of the ecclesial theology of the New Testament actually preceded the close of the canon. See *ibid.*, 59-60.

whole, and the whole derives its meaning from its end—from Christ.”<sup>260</sup> This is the global hermeneutic suggested by Ratzinger’s traditional model of inspiration.

### [II.3] *Mode of Intending: Hierarchically Symphonic*

From what has been said already about the nuanced intentionality of Scripture, it is clear that the *modus significandi* of Scripture follow upon the *modus essendi* of its living subject. The one People of God has retained her identity across all her historical transformations because she has been guided by and toward the same God. In a parallel fashion, Scripture proposes itself as a hierarchically ordered whole, a totality replete with inner tensions and contrastive images.<sup>261</sup>

Ratzinger gives balanced attention to both aspects—i.e., to both the overarching unity and to the asymmetrical relations between the parts. In order to concretize this aspect of Ratzinger’s biblical theology, we will explore 1) Ratzinger’s understanding of Scripture as *symphonia*, 2) the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and 3) the relationship between the Scripture and Dogma.

*Symphonia*: Using a patristic metaphor, Ratzinger compares the truth of Scripture or, better yet, the manner in which Scripture bears witness to this truth, to a symphony.

*Symphonia* serves to express the unity of the Old and New Testaments—which is the unity of law and gospel, of prophets and apostles, but also the unity of the diverse writings of the New Testament among themselves. At issue here is the basic form of the expression of truth in the Church, a form which rests upon a structure enriched by manifold tensions. The truth of faith resonates not as a mono-phony but as sym-phony, not as homophonic, but as a polyphonic melody composed of the many apparently quite discordant strains in the contrapuntal interplay of law prophets, Gospels, and apostles.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 9.

<sup>261</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Ratzinger’s general identification of truth with the whole, see Kaes, *Theologie Im Anspruch Von Geschichte Und Wahrheit : Zur Hermeneutik Joseph Ratzingers*, 46-49.

<sup>262</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, 83-84. See also Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 41, where Ratzinger comments on the tensions between the four Gospels: “The Church was right to reject Tatian’s attempt to create a unified gospel: no such literal harmonization can be the Gospel itself. It is *as a choir of four* that the Gospel comes before the understanding of faith ...” Italics mine.

Here Ratzinger is elaborating upon the unity between the first three interpretive layers of Scripture listed above: the Old Testament theology of the Old Testament, the New Testament Theology of the New Testament, and the New Testament theology of the New Testament.

At other times Ratzinger includes the fourth layer, the ecclesial theology of the New Testament, thus adding another movement to the one biblical symphony:

It is precisely in this profusion of the forms of faith in the unity of the Old and New Testaments, of the New Testament of early Church dogma, all of these elements together and the ongoing life of faith, which increases the excitement and fecundity of inquiry. To seek the inner unity and totality of truth in the grand historical structure of faith with its abundant contrasts is more stimulating and productive than to cut knots and to assert that this unity does not exist.<sup>263</sup>

Only the attitude of faith can see the whole in this welter of tensions and contrasts.

But the reverse is also true. Only a book whose internal perspectives are partially contrastive and, for that reason, mutually corrective can really point beyond itself to the ineffable truth of faith. The deeper authority of Scripture is evident in its mode of expression. One sign of the unique depth of divine involvement in Scripture is its iconic and differentiated self-expression:

The deeper human words penetrate into the essence of reality, the more insufficient they become. All of this emerges more clearly if we turn our attention to the concrete evidence of the language of faith, which is characterized by two immediately obvious facts. First, this speech consists of images, not concepts. Second, it presents itself in a historical succession of statements.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, 96-97.

<sup>264</sup> *ibid.*, 93-94. Cf. his explanation of the similar deficiencies of dogmatic language in Ratzinger, *Das Problem Der Dogmengeschichte in Der Sicht Der Katholischen Theologie*, 25: "Every dogmatic formula inhabits a double insufficiency (*ein doppeltes Ungenügen*): on the one hand, its distance from the reality which it tries to express; on the other hand, its participation in the historically determined and historically relative world of men, who have attempted to explain their faith-perception (*Glaubenserkenntnis*) in this formula. This diminishes the total definitiveness (*Endgültigkeit*) of the formula, without removing the formula's intended reality (*gemeinten Sache*) and thereby its abiding claim—provided the formula is understood without false verbalism (*Verbalismus*), as a signpost pointing toward the thing itself, which is never exhaustively formulated in language." Cf. also Ratzinger's description of the two fold transcendence of revelation over Scripture in Ratzinger, *God's Word : Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 53.

These images realize their true expressive potential only as an ensemble: “Scripture ... never tolerates the monarchical supremacy of single image. By utilizing many images it keeps open a perspective on the Indescribable.”<sup>265</sup> Moreover, the strain of trying to reconcile the various images channels the reader toward Christ, who alone can “give back to us, renewed, the truth of the images.”<sup>266</sup> Scripture directs the reader beyond itself to Christ through the self-effacement of its contrastive yet convergent elements. This is what Ratzinger means when he calls Scripture *symphonia*.

*Old and New Testaments:* At the same, such a unitary vision becomes possible only by acknowledging the hypotaxis of the parts. Unless a “slope” of normativity is established, Old Testament, New Testament and Dogma can exhibit only the disintegrated pluralism of a heap, not the integrated pluralism of the “one living organism of the word of God.”<sup>267</sup> Why not read the New Testament in light of the Old, rather than vice-versa? Why not simply replace Scripture with the latest dogmas? Ratzinger explains the gradient of normativity as function of the relationship of the part to Christ.

The most asymmetrical ordering obtains between the Old and New Testaments. We already had a chance to preview Ratzinger’s position on the relation between the Testaments in his critique of *De Fontibus*—to which he remains true along the length of his career. Ratzinger explains that the Old Testament retains a permanent validity because Scripture can point to the living God only as a whole and through the inner dynamic of salvation history.<sup>268</sup> Consequently,

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<sup>265</sup> Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 237. See also Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 15, where he says, “In the Bible itself the images are free and they correct themselves ongoingly. In this they show, by means of a gradual and interactive process, that they are only images, which reveal something deeper and greater.”

<sup>266</sup> *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>267</sup> Wicks, *Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, 277.

<sup>268</sup> “[God] becomes visible in the mirror of “*Heilsgeschichte*”. Its stages remain in one way or another the stages of every approach (*Führung*) toward God. The Old Testament is not simply abolished, as the mere past that one

truly biblical preaching cannot simply pass over the Old Testament. Christian proclamation remains bound to the *heilgeschichtliche* pattern of Law-Gospel, and the sequence remains “irreversible” (*unumkehrbar*).<sup>269</sup> The Old Testament is ordered, in other words, to fulfillment in the New, not vice-versa. Indeed, Ratzinger holds that the Old Testament is not even God’s word as such, but only as it transcends itself in the New Testament.<sup>270</sup> Hence, Scripture reads “forwards” rather than “backwards,” and proposes the Old Testament only “with a view to Christ.”<sup>271</sup> In other words, though the Old Testament remains integral to Scripture, the New Testament—by virtue of its direct reference to Christ—is something of a *norma normans* and the Old something of a *norma normata*.

*Dogma and Scripture:* Dogma and Scripture, for their part, show a more reciprocal normativity. Ratzinger implies both sides of this reciprocity in defining dogma as nothing other than the ecclesial *interpretation* of Scripture.<sup>272</sup> On the one hand, as interpretation, dogma actualizes and clarifies Scripture. Since Scripture builds its truth upon a structure of images and narratives, its manner of expression often lacks conceptual definition. Dogma provides the necessary “interpretation, in which the polyvalent image-language of Scripture is translated into the mono-valence (*Eindeutigkeit*) of the concept.”<sup>273</sup> In this way dogma maintains Scripture as a

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preserves merely out of antiquarian interest. It remains present, though admittedly as inserted into the greater whole that has come to be through Jesus Christ.” Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 111.

<sup>269</sup> *ibid.*, 113.

<sup>270</sup> Ratzinger singles out the Tübingen theologian J. Dreys as an exemplary exegete since—besides attending to the historical and philological aspects—Dreys also affirmed “the specific relationship between the Old and New Testament, which presupposes a transcendence of meaning (*Sinnüberschritt*) in the New Testament that is not evident from the merely historical perspective.” See Joseph Ratzinger, “Anmerkungen Zur Aktualität Von Johann Sebastian Dreys Kurze Einleitung in Das Studium Der Theologie,” in *Theologie, Kirche, Katholizismus : Beiträge Zur Programmatik Der Katholischen Tübinger Schule ; Mit Reproduktion Nachdruck Der Programmschrift Johann Sebastian Dreys Von 1819 Über Das Studium Der Theologie*, ed. Michael Kessler and Max Seckler (Tübingen: Tübingen : Francke, 2003), 5.

<sup>271</sup> Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 17.

<sup>272</sup> “[W]e could probably describe ... only dogma itself as the ecclesial theology of the New Testament.” See Ratzinger, *God's Word : Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 62.

<sup>273</sup> Ratzinger, *Das Problem Der Dogmengeschichte in Der Sicht Der Katholischen Theologie*, 26. Cf. Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, 60, where our author posits that it



vital reality: “[T]he interpreted lives only through interpretation.”<sup>274</sup> In the limited respect of its clarifying and vivifying function, dogma seems to norm Scripture. This regulatory function over Scripture perhaps accounts for Ratzinger’s assertion that ecclesial theology relates to Scripture as the New Testament (*norma normans*) relates to the Old (*norma normata*).

Nonetheless, Ratzinger more often gives attention to the respects in which Scripture “outranks” dogma—namely, its inherent authority and depth of expression. Ratzinger suggests that is the very nature of the interpreted to “stand over” its interpretation,<sup>275</sup> for interpretation is always referring back to something else as its ultimate “measure.”<sup>276</sup> Additionally, since the world of concepts proves more transient and unstable than the world of primordial images (the idiom most prevalent in Scripture), there eventually comes a time when Scripture must interpret dogmatic pronouncements rather than vice-versa.<sup>277</sup> Hence, Scripture and Dogma turn out to be mutually normative. Scripture, as God’s Word, enjoys a deeper authority than dogma; yet Scripture touches the present only through dogmatic interpretation.

The most comprehensive and authoritative interpretation of Scripture will, of course, be that of its living subject—the Church. From this perspective we can see why Ratzinger locates dogma within—rather than alongside—the complex “organism of the Word of God.” Dogma cannot represent any sort of eisegetical violence against Scripture, for the “teaching office of the apostles’ successors does not represent a second authority alongside Scripture but is inwardly a

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is “apostolic authority, which interprets the word which is handed down and gives it unequivocal clarity of meaning.”

<sup>274</sup> Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 57.

<sup>275</sup> “Dogma is biblical interpretation. So there is a necessary reciprocity and hierarchical order (*Rangordnung*) between Scripture and Dogma. The interpreting does not stand over the interpreted, but under it.” See *ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>276</sup> “Dogma, as interpretation (*Auslegung*), is always to keep referring back to what is interpreted (*das Ausgelegte*), Scripture” [Ratzinger, *Das Problem Der Dogmengeschichte in Der Sicht Der Katholischen Theologie*, 28]. Again, “The forward-marching history of dogma must indeed be an ever fresh about-face toward the origin as toward a measure (*Maßstab*), according to which it itself is directed (*gerichtet wird*)” [*ibid.*, 44].

<sup>277</sup> Scripture cannot be adequately replaced by dogma, however, since the “trans-historical permanence of images (at least of the great *Ursymbole* of humanity) is greater than that of concepts.” See *ibid.*, 26-27.

part of it.”<sup>278</sup> Dogma is not a second word so much as it is a fresh voicing of the same word. We also perceive more easily why Scripture requires the Church’s “living voice.” Since Scripture is a mélange of narratives and images, it lacks the clarity that the assent of faith requires. Hence, Scripture needs “the authority of the Church that speaks out” if it is to serve as the language of faith.<sup>279</sup>

One might say, in summary, that Ratzinger’s traditional model of inerrancy both simplifies and complicates the intention of Scripture. The model simplifies Scripture’s intention because it furnishes metaphysical grounds for speaking of a single intention—that of the whole of Scripture. These grounds are nothing other than the organic interpenetration of Scripture’s three subjects—God, the People of God, the human authors—and the underlying unity of the People of God across her historical pilgrimage.<sup>280</sup> At the same time, Ratzinger’s model also “complicates” matters because it presents that Scripture’s global intention—the mystery of Christ—as a light refracted through the prism of human history into a spectrum of “successive states.” The pure light of Christ becomes visible again only if one attempts to reverse this spectrification, if one bends the various bands—Old Testament, New Testament, and Church—back toward a common center. This is accomplished by marking how, in each of her historical “phases” the one People of God “intends” and “affirms” the language of her faith in diverse yet complementary ways.

[III] *How does one discern the intention of Scripture?*

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<sup>278</sup> Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith : The Church as Communion*, 35.

<sup>279</sup> *ibid.*, 35.

<sup>280</sup> See Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology : Essays to Orient Theology in Today's Debates*, 95, where Ratzinger remarks, “If one strikes out the continuity of a subject that which organically traverses the whole of history and which remains one with itself through its transformations, nothing is left beyond contradictory speech fragments which cannot subsequently be brought into any relation.”

In view of Scripture's complex and holistic mode of intention, one begins to wonder how one might decide what belongs to Scripture's affirmation and what merely accompanies it. Ratzinger does not offer a simple answer. However, he does not propose dividing Scripture quantitatively into fallible and infallible passages, or limiting inerrancy to statements concerning faith and morals. Ratzinger instead proposes a sort of Catholic "demythologization," and provides four concrete criteria for "demythologizing" correctly. We will develop Ratzinger's thought in the order suggested above, beginning with Ratzinger's treatment of inerrancy in matters of scientific, historical, and ethico-religious matters. Second, we will introduce the version of "demythologization" that Ratzinger develops in explicit conversation with Bultmann. Finally, we will examine a *quaestio disputata* probed by Ratzinger: whether Scripture teaches inerrantly the existence of the Devil.

### [III.1] *Historical, Scientific, Ethical-Religious Claims*

On Ratzinger's view, Scripture intends to affirm its own expressions only as pointing beyond themselves, that is, only as a material witness to the single complex truth that is God's self-disclosure in Christ. This does not mean, however, that Scripture is "inspired" or "inerrant" only in matters of faith and morals.<sup>281</sup> Rather, because Christ, the incarnate *Logos*, grounds all rationality, the intention of Scripture must be said to encompass scientific, historical and religious claims—though only to the extent that each bears upon the mystery of Christ.

With respect to science and history, Ratzinger makes this point clear in his essay, "Exegesis and the Magisterium of the Church" (2003). There he affirms that the relationship between the claims of scientific reason and the claims of the Scripture "can never be settled once and for all, because the faith attested to by the Bible also involves the material world; the Bible still makes claims about his world—concerning its origin as a whole and man's origin in

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<sup>281</sup> See references in Ch 1, s. II.

particular.”<sup>282</sup> To exclude science scientific content from Scripture absolutely, in other words, is effectively to abandon a the notion of a single domain of truth and of the harmony between faith and reason.

In what is perhaps a faint allusion to the argument of *Providentissimus Deus*,<sup>283</sup> Ratzinger suggests that “something analogous can be said with respect to history” as was said with respect to natural science.<sup>284</sup> For the sake of the integrity of the Incarnation, the relevance of historical facts to faith cannot be precluded *tout court*:

The opinion that faith as such has nothing to do with historical facts and must leave their investigation to the historians in Gnosticism. It dis-incarnates the faith and turns it into a pure idea. But precisely the ontological realism of historical events is intrinsically constitutive of the faith that originates from the Bible. A God that cannot intervene in history and show himself in it is not the God of the Bible. For this reason, the reality of Jesus’ birth from the Virgin Mary, the real institution of the Last Supper by Jesus himself, his bodily Resurrection from the dead—the fact that the tomb was empty—are all an element of the faith itself that it can and must defend against supposedly better historical knowledge.<sup>285</sup>

Despite his insistence upon the fundamental historicity of the Scripture, Ratzinger does not show himself much exercised by the difficulty of harmonizing every historical detail. The presence of Christ transmitted through tradition frees the Christian from anxiety over reconstructing the

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<sup>282</sup> Ratzinger, *Exegesis and the Magisterium of the Church*, 134.

<sup>283</sup> *Providentissimus* §40 affirms in principle that Bible may speak inerrantly on scientific matters and—in an analogous way—on historical matters: “The Catholic interpreter, although he should show now that those facts of natural science that investigators affirm to be now quite certain are not contrary to the Scripture rightly explained, must nevertheless always bear in mind that much which has been held and proved as certain has afterwards been called into question and rejected ... The principles laid down here will apply to cognate sciences and especially to History.” See Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 54.

<sup>284</sup> Ratzinger, *Exegesis and the Magisterium of the Church*, 134.

<sup>285</sup> *ibid.*, 134. For Ratzinger’s approval of an “informed realism” with respect to the infancy narratives, an attitude that lies between a “naïve realism” and an “total capitulation to the thought patterns that arose from the Enlightenment,” see Joseph Ratzinger, “Preface,” in *The Truth of Christmas Beyond the Myths : The Gospels of the Infancy of Christ* (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede’s Publications, 1986), xiii. For Ratzinger’s analogous way of understanding “historicity,” see his early address in Wicks, *Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as Peritus before and during Vatican Council II*, 281. There he comments: “[I]n stressing the objective truth of the history of Jesus, it seems improper to list the infancy narrative, resurrection from the dead, and ascension beside each other on the same level.” For a more in depth discussion of the various relationships to history suggested by the nature of these events, see Ratzinger’s debate with Walter Kasper in Joseph Ratzinger, “Glaube, Geschichte, Und Philosophie,” *Hochland* 61 (1969), 539-40.

*ipsissima vox* of Jesus.<sup>286</sup> In fact, as Ratzinger sees it, tensions in the historical narratives may signal that the truth intended lies on a higher plane.<sup>287</sup>

In various other writings, Ratzinger extends this analogy even to matters of religious observance and morality. Ratzinger acknowledges, for instance, that contemporary historical awareness has rendered Scripture's authority problematic even in religious matters:

[T]he Bible, venerated by faith as the word of God, has been disclosed to us, by historical-critical scholarship, as a thoroughly human book. Not only are its literary forms those of the world that produced it, but its manner of thought, even in respect to religious topics, has been determined by the world in which it arose.<sup>288</sup>

Here the provisional status Mosaic Law serves as an obvious example.<sup>289</sup> However, Ratzinger finds even the New Testament ethical and religious directives so culture-bound as to be “purely of human right.”<sup>290</sup> As examples he cites “the stipulations of James, the veiling of women, marriage legislation of 1 Corinthians 7”—in short, *loci classici* already well known to the Fathers of Trent.<sup>291</sup> Ethical and religious teachings, it turns out, are subject to the same sort of scrutiny as history and science.

### [III.2] *Worldview and Demythologization*

In each domain, then—science, history, religion and morality—there is a similar problem of the relationship between revelation and the historically conditioned worldview by which it is

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<sup>286</sup> “Over against such fragmentary authorities (*Teilautoritäten*) the vital power of Tradition has for me an incomparably greater weight. Therefore the fight over the *ipsissima vox* has no terribly great meaning for me.” See Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 140. Cf. his statement in Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 41: “[T]he Gospel does not confront the Church as a self-enclosed *Ding-an-sich*. Herein lies the fundamental methodological error of trying to reconstruct the *ipsissima vox Jesu* as a yardstick for Church and New Testament alike.”

<sup>287</sup> Speaking of the diversity in the accounts of the Last Supper, for instance, Ratzinger suggests that “each strand selects a different reference point. In this way all the essential covenant ideas flow together in the ensemble of utterances at the Last Supper and are fused into a new unity.” See Ratzinger, *Many Religions, One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World*, 59.

<sup>288</sup> Ratzinger, *Faith and the Future*, 9.

<sup>289</sup> “Consequently the law of Moses, the rituals of purification, the regulations concerning food, and all other such things are not to be carried out by us; otherwise the biblical word would be senseless and meaningless.” See Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 16.

<sup>290</sup> Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology*, 97.

<sup>291</sup> Ratzinger, *God's Word: Scripture, Tradition, Office*, 78.

mediated. As truly—albeit not exclusively—human words, Scripture may carry a content accidental to its proper affirmation, a content that would not therefore enjoy inerrant status. Of its very nature, then Scripture calls for “demythologization.”

In an irenic manner, Ratzinger explains that “Catholic theology has always practiced the ‘demythologization’ of Scripture—that is, the spiritual translation of its social imaginary (*Bildwelt*) into the contemporary intellectual world (*Verständniswelt*) of the believer—and practices it still today to a high degree in the discrimination between expressive form and expressive content (*Aussageform und -inhalt*).”<sup>292</sup> In writings spanning the length of his career, Ratzinger evokes the relationship of between the truth and myth through various images of center and periphery. Accordingly, one must distinguish “core” (*Kern*) and “rind” (*Schale*),<sup>293</sup> “revelation” (*Offenbarung*) and “rind” (*Schale*),<sup>294</sup> the “content of the expression” (*Aussageinhalt*) and the “form of the expression” (*Aussageform*),<sup>295</sup> “faith” and “worldview” (*Weltbild*),<sup>296</sup> the “outward form of the message” and the “real message of the whole,”<sup>297</sup> the “form of portrayal” and the “content that is portrayed.”<sup>298</sup> Such discernment between intended and accidental content is a legitimate function of the Church and her theologians.

In this limited sense, Ratzinger sympathizes with Bultmann’s project of “demythologization.” What he finds objectionable is not “demythologization” *per se*, but the *criteria* by which Bultmann sifts truth from myth. Bultmann’s mistake was to deploy “criteria alien to revelation” (*Offenbarungsfremde Kriterien*), which prove to be finally reducible to the

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<sup>292</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "Zum Problem Der Entmythologisierung Des Neuen Testaments," *Religionsunterricht an Höheren Schulen* 3 (1960), 8.

<sup>293</sup> *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>294</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>295</sup> *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>296</sup> Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 228.

<sup>297</sup> Ratzinger, *Exegesis and the Magisterium of the Church*, 134.

<sup>298</sup> Ratzinger, *In the Beginning...: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 5.

criteria of Scripture's compatibility with existentialist philosophy.<sup>299</sup> The properly Catholic criterion, by contrast, is nothing other than the "living substance of the living faith of the Church."<sup>300</sup> Just as Christ alone could distinguish between divine will and human accretion in the tradition of Israel,<sup>301</sup> so also is the Church—on the basis of her union with Christ—uniquely competent to perform such a discernment:

What is revelation and what is rind (*Schale*) can never be ascertained by the individual theologian—from his own perspective—on the basis of scholarly presuppositions (*wissenschaftlicher Vorgegebenheiten*); this, in the end, only the living community of faith can decide, which—as the Body of Christ—is the abiding presence of Christ, who does not let his disposal over his work slip from his grasp.<sup>302</sup>

For Ratzinger, reliance on any criterion other than the faith of the Church inevitably ends up subjecting revelation to the limitations of human philosophy.

### [III.3] *Case Study: Galileo and the Devil*

Still, the Church's faith ordinarily presents itself as a single intuitive whole. Its internal variety and historical expansiveness make it an unwieldy instrument for winnowing Scripture's intended content from its accidental accompaniments. In his little-known essay "*Abschied vom Teufel?*" (1973), however, Ratzinger does show how the Church's substance can be analysed into more serviceable sub-criteria and then be applied to a biblical *quaestio disputata*. In "*Abschied,*" Ratzinger responds to the argument of the Tübingen *Alttestamentler* Herbert Haag that the biblical motif of the "Devil" is nothing other than the concept of "Sin" in mythological dress. Personified evil does not exist as such. Ratzinger argues not that all demythologization is illegitimate, but that Haag failed to apply the "tests" (*Maßstäbe*) appropriate to Scripture. He instead proposes a diagnostic battery of his own for identifying Scripture's true intention: 1) the

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<sup>299</sup> Ratzinger, *Zum Problem Der Entmythologisierung Des Neuen Testaments*, 10.

<sup>300</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>301</sup> See Chapter 2, s. II.2 for Ratzinger on Christ's unique ability to discern the core elements of Israel's tradition.

<sup>302</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

relationship between the two Testaments with respect to the affirmation in question, 2) the relationship of the affirmation to the inner shape of Christian existence, 3) the relationship of the affirmation to the Church, and 4) the relationship to right reason. In attempts to clarify his position through contrast, Ratzinger considers two unequally qualified candidates for demythologization: Geocentrism and the Devil. We will review how Ratzinger applies each of the four tests to these Scriptural contents.

*Old and New Testaments:* The first test, that of the relationship between the two Testaments, already begins to separate Galileo's claim that the earth revolves around the sun from Haag's claim that the Devil is but the poetic expression of human sin. In the domains of cosmogony and creation, Ratzinger observes, the scope of the biblical affirmation contracts considerably in the transition from Old to New Testament. "If one applies this test (*Maßstab*), it becomes evident that John 1:1 is the New Testament's reception of the Genesis text and that it sums up its colorful depictions in a single expression: In the beginning was the word. Everything else was thereby relegated to the world of images." Whereas biblical interest in cosmogony shows a "movement of contraction" in the transition from Old Testament to New, interest in the demonic shows a contrasting "movement of expansion." Whereas the "representation of demonic powers enters only haltingly (*zögernd*) into the Old Testament; by contrast, it achieves in the life of Jesus an unheard of vehemence, which remains valid in Paul and in the last writing of the New Testament ..." Hence, the two cases show distinct developmental trajectories, with the rising trajectory of the demonic suggesting its permanent validity.<sup>303</sup>

*Christian Existence:* The second test, that of the "relationship of an expression to the inner fullness of faith and the life of faith," yields a similar decision. Christ not only drives out

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<sup>303</sup> For all references in this paragraph, see Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 229-230.



demons, but passes this authority and mission on to his disciples, such that it now belongs to the way of discipleship. In other words, “The form of Jesus, its spiritual physiognomy, does not change, whether the sun revolves around the earth or the earth moves around the sun ... but it changes decisively, if one cuts out of it the experience of struggle against the power of the demonic kingdom.” If we can no longer affirm a reality so central to Christ’s own self-understanding and the understanding of his contemporaries, then we cannot claim to share the same faith.<sup>304</sup>

*The Church:* The third test is simply an extension from the “spiritual physiognomy” of Christ to the spiritual physiognomy of the Church, the whole Christ. Ratzinger asserts that the Eucharistic and the Baptismal liturgies belong to the Church’s “fundamental form (*Grundform*) of prayer and life.” The great doctrinal affirmations of the fourth century—the divinity of Christ, the divinity of the Spirit, and the Trinity—were decided precisely according to the consequences that their negation would have had on the language and experience of Christian worship. Ratzinger points out that St. Basil upheld the full divinity of the Holy Spirit principally on the grounds that one “must be able to take [the baptismal liturgy] at its word.” Yet a serious consideration of this same baptismal liturgy does not favor excising Satan from the content of the faith; for the “exorcism and the renunciation of the devil belong to the core event (*Kerngeschehen*) of baptism; the latter, together with profession of Jesus Christ, forms the indispensable entryway into the sacrament.” Moreover, the perennial experience of saints in every age—whose awareness of demonic activity seems to grow in direct proportion to their holiness—suggests that demons belong to the true faith of the Church and thus to the abiding

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<sup>304</sup> For all references in this paragraph, see *ibid.*, 230-231.

affirmation of Scripture. Geocentrism, by contrast, is not intimately linked to the Church's existential form.<sup>305</sup>

*Reason:* Ratzinger lists “compatibility with scholarly knowledge” as a final test in the “question of ‘worldview’” (*Frage des »Weltbildes«*). Obviously, this test long ago revealed that geocentrism falls outside the central affirmation of Scripture. Haag would argue that demons have been displaced by this standard as well, with psychology and medical science having rendered them an unnecessary hypothesis. Yet, as Ratzinger points out, only “in a world functionally considered” would demons be ruled out of court. In “pure functionalism,” moreover, “there is neither place for God nor for the human person as human person, but only for the human person as function; much more is at stake here than simply the idea of the ‘Devil.’” Any worldview incompatible with the “Devil,” in other words, is also incompatible with God and thus with “sin” in the Christian sense. Haag's approach ends not in a nuanced discrimination between the *Kern* and *Schale* of the bible, but in a wholesale rejection of *Kern* and *Schale* alike.<sup>306</sup>

While Ratzinger's ecclesial method of demythologization reveals geocentrism to belong to the *Schale* of biblical revelation, it reveals the existence of personal evil to belong to its perennially valid *Kern*. Though he is not so explicit about his criteria elsewhere, these four

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<sup>305</sup> For all references in this paragraph, see *ibid.*, 231-232. Ratzinger is reluctant to ascribe the images of “sacrifice” (*Opfer*) and “atonement” (*Sühne*) to a “later New Testament theologoumenon” (as opposed to Jesus's own self-understanding) for similar reasons: “For then logically the whole tradition of the sacrificial words of the eucharistic celebration also becomes invalid” (*hinfällig*). See Joseph Ratzinger, “Gespräch Über Jesus : Papst Benedikt XVI. Im Dialog Mit Martin Hengel, Peter Stuhlmacher Und Seinen Schülern in Castelgandolfo 2008” (Castel Gandolfo, Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 2008, 2010).

<sup>306</sup> For all references in this paragraph, see Ratzinger, *Dogma Und Verkündigung*, 232-233. For a similar rejection of functionalist criteria as representative of right reason, see Catholic Church Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, *From "Inter Insigniores" to "Ordinatio Sacerdotalis" : Documents and Commentaries*, ed. Catholic Church. Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei (Washington, D.C.: Washington, D.C. : United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 15. There Ratzinger denies that the reservation of the priesthood to men alone can be excluded from the intention of Scripture on the grounds that it is unjust or irrational: “The priesthood cannot be understood according to the criteria of functionality, decision-making power, and expediency, but only the basis of the Christological criterion which gives it its nature as a sacrament ...”

constitute the touchstones by which Ratzinger discerns the intended—and, therefore, inerrant—content of Scripture.<sup>307</sup> Ratzinger’s “Catholic” demythologization does not imply any *a priori* restriction of inerrancy to faith and morals. Naturally, scientific content will be more easily demythologized than religious or ethical content, since the latter domains are more closely connected with faith in the Incarnation. Formally, however, scientific, historical, moral, and religious contents are together lumped under the same *Frage des Weltbildes*. Calls for demythologization are countenanced in each field to the extent that such a concession proves compatible with the perennial faith of the Church. Put another way, the content of Scripture is guaranteed to be inerrant to the extent that it informs belief in any of the manifold dimensions of the mystery of Christ.

[IV] *Conclusion: Strengths, Weaknesses, Comparisons*

How then are we evaluate Ratzinger’s traditionary model of inerrancy? Its strengths are numerous and important. First, it is sufficiently nuanced to be compatible with the findings of scientific historiography. It commits the Catholic exegete neither to vindicating every doubtful historical detail of Scripture nor to supposing that the historical author did not really intend what he said—e.g., that the author of Daniel did not really intend to affirm that Belsazar was Nebucadnezar’s son.<sup>308</sup>

Second, despite the flexibility of his model of inerrancy, Ratzinger does not present Scripture as totally—or even largely—without inerrant content. Scripture is not therefore an ink

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<sup>307</sup> It is worth observing that, despite the importance he attributes to dogma and the authoritative voice of the Church elsewhere, Ratzinger uses liturgical rather than dogmatic formulae here. However, this may owe in large part to the dearth of dogmatic pronouncements on the devil’s personal existence.

<sup>308</sup> This strategy continues to have staunch proponents, and is, in a certain sense, invulnerable to charges of direct contradiction. See Harrison, *Restricted Inerrancy and the 'Hermeneutic of Discontinuity'*, 245, where Harrison argues that unhistorical references to Nebucadnezar do not threaten inerrancy because any ancient near eastern author would have employed such names primarily as “symbols and archetypes.”

blot whose shape is given by the unconscious projections of its readers.<sup>309</sup> Scripture has a definite content, and that content can be discerned in the faith of the Church and applied to *quaestiones disputatae* through the Church's living voice.

Third, Ratzinger develops the doctrine of inerrancy by modifying the underlying assumptions of the Biblical encyclicals while maintaining their explicit affirmations. He does not, for instance, divide Scripture quantitatively into inerrant and indifferent subject matter. Moreover, he builds upon the important concession of the biblical encyclicals—that the inerrancy of Scripture extends only as far as the explicit intention of its subject. He simply identifies the People of God (as opposed to the hagiographer) the primary bearer of said intention and makes the truth of Christ the chief object thereof. This, however, sets off a hermeneutical domino effect, suggesting a “symphonic” mode of expressing Christ and a complex of criteria for discerning Scripture's inerrant and abiding content.

Over and against the prophetic instrumental model, Ratzinger's traditional model would share all these advantages in common with the model of N. Lohfink. The principal advantage that Ratzinger's model has over Lohfink's is its thicker metaphysical foundation. Lohfink shifts from “inerrant authors” to “inerrant book” without identifying the subject of the book or the agent of its tradition. Similarly, Lohfink advises reading Scripture as a whole without grounding the practice in the transtemporal identity of the People of God.<sup>310</sup> Finally, Ratzinger's traditional anthropology better accounts for how the words of the historical author could be open to transcendence from the outset. Just as the human person is open to God and community

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<sup>309</sup> Though admitting the poverty of the word before the reality to which it bears witness, Ratzinger insists nevertheless that “this does not mean that the word is in itself content-less and thus abandoned to the whims of all-and-sundry.” See Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 43.

<sup>310</sup> For a fuller exposition of Lohfink's position, see Ch 1, s. IV.

“from within,” so will the inspired author’s words be open “from within” to self-transcendence and growth in meaning.

Are there weaknesses in Ratzinger’s presentation? Two perhaps suggest themselves. First, one occasionally gets the impression that Ratzinger—especially in his early writing—is not giving a nuanced presentation of the theology that he is criticizing. The neo-scholastics whom Ratzinger opposes often saw their positions as an *alternative* to mechanical “dictation theory.”<sup>311</sup> Moreover, Ratzinger does not engage the tradition of genre criticism, which was used broadly in neo-scholastic circles to account for such trivial errors of fact.<sup>312</sup> Though he may have cogent reasons for doubting the sufficiency of the generic solution, he does not divulge them.

The second point is not so much a weakness as a contingency. One’s evaluation of Ratzinger’s theory of inerrancy will depend on how one evaluates his traditional anthropology and the traditional model of inspiration that flows from it. The most questionable load-bearing pillar in Ratzinger’s edifice is surely the psychological realism with which he treats the People of God. To the extent that one can conceive of the People of God as a “corporate personality” endowed with her own intending consciousness and living voice, one will probably find Ratzinger’s solution convincing. This is simply to say that much turns on Ratzinger’s ecclesiology, the adequate treatment of which lies beyond the scope of this essay.

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<sup>311</sup> For Benoit’s treatment of the psychology of inspiration, see Chapter 1, s. I. Benoit himself protests the “hegemony of dictation theory,” which he identifies with the *res et sententia* theory of Franzelin rather than his own Thomist alternative [Synave and Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*, 116]. Another example: Fr. Sebastian Tromp, SJ, who sat on the preparatory theological commission that produced *De Fontibus*, declares in his Latin “manual” that “*dictatio mechanica*” was heretical: “*Si talis dictatio excludit opus personale auctoris sacri, est absolute theologice falsa. Homo non tantum non esset auctor, sed ne secretarius quidem; esset scribendi machina.*” See Sebastian Tromp, *De Sacrae Scripturae Inspiratione*, 6th ed. (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1962), 94.

<sup>312</sup> For Benoit’s treatment, see Chapter 1, s. II.2. Ratzinger’s list of scriptural errors could perhaps have been accommodated through genre criticism. When treating historical genres, for instance, Tromp speaks of the “genus antiquum vulgare”—in which sayings are compressed and combined, chronology is altered for psychological or logical coherence, and “*minor est diligentia et cura in accidentalibus.*” See *ibid.*, 136-137.

Nonetheless, Ratzinger’s reframing of inerrancy may stand as a lasting achievement. It constitutes one of the most metaphysically integrated and hermeneutically sophisticated attempts to describe how Scripture is true. As such, it represents a plausible mediation of the tension inherent in the formulation of inerrancy in *Dei Verbum* §11: “We must acknowledge the Books of Scripture as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error the truth that God wished to be recorded in the sacred writings for the sake of salvation.”<sup>313</sup> By putting truth and “worldview” in a *tantum-quantum* relationship, Ratzinger combines the Constitution’s (materially-quantitatively) unqualified affirmation of Scripture’s veracity with the Constitution’s affirmation of God’s salvific purpose. The canonical books are inerrant as a whole and “with all their parts,” but only to the extent that they touch upon the intention of the whole—the mystery of Christ.

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<sup>313</sup> Bechard, *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings*, 24.

## Conclusion

With his Bonaventuran-traditional-dialogical model of inspiration, Ratzinger keeps a certain theological independence vis-à-vis both Rahner's Molinist-ecclesial-predefinitive model and Benoit's Thomist-prophetic-instrumental model (and, therefore, the theological assumptions of the biblical encyclicals). Though his parting of ways with Benoit is more overt, Ratzinger also distances himself from Rahner, whom he viewed as presenting the phenomena of salvation history and inspiration too formally. By subsuming inspiration under the broader phenomenon of sacred tradition, Ratzinger attempted to describe God's authorship of Scripture as a historically broad yet concrete influence upon both charismatic individuals and the whole People of God. Yet only when this People becomes the Church, the true subject of Christ's presence, does she realize her full potential as author and interpreter of Scripture.

The application of the traditional model of inspiration to questions of biblical veracity leads to a symphonic and Christological model of inerrancy. Scripture is not inerrant in its individual statements, but only as a whole and in the tension of mutually rectifying images, perspectives, and dogmatic interpretations. Ratzinger's model of inspiration thus closely resembles N. Lohfink's critical-correlative model. Ratzinger goes beyond Lohfink's position, however, in rooting this interpretive strategy in divinely-bestowed, transhistorical unity of the People of God. Ratzinger's hermeneutical theory is consequently not simply a phenomenology of the sacred text; it rests upon deeper metaphysical properties of the People of God. One of these metaphysical properties in particular,<sup>314</sup> the subjectivity and agency of Church, contains

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<sup>314</sup> Although a thorough discussion would have carried us far afield, another element of Ratzinger's ontological (as opposed to simply phenomenological) hermeneutics is his notion of the movement of history itself. In this respect, Ratzinger seems to transpose Bonaventure's notion of time and history extra-mental realities into a Teilhardian key. For Ratzinger's appreciation of Bonaventure's notion of history, see especially his early, untranslated essays: Ratzinger, *Offenbarung-Schrift-Überlieferung*, 13-27; Joseph Ratzinger, "Der Mensch und die Zeit im Denken des Heiligen Bonaventura," in *L'Homme et son destin d'après les penseurs du Moyen Âge* (Louvain and Paris, 1960), 473-483. For his appreciation of Teilhard's transposition of this view into contemporary, evolutionary categories,

important implications for interpretation. Since the Church, whose faith remains constant through change, is even more deeply the “author” or “subject” of Scripture than the individual hagiographer, the overriding criterion for determining what Scripture properly intends becomes the living substance of the Church’s faith. Hence, in order to discover what Scripture inerrantly intends, one need only look at what the Church has always believed.

Of course, it must be admitted that Ratzinger’s repackaging of inspiration and inerrancy is not without its own limitations. It is clearly couched in the conceptuality of 20<sup>th</sup> century personalism and German Romanticism. It depends heavily upon ecclesiological premises that could scarcely be introduced—let alone defended—in this thesis. Moreover, in Ratzinger’s model, the uniqueness of Scripture (especially vis-à-vis doctrinal statements and other inspirational writings) is more difficult to explain than in Benoit’s or Rahner’s model. As we discovered, Ratzinger’s attempts to describe a qualitative difference between the language *of* God and language *about* God ultimately devolve into differences of degree, i.e., gradations in the intensity of religious experience or in the engagement of religious authority.

We are now also in a better position to understand where Ratzinger draws the line between the abiding “kernel” of the biblical encyclicals and their transient “particulars”. Within the perennial core Ratzinger would locate God’s unique guidance of the production of Scripture, which must itself be understood as inspired in all its parts and inerrant insofar as its author(s) intend. To the periphery Ratzinger would relegate the instrumental model of inspiration, with its assumptions of monographic authorship and Thomist rational psychology. Once the latter assumptions are understood to be theologically optional, then certain aspects of the teaching of the biblical magisterium on inerrancy—i.e., those dependent on said assumptions—must

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see Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, esp. 177ff For a the hermeneutical consequences of this notion, see his discussion of the distance between “schema” and “reality” in Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 41-45.



likewise be understood as optional. One need no longer defend as “adequate” to reality, at least when taken individually, the proposed and intended mental contents of every person who had a hand in Scripture’s composition. For Ratzinger, these innumerable authorial affirmations constitute only tesserae in the larger mosaic of biblical truth, whose pattern is ultimately Christological and whose demiurge is the divinely-directed Church. Ratzinger might agree with Abbot Farkasfalvy’s concise formulation: “By its inspired character each part of the Bible offers a path to Christ who is that Truth that God offered mankind for the sake of salvation.”<sup>315</sup>

In its own way, of course, Ratzinger’s traditionary model of inspiration and inerrancy necessarily falls short of the mysterious reality to which it gestures and points. Nevertheless, because it manages to combine into a single model historical plausibility, hermeneutical sophistication, metaphysical depth, and doctrinal fidelity, it may well constitute the twentieth century’s least inadequate account of inspiration and inerrancy. It stands as a solid achievement.

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<sup>315</sup> Farkasfalvy, *How to Renew the Theology of Biblical Inspiration?*, 252.

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