

## WHAT DOES THEOLOGY HAVE TO DO WITH THE BIBLE? A CALL FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Today's theological scholarship and the work it has produced have been extremely beneficial for both the academy and the church. Biblical scholars have deepened our understanding of the scriptural text itself. Systematic theologians have clarified the meaning of the text. Ethicists and homiletics have shown us how to apply the Bible's teachings in both individual and corporate settings. The church and ultimately Christ's kingdom have benefitted greatly from the work of the various fields of modern religious scholarship. Yet, while doing so much good, we believe that the diversity of academic disciplines within the broad field of "Theology" has created an unhealthy situation for religious studies.

Our concerns are focused on three issues. First, fundamental methodological differences within the disciplines, be they Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Practical Ministry, or Philosophy, have made it increasingly difficult for scholars who maintain their own discipline's specific vocabulary, scholastic canon, and set of research assumptions to carry on inter-disciplinary discussions. Second, even as we professors struggle to interact with our colleagues in other disciplines, our students are forced to engage all of our disciplines, each of which has its own unique set of rules and assumptions, in the effort to integrate religious knowledge which is based upon such disparate methodologies. Third, and most troubling, the breakdown of inter-disciplinary communication may result in the production of research which is no longer compatible with that produced by other disciplines. To put it plainly, what systematic theologians are teaching about the Bible may not correspond with what biblical scholars hold. Likewise, what the biblical scholars are teaching may run contrary to some key theological tenets.

While we feel that our educational concerns are legitimate and ought to be addressed within and by the academy, this work will focus upon a specific problem created by the breakdown of inter-disciplinary communication—that being the way the doctrine of inspiration is defined by the various disciplines.

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As evangelicals, the doctrine of inspiration is an essential belief which undergirds and substantiates our view of the Bible as authoritative. Disagreement about the fundamental nature of the doctrine is a serious issue for evangelicals—no matter what their theological discipline. In the following sections, we will demonstrate the ways that contemporary systematic theologians and biblical scholars differ in their descriptions of inspiration. We will first examine the ways systematic theologians have technically defined the doctrine. We will then examine ways that biblical scholars describe the production of the biblical text. By comparing these different approaches, the contradictory elements will be fairly clear. Our ultimate hope is that a broader definition of inspiration, which crosses disciplinary lines and incorporates the work of both biblical scholars and systematic theologians, may be reached.

## II. THEOLOGICAL DEFINITIONS OF INSPIRATION

The doctrine of inspiration is foundational for evangelicals. Descending from the Reformation tradition of *solā Scriptura*, the doctrine of inspiration not only explains the process of the writing of the Bible, but also provides the basis for viewing the Bible as authoritative and inerrant. Indeed, this is why the doctrine is generally the first proper doctrine discussed within a systematic theology text.<sup>1</sup>

Although each definition of the doctrine has subtle differences, evangelical systematic theologians are remarkably consistent when it comes to detailing the parameters of the doctrine. A brief examination of several theologians' definitions of the doctrine will demonstrate the similarities that exist.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For examples, see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Bible* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1993); and Augustus Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Boston: Judson, 1907).

<sup>2</sup> Due to space restrictions, this current work has limited its examination to seven sources. The theologians whose views are discussed here were not randomly selected, but rather were chosen either (1) because of their historical significance (Warfield, Henry, and the Chicago Statement); (2) because their texts are currently in wide use as the textbooks for basic theology courses (Grudem, Erickson, and Geisler); or (3) because their writings represent a different perspective within the evangelical spectrum of belief (Grenz). All of these writers, with the exception of Warfield and Grenz, have also served as president of the Evangelical Theological Society. These definitions will be examined in chronological order (date of publication). The following references cite the location of other definitions of inspiration: David S. Dockery and David P. Nelson, "Chapter 3: Special Revelation," in *A Theology for the Church* (ed. Daniel L. Akin; Nashville: B & H, 2007) 154. "Inspiration is thus concursive, verbal and plenary, meaning that all Scripture is inspired. We affirm verbal inspiration, meaning that the Spirit's work influences even the choice of words by the human authors, while remaining cognizant of contemporary linguistic theory that suggests that meaning is located at the sentence level and beyond"; Strong, *Systematic Theology* 196. "Inspiration is that influence of the Spirit of God upon the minds of the Scripture writers which made their writings the record of a progressive divine revelation, sufficient, when taken together and interpreted by the same Spirit who inspired them, to lead every honest inquirer to Christ and to salvation"; and Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 65. "The Holy Spirit so guided and superintended the writers of the sacred text, making use of their own unique personalities, that they wrote all that he wanted them to write, without excess or error."

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, the long-time professor of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, was an ardent defender of the truthfulness and authority of Scripture. Seeking to combat attacks upon the orthodox understanding of inspiration, Warfield provided the following oft-quoted definition of inspiration: “Inspiration is that extraordinary, supernatural influence (or, passively, the result of it,) exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God, and therefore, perfectly infallible.”<sup>3</sup> Warfield expanded upon this general understanding by appealing to the traditional beliefs of the church:

The Church, then, has held from the beginning that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will. It has always recognized that this conception of co-authorship implies that the Spirit’s superintendence extends to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship—thus securing, among other things, that entire truthfulness which is everywhere presupposed in and asserted for Scripture by the Biblical writers (inerrancy). Whatever minor variations may now and again have entered in to the mode of the statement, this has always been the core of the Church doctrine of inspiration.<sup>4</sup>

While being primarily concerned with the Holy Spirit’s work as “co-author” of the text, Warfield connected the work of the Spirit through inspiration with the human author’s “choice of words” and the preservation of those words.

Carl F. H. Henry was one of the founding fathers of the Evangelical Theological Society and a leading evangelical theologian. Henry’s definition, as expressed in his magnum opus *God, Revelation, and Authority*, is as follows:

Inspiration is a supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of their oral and written proclamation. Historical evangelical Christianity considers the Bible as the essential textbook because, in view of this quality, it in-scripturnates divinely revealed truth in verbal form.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (ed. Samuel Craig; Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948) 420.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 173.

<sup>5</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 4: *God Who Speaks and Shows* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999) 129. Henry followed this brief definition with an extended discussion of the out-working of the definition. Within that extended discussion, Henry noted: “Over against the aforementioned denials, the evangelical doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures makes the following affirmations: 1. That the text of the scripture is divinely inspired as an objective deposit of language. The attack on verbal inspiration in the orthodox sense is always an assault on the Bible as a linguistic revelatory deposit. . . . 2. The evangelical view affirms, further, that inspiration does not violate but is wholly consistent with the humanity of the prophets and apostles. The Spirit of God made full use of the human capacities of the chosen writers so that their writings reflect psychological, biographical, and even sociohistorical differences. . . . 3. It affirms also that inspiration did not put an end to the human fallibility of prophets and apostles. In their daily lives they remained fallible men prone to mistakes, and frequently made them. The doctrine of Biblical inspiration does not deny that the sacred writers had a great deal of merely human learning that was acquired within their own limited cultural milieu and whose form and content scholars in our

Henry further explained, “the text of the scripture is divinely inspired as an objective deposit of language. The attack on verbal inspiration in the orthodox sense is always an assault on the Bible as a linguistic revelatory deposit.”<sup>6</sup> Thus for Henry, the heart of inspiration is putting “divinely revealed truth in verbal form.”

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy was drafted in October 1978 by leading evangelical theologians such as Carl Henry, J. I. Packer, Francis Schaeffer, and R. C. Sproul. Although the document is focused on the truthfulness of the text, inerrancy as a doctrine is so connected to inspiration that the statement itself almost speaks more of inspiration than it does of inerrancy. Given the continued influence of the document, it only seems appropriate to examine its view of inspiration. The first part of the three-part document, the short statement, states:

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God’s witness to Himself.
2. Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises.
3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture’s divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.
5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a

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generation would rightly dispute. The men and women of the Bible shared the culture of their age. . . . 4. The evangelical view also holds that divine inspiration is limited to a small company of messengers who were divinely chosen to authoritatively communicate the Word of God to mankind. This inspiration is no universal phenomenon, nor is it necessarily or actually shared by all or most spiritually devout and obedient men of God. . . . 5. The evangelical view believes that God revealed information beyond the reach of the natural resources of all human beings, including prophets and apostles. Biblical doctrine has an authoritative basis only because of communication of specially revealed truths to chosen messengers. . . . 6. Evangelicals insist, further, that God is the ultimate author of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is the communicator of the prophetic-apostolic writings. . . . 7. The evangelical view affirms that all scripture is divinely inspired—Scripture as a whole and in all its parts. The idea of degrees of inspiration, a notion found in Philo and borrowed from Plato, has no support in the Biblical narratives. The historic evangelical insistence has been on the plenary inspiration of the Bible; in other words, that Scripture is fully inspired. . . . 8. This view that all Scripture is inspired is the historic doctrine of all denominations. All major bodies have explicitly affirmed the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible” (ibid. 144–61).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 144.

view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.<sup>7</sup>

Notice that the short statement (on inerrancy) emphasizes that "Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men," "The Holy Spirit [is] Scripture's divine Author," and Scripture is "wholly and verbally God-given." Yet the statement does not stop there. The second portion of the Chicago Statement is a series of nineteen articles of affirmation and denial. Within those articles, the statement affirms that "the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration" and "God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word."<sup>8</sup>

Wayne Grudem has produced a systematic theology text which is in heavy use as a textbook in many seminaries and divinity schools. Interestingly, Grudem chose to speak of Scripture as being "God-breathed" rather than inspired.<sup>9</sup> Yet in his discussion he noted, "The authority of Scripture means that all of the words in Scripture are God's words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God."<sup>10</sup> As he detailed the mechanism whereby "God-breathed" the text into being, Grudem stated,

In cases where the ordinary human personality and writing style of the author were prominently involved, as seems the case with the major part of Scripture, all that we are able to say is that God's providential oversight and direction of the life of each author was such that their personalities, their backgrounds and training, their abilities to evaluate events in the world around them, their

<sup>7</sup> International Conference on Biblical Inerrancy, "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman Geisler; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 494.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 495–96. Articles which directly address inspiration are: "**Article VI**- We affirm that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, down to the very words of the original, were given by divine inspiration. We deny that the inspiration of Scripture can rightly be affirmed of the whole without the parts, or of some parts but not the whole.

**Article VII**- We affirm that inspiration was the work in which God by His Spirit, through human writers, gave us His Word. The origin of Scripture is divine. The mode of divine inspiration remains largely a mystery to us. We deny that inspiration can be reduced to human insight, or to heightened states of consciousness of any kind.

**Article VIII**- We affirm that God in His Work of inspiration utilized the distinctive personalities and literary styles of the writers whom He had chosen and prepared. We deny that God, in causing these writers to use the very words that He chose, overrode their personalities.

**Article IX**- We affirm that inspiration, though not conferring omniscience, guaranteed true and trustworthy utterance on all matters of which the Biblical authors were moved to speak and write. We deny that the finitude or fallenness of these writers, by necessity or otherwise, introduced distortion or falsehood into God's Word.

**Article X**- We affirm that inspiration, strictly speaking, applies only to the autographic text of Scripture, which in the providence of God can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy. We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent that they faithfully represent the original. We deny that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant."

<sup>9</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* 75. See Grudem's footnote for his explanation of his choice of word usage.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 73.

access to historical data, their judgment with regard to the accuracy of information, and their individual circumstances when they wrote, were all exactly what God wanted them to be, so that when they actually came to the point of putting pen to paper, the words were fully their own words but also fully the words that God wanted them to write, words that God would also claim as his own.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, for Grudem, God's words were recorded at "the point of putting pen to paper."

In the same year that Grudem's work was published, the late Stanley Grenz also published a systematic theology text. While maintaining the label "evangelical," Grenz demonstrated himself to be rather progressive in some of his thoughts and teachings. Indeed, he has been included amongst a group of scholars which have been described as the "evangelical left."<sup>12</sup> Although Grenz's conservative credentials have been questioned, his definition of inspiration is similar to those put forward by more conservative scholars. Grenz defined inspiration as "that work of the Holy Spirit in influencing the authors and compilers of Scripture to produce writings which adequately reflect what God desired to communicate to us."<sup>13</sup> Grenz was hesitant to endorse any one particular model of inspiration, noting that,

Because of this variety, we ought not to apply any one theory to the entire Bible. We can offer only a broad statement as an attempt to summarize what the texts themselves suggest: By direct command, a sense of urgency, or simply a personal desire or compulsion, God's Spirit moved spiritual persons within the faith community to write or compile from dictation, experience, tradition, or wisdom those documents which reflect what God desired to have recorded in order that his purposes might be served.<sup>14</sup>

While retreating from the verbal language expressed by the other definitions, Grenz nonetheless affirmed that Scripture contained "what God desired to communicate to us" and "what God desired to have recorded."

Millard Erickson published a revised version of his heavily used systematic theology in 1998 which provided an extensive discussion of inspiration, inerrancy, and the authority of Scripture. Rather than just provide a definition of inspiration, Erickson described the mechanics and process of inspiration. He explained,

We are suggesting that what the Spirit may do is to direct the thoughts of the Scripture writer. The direction effected by the Spirit, however, is quite precise. God being omniscient, it is not gratuitous to assume that his thoughts are precise, more so than ours. Consequently, within the vocabulary of the writer, one word will most aptly communicate the thought God is conveying (although that word in itself may be inadequate). By creating the thought and stimulating the

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Millard Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). Erickson identified Stanley Grenz, Bernard Ramm, Clark Pinnock, and James McClendon as being leaders of the "evangelical left."

<sup>13</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994) 498.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 499.

understanding of the Scripture writer, the Spirit will lead him in effect to use one particular word rather than any other.<sup>15</sup>

Erickson further explained,

It is our contention here that inspiration involved God's directing the thoughts of the writers, so that they were precisely the thoughts that he wished to express. At times these thoughts were very specific; at other times they were more general. When they were more general, God wanted that particular degree of specificity recorded, and no more. At times greater specificity might have been distracting. At other times specificity was important. . . . We have concluded that inspiration was verbal, extending even to the choice of words.<sup>16</sup>

For Erickson, inspiration is a process that affects the biblical writer's thoughts but also extends to the selection of words. Erickson explained, "Although inspiration in the strict sense applies to the influence of the Holy Spirit at the actual point of writing, it presupposes a long process of God's providential working with the author. Then, at the actual point of writing, God directs the author's thinking."<sup>17</sup>

The final definition we shall examine is that of Norman Geisler as he expressed it in his four volume systematic text. Geisler noted that "Biblical inspiration is not only verbal (located in the words), but it is also plenary, meaning that it *extends to every part of the words and all they teach or imply*."<sup>18</sup> Having established the parameters of inspiration, Geisler provided his formal definition on the doctrine:

Inspiration is the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit, who through the different personalities and literary styles of the chosen human authors invested the very words of the original books of the Holy Scripture, alone and in their entirety, as the very Word of God without error in all that they teach or imply (including history and science), and the Bible is thereby the infallible rule and final authority for faith and practice of all believers.<sup>19</sup>

Thus for Geisler, inspiration is the Holy Spirit's investment of "the very words of the original books."

Having examined these seven definitions, it ought to be plainly evident that these various definitions have several elements in common. First, from a theological perspective, inspiration is more about the source, God, than the means or the product. Each of these definitions is focused upon God and his connection to the text. The exact role of the human author is minimized within the definition of the doctrine because the authoritative nature of the text lies in the divine source, not the human agent. Second, most of the definitions assume God's use of a single author. Henry's definition actually restricts inspiration to "prophets and apostles." Only Grenz's definition opens the door for inspiration to extend beyond the single writer as he mentioned "compilers

<sup>15</sup> Millard Erickson, *Theology* 240.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 242.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 243.

<sup>18</sup> Norman Geisler, *Systematic*, 236 (emphasis original).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 241.

of scripture.”<sup>20</sup> Third, for all of the writers, except for Grenz, inspiration seems to end once the texts are written. The focus of inspiration is placed upon God putting down the words he wants on the paper. Once that is completed, these writers seem to think or at least imply that God’s inspiring work is done. Thus for the theologians, inspiration is centered on the providing of thoughts and accurate recording of those thoughts in order to produce the autographs.

### III. INSPIRATION AND THE FINDINGS OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

In the previous section, we demonstrated that evangelical systematic theologians have reached a general consensus in their definitions of inspiration. Unfortunately, such a consensus does not hold across the entire field of theology as a whole. In this portion of the article, we will show that those theological definitions of inspiration are inconsistent with the way in which biblical studies scholars understand and view the process of inspiration of the text. Many biblical scholars frequently point out issues that contradict or extend the theological definitions of inspiration without any discussion of possible theological implications. Biblical scholars make assumptions about authorship which do not coalesce with the systematic theologians’ understanding of inspiration. These will be examined in the next section in hopes of illustrating places where theologians and biblical scholars need to work together to find a way forward.

1. *Evidence of secretaries.* The first issue will primarily be discussed from a NT perspective, but one should note that many OT scholars propose someone in the role of secretary for prophetic works and many other books. In the NT, Tertius is explicitly mentioned in Rom 16:22 where he sends greetings. The existence of one secretary would necessitate a need to allow for the role of secretaries when dealing with the writing of biblical texts, but scholars are generally agreed that the use of secretaries was a common occurrence and not a rarity. Ben Witherington noted, “We have reasonably clear evidence both from the personal signature remarks and from the reference to a scribe that Paul regularly used secretaries.”<sup>21</sup> Secretaries were widely used by both upper and lower classes in Paul’s day. D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo remarked regarding the use of an amanuensis, “While we have no way of knowing for sure, it seems likely that most of the New Testament letters, including, of course, those of Paul were produced in this way.”<sup>22</sup> Not naming the secretary was typical for Greco-Roman letters and the same is true for Paul. Even in Romans, Tertius was identified because he sent greetings, not because he was the secretary.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Grenz, *Community of God* 498.

<sup>21</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Paul Quest* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) 109.

<sup>22</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) 334.

<sup>23</sup> E. Randy Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) 89.

The question, then, is not the usage of secretaries in the writing of the biblical texts, but the extent of the secretary's influence. Often, scholars assume a dictatorial approach to letter-writing with a secretary. Unfortunately, the picture of dictation is typically a modern one. Scholars often envision a syllable by syllable giving of the text. Hours would be needed to dictate a text like Romans in this manner. In the biblical world, secretaries would normally write down the general ideas, make notes, and then write a draft with revision and rewriting to be done before the final copy would be sent.<sup>24</sup> Implicitly, scholars often acknowledge that secretaries had some role in choosing which words were used to record the thoughts of the author by explaining the differences in style and vocabulary from book to book with reference to the amanuensis.<sup>25</sup> Such an appeal to the secretary to explain style and language differences among one author's writings only makes sense if the secretary had some influence on the wording of the text. However, biblical scholars regularly address the role of the secretary without making reference to the doctrine of inspiration.

We are not suggesting that secretaries are authors. Clearly, the author was responsible for whatever was written even when a secretary was used. However, the modern definitions of inspiration seem to skip a step when all of the evidence is considered. Inspiration is used to refer to what happened with the author only, as if he actually penned the text in every case. To put the question succinctly, were the secretaries inspired? Even if one argued that the secretaries of the biblical texts never contributed in an authorial sense (a difficult case to make), they still recorded the words. Would it have been possible for a secretary to misunderstand the author or misspell a term? If God is preserving the actual words, inspiration has to include the secretary.

2. *Evidence of more than one author.* A common characteristic of the definitions of inspiration considered above is the assumption of one author. With the exception of Grenz, each definition seems to assume that only one person actually wrote the inspired work. Both Psalms and Proverbs are prominent examples of biblical works with more than one author. These books will be discussed more fully in a later portion of the paper dealing with collection. The authorship of individual Psalms can be questioned, but the collection is attributed to at least seven different authors from antiquity.<sup>26</sup> What is known about authorship of the individual psalms is derived primarily from the ancient titles. Hill and Walton noted that even the oldest MSS of the OT contain the titles though they are not part of the composition proper, and "[m]ost conservative interpreters treat them as accurate."<sup>27</sup>

Of course, Proverbs has a similar situation with Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel, the advisors of King Hezekiah of Judah, and a group called "the

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 53–56.

<sup>25</sup> Witherington, *Paul Quest* 110.

<sup>26</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72* (TOTC; Leicester, England: Tyndale, 1973) 33–36.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Hill and John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 342.

wise” mentioned in some way as authors of portions of the book.<sup>28</sup> Even if one were to argue that Solomon penned all the proverbs in the book, though some were authored by others, the process would still not be what is normally described in inspiration as God giving the words to the author. Scholars typically suggest one inspired author writing the canonical books rather than multiple authors contributing.

While these two OT books are commonly accepted as having more than one author involved in their composition, a number of NT works also reflect multiple authors in a different way altogether. In Randy Richards’s book *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, the issue of co-authors is prominently discussed. Richards posited that “our modern understanding of author must expand beyond just Paul alone.”<sup>29</sup> Richards argued convincingly that the modern depiction of Paul’s letter-writing is often anachronistic and inaccurate.<sup>30</sup>

In general, Paul’s letter-writing style mirrored that of his culture and context. One prominent exception to the common style of his day was the listing of co-authors. Several of Paul’s letters include other names in the epistolary prefix where the author’s name was given. Timothy is listed as a co-author in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul, Silas, and Timothy are mentioned in both the Thessalonian letters. Paul and Sosthenes are mentioned in 1 Corinthians, and Galatians refers to Paul and “all the brothers who are with me.” Although often trivialized in modern commentaries, Jerome Murphy O’Connor noted that “the naming of another person in the address was anything but a meaningless convention”<sup>31</sup> In fact, Gordon Fee in his commentary on Philippians posited that there are no known examples outside the Pauline corpus of a co-sender with the only known reference to a co-author being in Cicero.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Witherington in *The Paul Quest* referred to the rarity of epistolary co-authorship and then noted, “it was equally rare for the opening line of a letter to formally mention the name of someone who had nothing really to do with the document.”<sup>33</sup>

Many NT scholars who note that more than one author is given in the epistolary prefix quickly revert to describing Paul as the solitary author.<sup>34</sup> The presence of other names in the address is attributed to everything from Timothy as secretary, to Paul mentioning people because of their special service and familiarity with the audience.<sup>35</sup> However, even Fee who regarded

<sup>28</sup> Tremper Longman, *How to Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 159–60.

<sup>29</sup> Richards, *First-Century Letter Writing* 36.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>31</sup> Jerome Murphy O’Connor, “Co-Authorship in the Corinthian Correspondence,” *RB* 100 (1993) 564.

<sup>32</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 60.

<sup>33</sup> Witherington, *Paul Quest* 101.

<sup>34</sup> With the possible exception of the Thessalonian letters, commentaries do not typically discuss Paul’s co-senders under authorship but rather as they deal with individual passages.

<sup>35</sup> For the argument that Timothy was the secretary see Fee, *Philippians* 61. F. F. Bruce also suggested Timothy as the secretary for some of Paul’s letters. See F. F. Bruce, *Philippians* (NIBC 11; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989) 25. For the argument that some were mentioned because of their relationship to the audience, see Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 44.

Timothy as the secretary for some of Paul's letters allowed that he was "present to offer reminders and/or corrections as the need may arise."<sup>36</sup> The issue of secretary has been discussed already, but corrections and reminders by secretaries could certainly be included in authorship.

In some instances, scholars take co-authorship seriously when another individual is listed with Paul. Biblical scholars often refer to more than one author in reference to the Thessalonian letters where Paul used first person plural pronouns frequently. Commenting on the Thessalonian letters, F. F. Bruce wrote, "But while Paul was the senior partner, the inclusion of the other two names need not be a matter of courtesy only: both Silvanus and Timothy, and especially Silvanus, may have participated responsibly in the composition of the letter."<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Michael Gorman in his theological introduction to Paul's letters remarked with regard to 1 Thessalonians, "the use of first person plural language throughout most of the letter indicates the ongoing concern and involvement of Silvanus and Timothy as Paul's esteemed colleagues. The presence of their names is not merely a rhetorical device."<sup>38</sup> The issue of co-authorship is certainly not a settled one in biblical studies, but contrary to the pattern of letter-writing in his time, Paul frequently listed some of his companions in the position where authors were typically listed. Witherington suggested that Paul's letters are group communications.<sup>39</sup> Richards's work paints a picture of Paul and his companions working together over several months and several revisions to produce the biblical text and argues that "our understanding of inspiration needs to incorporate letter-writing techniques of the first century."<sup>40</sup>

Not only are not all of the books of the Bible written by "apostles or prophets," but some of the books of the Bible were apparently written by more than one person.<sup>41</sup> Few of the scholars who discuss multiple authors deal with the related issue of inspiration. (Richards is a notable exception.) Clearly our theological definitions of inspiration need to be revised based upon the biblical evidence, and biblical scholars need to seek to relate the evidence to current theological definitions.

*3. Evidence of collection.* Although Grenz mentioned "compilers," none of the definitions mentioned previously consider the impact of collection when discussing inspiration. By "collection" we mean the gathering together of material by someone other than the writer or writers for the purpose of publication. Two prominent examples of collection exist in the OT: Psalms and Proverbs. Peter Craigie wrote the Psalms commentary for the Word volumes. In the introduction, he compared the Psalms to the collection of a modern hymn book. The text functions as an anthology: "It contains the compositions of many poets and singers whose works have been brought together into a

<sup>36</sup> Fee, *Philippians* 61.

<sup>37</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (WBC 45; Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 6.

<sup>38</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 152.

<sup>39</sup> Witherington, *Paul Quest* 107.

<sup>40</sup> Richards, *First-Century Letter Writing* 226.

<sup>41</sup> See the definition by Carl F. H. Henry cited above.

single volume, namely the Book of Psalms as it now stands."<sup>42</sup> Craigie follows the general consensus of OT scholars who suggest the process involved the writing of a single psalm eventually collected with other psalms. These collections were then joined together.<sup>43</sup> William Lasor, David Hubbard, and Frederic Bush in their OT survey asserted that "[b]ehind the editorial division of books there lies a process of historical development involving the combination of different collections of psalms."<sup>44</sup> Another much-used OT Survey book is that by Andrew Hill and John Walton. In reference to Psalms, Walton remarked, "we know that . . . the editor (the person or persons responsible for collecting and organizing the psalms) is to be differentiated from the author (the composer of individual psalms)."<sup>45</sup> Walton used the terms "author" and "editor" separately to distinguish the two functions. In addition, like many scholars, he encouraged examining the "seam" Psalms (those added to the collections) to identify the editor's purpose.<sup>46</sup> There seems to be little question among OT scholars that the Book of Psalms was collected over a period of years (many suggest over centuries) by someone other than the original writer(s).<sup>47</sup>

One example of collection should suffice to illustrate the issue, but Proverbs will be examined briefly as well. Scholars are agreed that the canonical version of Proverbs was written over a period of time and edited later. Lasor, Hubbard, and Bush remarked, "Most likely chs. 10–29 were edited during Hezekiah's time and the introductory and concluding chapters were added during the two following centuries. The fifth century is a reasonable date for the final editing, although most of the contents are much earlier, with most individual proverbs and even longer speeches stemming from long before the Exile."<sup>48</sup> Tremper Longman in his commentary on Proverbs stated, "The exact date of this final editing is not known."<sup>49</sup> Virtually no one argues that Proverbs was unedited. Even if one were to argue that the collector is in fact one of the authors of Proverbs, the process involves more than one person writing a text at a particular point in time, which is what the typical description of inspiration implies. Unfortunately, biblical scholars rarely relate this issue of collection to inspiration at all. Instead, they discuss the biblical evidence without referring to any possible implications for inspiration.

The problem of collection for the definitions of inspiration given earlier should be apparent, but a few comments may be helpful. Most definitions of inspiration focus on an individual writing an individual text. How does this

<sup>42</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (WBC 19; Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 27–28.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> William Lasor, David Hubbard, and Frederic Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 431.

<sup>45</sup> Hill and Walton, *Survey* 341.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> See Tremper Longman, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988) 42–43 as an example.

<sup>48</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Survey* 470.

<sup>49</sup> Longman, *Proverbs* 161.

even relate to the canonical Psalms or Proverbs? While one could hold to the traditional understanding of inspiration if the individual writers were inspired at the time of writing, and the collector merely recognized inspiration, at what point would these collections be inspired, at every point along the way, or only as they were finished? Such a theory would allow for the material in Psalms and Proverbs to be inspired, but it does not account for the order of each of these works as inspired. Yet the order (i.e. context), especially in Proverbs, is often used to help interpret the text. If we place inspiration solely at the time of the writer, then in what sense is God controlling the resultant text that may take years to take shape? In the same way, if it is the final collection that is inspired, how can the person deciding which texts are included and in what order they should be included not be considered inspired in some sense? Of course, one of the theological issues that will need to be addressed if scholars, biblical and theological, move in the direction of referring to collectors as inspired would be the issue of canonization and inspiration. If one allows for the collection process to be considered inspired, it could lead toward canonization and inspiration being grouped together in some ways.

4. *Evidence of revision.* Finally, a thorough examination of the theological definitions of inspiration reveal that no room is left for possible changes to the text after it leaves the author's hand. Since what the author "writes" is inspired, changes after it leaves his hand may not be considered inspired. In fact, changes of what was considered inspired would have to constitute a moving away from inspiration. However, biblical scholars have suggested revisions in a number of OT and NT books including the Corinthian correspondence, Philippians, Amos, and others. If these revisions are found in the earliest texts, in what sense are they to be considered inspired? We will consider two widely accepted examples of possible revision to illustrate the problem.

Scholars have differed in their understanding of the authorship of the Pentateuch. Of importance for this article, most conservative scholars holding to Mosaic authorship acknowledge probable revision in Deuteronomy 34. In fact, most OT scholars point to the narration of Moses' death, burial, and final tribute to his ministry in Deut 34:1–12 as an "obvious post-Mosaic addition."<sup>50</sup> For example, Hill and Walton concluded regarding Deuteronomy, "We see no reason to deny that the book is indeed an accurate record of the words of Moses. It is not necessary that Moses personally committed them to writing, but the nature of the book and its unity suggest that it was written down quite close to the time when the speeches were given. A few sections, such as chapter 34, might be better understood as having been appended at a later time."<sup>51</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, and Bush suggested that much of the book comes

<sup>50</sup> Michael A. Grisanti, "Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the OT Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture," *JETS* 44 (2001) 583.

<sup>51</sup> Hill and Walton, *Survey* 132.

from the time of Moses but referred to “apparently late glosses” and material in the final chapters being added.<sup>52</sup> One could conceivably argue that Moses wrote about his own death and burial in the final chapter of Deuteronomy, but few scholars do so. Thus, if one takes Mosaic authorship seriously for Deuteronomy, revision must be considered in discussing authorship. Conservative OT scholars typically refer to Mosaic authorship and note probable revisions without noting any issues with the doctrine of inspiration.

Another likely example of revision is the Gospel of John. Even if one does not accept Raymond Brown’s intricate description of circumstances and community surrounding the Gospel’s origins, there is at least a good possibility of some revision in this Gospel. John 21:22–23 refers to the rumor about the beloved disciple that he would never die. Then verse 24 states, “This is the disciple testifying to these things and who wrote them down, and we know that his testimony is true.”<sup>53</sup> One common way to understand this passage is to suggest that John’s disciples or some other revisers are the “we” who know that the beloved disciple’s testimony is true and have added the last few verses to this Gospel. Gerald Borchert in the *New American Commentary* stated, “Whereas it is John ‘who stands behind the Gospel tradition,’ the Gospel itself suggests that there was more than one mind and one hand at work in bringing the work to its final form.”<sup>54</sup> Thus if one accepts Johannine authorship on the Gospel and John as the beloved disciple, the work may have been revised after his death. Unfortunately, this type of revision is not allowed for in the standard definitions of inspiration.

We do not have space to examine all the possible examples, but Michael Grisanti in his December 2001 *JETS* article identified several later revisions of geographical names in the OT.<sup>55</sup> Ronald Youngblood in his commentary on Genesis actually related the issue of later revisions to the doctrine of inspiration. He accepted that Genesis has a number of later editorial touches and then concluded,

Our doctrine of inspiration is not affected at all by such observations. The same God who inspired the original author (or authors, in the case of a book like Proverbs) of an OT book also inspired its compilers and editors (if any). The final product, the completed Word of God is just as inspired and infallible and authoritative as each individual word and verse and chapter and book that entered into its compilation.<sup>56</sup>

Youngblood’s comments are a perfect illustration of the problem. He recognized the possible issues that later revisions raise but had no problem considering the revisers inspired. Of course, there is no room for editorial touches in the traditional theories of inspiration.

We doubt that many biblical scholars would argue that none of the canonical books were revised after they left the hand of the author. Bruce Waltke

<sup>52</sup> Lasor, Hubbard, and Bush, *Survey* 116.

<sup>53</sup> Translation by the author.

<sup>54</sup> Gerald Borchert, *John 1–11* (NAC 25a; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996) 89.

<sup>55</sup> Grisanti, “Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the Old Testament Canon” 577–98.

<sup>56</sup> Ronald Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 241.

represented the thoughts of many biblical scholars when he suggested “books of the Bible seem to have gone through an editorial revision after coming from the mouth of an inspired spokesman.”<sup>57</sup> If the evidence points to possible revision, in what sense should the revisers be considered inspired? The current definitions of inspiration do not allow for the original editions of canonical books to be edited after they leave the author’s hand. At the same time, biblical scholars frequently assume revision when referring to the text without relating the evidence to the traditional understandings of inspiration.

The evidence of collection, revision, co-authorship, and secretaries all raise possible problems when considered alongside the traditional definitions of inspiration. Biblical scholars often note these issues without relating their findings to inspiration. More examples could be given, but the issue is clear. The traditional definitions of inspiration do not account for all the types of material found in the biblical texts.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

And so we see the problem. The definitions of inspiration drafted by systematic theologians clearly do not address the entire process as it is acknowledged and described by the biblical studies scholars. Even though the concepts are well known, the issues of collection, revision, multiple authorship, and the use of secretaries have no place within our current definitional understandings of inspiration. Similarly, biblical scholars are making affirmations about the formation of the biblical text without considering the theological implications or possible contradictions inherent in those affirmations. Indeed, there seems to be a disconnect on the part of biblical scholars for how these textual theories relate to the theological concept of the original autographs.

One obvious need that can be identified from the previous examples is for scholars to seek to account for the wide range of material represented in the Bible when describing inspiration. While one can properly describe elements of the Bible as having been written by one man with little or no revision or collection needed, clearly other portions of the Bible will not fit into this paradigm. A careful consideration of the complexity of the biblical texts will guard scholars from making statements about inspiration that simply are not true for all of the Bible.

The most important implication from this article is that the traditional definitions of inspiration need to be expanded in order to account for issues such as collection, revision, and multiple authorship. While the traditional understandings of inspiration with their emphasis on the authors are helpful and theologically correct, the various genres and content of the biblical text require a broader view of this important issue. Perhaps a larger stress on the process rather than just the writer would provide an avenue for going forward.

<sup>57</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, “Historical Grammatical Problems” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (ed. E. Radmacher and R. Preus; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 78.