

Inspiration, Authority and Revelation of the Bible

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The Bible remains a very special and unique volume, written and compiled over a spread period of about 1,500 years by nearly forty different authors dispersed in different locations but amazingly telling the same story about and from God. The Bible (or *Biblia* in Greek literary meaning “books”) stands unique as a Library canon.

Their message (i.e. the books) admittedly has different slants or focus but never once contradicting each other. This fact, in itself, is an amazing occurrence given the remote probability of authoring a contradiction-free corpus, given the progressive nature of God's revelation until the canonization of scripture. The Bible is inspired and therefore inerrant, trust worthy, sufficient and reliable. It is the authoritative special revelation of God given to men by which they may be saved. Furthermore, the Bible reveals the will of God, of course in addition to creation and how it ought to be understood or interpreted. This is the Bible, Old and New Testament as one unit by which countless people have been led to eternal life. Interestingly, the interpretation and view of the scriptures is varied even among the children of God, on occasion arriving at different conclusions.

This affects their world view (or vice versa), reaction to the world or self-exertion as it were. The nature and inherent authority of the Holy scriptures undergirds all that has been said thus far. It is therefore prudent to briefly survey the biblical origin landscape as encapsulated in revelation, inspiration and authority of scripture. To achieve our objective, this treatise is broken down into several sub-heads that should highlight important issues addressed in this paper.

What Revelation is

“Revelation” has to do with how God has made Himself known to his creation using the ordained means. In this case, reference is made to the Holy Scriptures. The ‘How’, ‘Where’, ‘When’ or whether of revelation, let alone inspiration are issues that have engaged theologians and thinkers for many generations. Early authors of scripture did not distinctly treat the revelation topic and thus it is a subject that was not very fine or precisely defined. Its precise expression in fact came as a consequence of discussion, much like Paul’s treatment of Christology.

Take for instance the apostle Peter or Paul, they do not discuss how or why revelation is but simply state the fact, giving the impression that either this was a commonly held-taken for granted truth or had already been discussed elsewhere (i.e. orally or other lost unknown writings) not preserved for present generations to read. We may safely assume that it was an assumed truth. Later thinkers like Thomas Aquinas attempted to discuss this in their writings to some considerable depth but even they did not agree in all aspects. Future generations would grapple with to refine this point arriving at some sense of idea towards what the Apostles actually meant to communicate. In a word, it can be said that revelation is God revealing Himself, His attributes and nature in His word as well as in creation. More specifically (but used in generic sense as well), “revelation” takes place in following ways:

I. Human innovation and speculation: These are efforts made by human beings to get to the divine using various methods that include, rational thinking, reason, magic, ritualism, astrology, pantheism or shrine worship. (Acts 17:26-30).

II. General (natural) revelation: God has revealed Himself in the book of nature (i.e. creation). The trees, grass, animals and things on the earth or the universe at large point to a greater being, the designer that put them together in perfect symmetry/ harmony. This book of nature offers indisputable evidence of the existence of God despite opposing views (Romans 1:18-20). God cannot be fully known through this kind of revelation although points to His existence.

III. Special revelation: God has revealed Himself in a specific way in the Bible. The Bible sets forth the creator who originated all things into motion and daily sustains them through divine providence. Unlike the deistic idol, Yahweh is intimately connected to the affairs of the world and human beings in particular. He is both transcendent and immanent at the same time. Though He is sovereign, thrice holy, omniscient and omnipotent, God has chosen to reveal Himself in the Bible. This self revelation is far more than just basic knowledge about His existence as general revelation would point out but it is a knowledge that leads to salvation, yea, a living real relationship between the mortal and the divine. This is made possible through the person of His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus, the God-man, took on flesh and was born among humans, lived and died on the cross to save the world. In his death, he was both the priest and sacrifice. A number of views have been advanced with respect to special revelation such as 1. God conversing directly with an individual 2. God revealing Himself through other sacred writings from other faiths (pluralistic society) 3. God revealing himself through scripture and the church organisation (as held by the Roman Catholic) 4. Revelation through other means apart from the Bible or 5. Exclusively through His word. Clearly, God has revealed Himself exclusively through the Bible as advanced above.

Any other option would suggest that Bible is not true or insufficiently complete. That cannot be.

The Bible makes serious statements both in the Old and New Testaments that ONLY what has been revealed in entire canonized scripture is to be considered the word of God. Anything outside that is not to be obeyed or revered. Jesus and others before him attested to the law and the prophets as the only revelation from God (Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 7:12; 22:40). The Apostles and others maintained this position and thus urged all men to repent and believe on the lord Jesus as God's appointed means to salvation (Acts 2:37-38; 4:12; 16:31). It is equally important to observe that God initially more or less exclusively revealed His word through Jewish prophets and only when the New Covenant arrived did God use other believers within the said church. This explains why most of the Apostles, if not all were of Jewish decent. When the canon of scripture was closed, no other biblical revelation was accepted, although some still claim fresh revelation today. At the present time, many things seem curiously attractive in or from the pagan religions who do not know God. The striking similarities with the Bible, the quest to be all embracing and harmonious often plagues many well meaning Christians into believing that correct doctrine does not really matter but harmony and peace (Pollitt 1996). They naively assert that the Bible is one of the many ways God has revealed Himself and as such, all should accept and respect other religions on equal footing. But that cannot be because the God of the Bible is a jealous God not sharing His glory with any other (Exodus 20: 5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; 6:15; 32:21 etc.). For instance, in the Pentateuch alone, God warns the children of Israel over 400 times to desist from adopting or mingling with the pagan tribes lest they be defiled consequently soiling their pure religion. Intermarriages are also expressly forbidden in a bid to maintain Hebrew purity and distinctness (Deuteronomy 7:3). This is included in God's progressive self-revelation to mankind.

What inspiration is

From ancient times, humans have sought a way to know God. They have done it through a variety of ways but all of them have failed to know the living God (Acts 17:27-30). Every effort has ended up in miserable failure and a mere groping in the darkness. The aching void still needs to be filled. The God of the Bible cannot be known unless He reveals Himself to someone. God has revealed Himself in at least two ways namely Special revelation in the Bible and General revelation through creation. These are the ways God can be known. But a third way may be added in which human beings have attempted to know God, by human innovation and speculation as earlier hinted at in this write up.

Having said the above, what exactly is inspiration, its nature and extent? Theologically speaking, inspiration is the way in which God influenced the authors of scripture to record and pen down the inerrant word of God. The

scriptures are God-breathed in that sense (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). While fully and volitionally using their mental faculties, these writers wrote as they thought best, their convictions and what they felt God had impressed on their minds. Thus these wrote in different styles, from different perspectives or varied motives but miraculously were guided by the Holy Spirit to write exactly what God wanted them to communicate. In discussing inspiration, inerrancy is implied because although God allowed them leverage to write as they thought best, they were led to write only the truth and nothing but the truth as we have it today.

Furthermore, inspiration extended to the choice of words, actual words themselves, ideas and message, though some modern thinkers object to this assertion preferring a limited inspiration or not at all. This (extent of inspiration to actual words, ideas and messages) implies that the writings in the original Greek language manuscripts or monographs (in the case of the New Testament) were preserved from error, trustworthy and therefore inspired but the later translations introduced typographical errors though the sense remained the same in the main. Some however hold different views such as only parts of the scripture being inspired and not the whole. Others however, (e.g. Karl Barth) hold that a particular scripture only becomes inspired when it comes alive in the reader's heart or mind. This is the neo-orthodox position. Like revelation, inspiration is not explained in scripture but assumed, taken for granted. From the same scriptures however, the inspired writers declare that ALL scripture is inspired by God or given by inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16) as well as declare that writings of the apostles are regarded scripture and therefore inspired (2 Peter 3:16ff). Finally (under this head), the apostle Peter speaking retrospectively states that scripture has a divine origin as people are led towards writing the word of God (2 Peter 1:21). In stating that scripture never had its origin in men's ideas, Peter dispels any notions suggesting that scripture is a mixture of man's innovation or is given mechanically (i.e. people used as mindless trance-like robots as in some human generated religions). Rather inspiration is verbal and yet plenary at the same time. EJ Young and Vos have very helpful insights on both plenary and verbal inspiration worth gleaning from.

Inspiration is a very wide subject and may not admittedly be exhausted in this short and small campus. Suffice it to say that if the scriptures are inspired, then they are inerrant, divine in origin and inherently authoritative.

What Scripture Authority is

Authority implies possessing an intrinsic compelling power or position which subjects under its influence cannot ignore or reject. They of necessity bow the knee and obey the commands that emanates from that power source. Further, authority may also imply that relevant statutes enacted by men or decreed by God empower that particular entity to be venerated. The scriptures can be said to be authoritative in both senses except that this authority comes from God rather

than men. In their very nature, they wield indisputable power and force to which the saint gladly bows or submits. The Old and New Testaments complement each other, the latter being the continuation for the former. Both are inspired but bind the Christian differently because the New is the fulfilment of the Old Testament.

The scriptures are the word of God from beginning to end. Both the ideas and the actual words are inspired of God, without error, sufficient and necessary for life and godliness. If this is the case, then scriptures possess an intrinsic authority for life and godliness. This extends to all parts of life, practice, thought and ideas. God has spoken and those belonging to Him must respond accepting His word without question. Those claiming to be saints and yet deny the inspiration or authority of the word of God, in my view, are mere masqueraders and not true children of God no matter how well meaning or schooled. They claim to be 'angels of light' when in fact they are children of darkness, no matter how well versed in scripture or public influence they may wield. In short, the Christian accepts and reads accepting the whole Bible as inspired, not parts of it as is occasionally but increasingly commonly evident in these latter degenerate days.

Sadly, the postmodern mind holds a contra opinion about the Bible to what has been advanced in this paper. Tragically this wind has even infiltrated even the church of Jesus Christ. The postmodern mind holds and believes in relativism or flexibility (Raschke 2004; Grenz 1996; Pollitt 1996; House 2020; Chalk 2013; Dockery & Thornburg 2002; Craig 1994). Everything is fluid. Absolutes are abhorred and opposed in the strongest terms. It is therefore hardly surprising when such minded people regard and treat the Bible as a mere guide that is not binding at all. It is treated as a book full of clever humanly generated opinions, yea, wise sayings from which a person can pick and choose what to believe or hold. Depending on what is preferred, desirable and palatable, they pick and choose what they want with no obligation to obey the whole of scripture as the love letter from God. The liberal theologians and atheists clearly fit this profile with the latter not having any reverence or recognition of the authority enshrined in the scriptures. Authors like Carl Raschke (2004) and Stanley J Grenz (1996), probably well meaning Evangelicals, travel on a perilous lane having warmed up to Postmodernism as evidenced in their writings. Granted, not all is absolutely bad or evil with Postmodernism but we need to jealously guard against this insidious underlying philosophy subtly nibbling away at the precious Scriptures. We may not perceive the incipient damage now but in the distant future.

Interpretation of the Bible

Although today believers assume that scripture should be interpreted as literal as possible, in the light of other scripture (of course bearing in mind genre considerations), it was not always so. Historically, different approaches were used such as the allegorical and poetic approaches used earlier on through

Philosophical means or reason (Riches 2000). The Reformers introduced the literal interpretation and reading of scripture by rejecting the allegorical approach remaining as true to the text as possible. Thus, the Reformers enthroned the scriptures again allowing scripture to speak while they listened. Authorial intent was their primary goal considering scripture as authoritative, inspired, precise, infallible, non-contradictory, trust worthy and inerrant. The “scientific hermeneutic” insisted that scripture interpreted scripture as there was insistence on contextual interpretation in the light of other scripture. Today there is a relatively harmonised scripture interpretation approach. Blomberg, Klein and Hubbard (2017) have done the Church great service in the and mark work *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, a worthwhile perusal.

Conclusion

It is evident that the Bible has had a long and winding development history. It remains a unique volume with an interesting history. Though the finer points remain unresolved the saint rejoices in possessing a complete final revelation in one volume. The ‘human-agent’ written Bible is inspired, true and therefore authoritative. The Christian does well to heed the voice from the sacred page.

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