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THEOLOGY OF INCARNATIONAL BIBLE INSPIRATION

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ABSTRACT

The construction of biblical texts runs through the discussion about the incarnation by divine inspiration in the construction of texts. Thus, this dialogue involves studies of literary theory, as well as a philosophical debate about the problem of authorship and the Theology of Inspiration of the Bible, as a collection of books that count on the divine and human presence. This human and divine brought together make it possible to deal with the limitations of language, as well as the analysis of symbolic elements, meanings and other components proper to literary texts. At the same time, it is necessary to understand the limits and the interaction between God and the inspired writers who created the books that make up the Bible.

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the main book of the Christian religion. Denominated by various names such as God's Word, Holy Book and Holy Scripture, they all point to the supernatural aspect involved in the process of making its contents. But who is the author of the Bible anyway? God, men, or both? In an attempt to provide answers to this question, several theories involving the concept of Revelation-Inspiration arise within theology. Some emphasize the human aspect, denying or diminishing divine action, others emphasize the divine aspect, nullifying or rejecting the role of the human author in the process. Michel Foucault analyzes that a work can supplant its author, because, although its personality marks are inscribed in the book, when entering into dialogue with social mediators, such as teachers and / or research or even with readers, it can gain another meaning than intended by the author. The text would have, therefore, autonomy, but at the same time, bearing the discursive marks of its authors. The author questions that when a book carries the marks of a sacred text, written or

inspired by a divine being, its analysis becomes more complex. When we refer to the biblical text, we can then discuss with Michel Foucault, about the problem of authorship of the Bible, as it is a sacred text, seen by Christians as of divine authorship, but written by humans. Would the text carry, therefore, as discursive marks of God or his human writer? Where would be the human presence and its difference to the divine manifestation in the text? Using Foucault's logic, a portrayed personality would be the divine one crossed by the marks of the human culture and discursive construction. Caughie (2005) in dialogues with Abrams' studies argues that texts, especially those that go through literary constructions, bring the personality of the authors printed on their pages, as an intrinsic element that composes them. Biblical texts are marked by a literariness in their composition, as stated by Magalhães (2008), which brings the complexity of understanding the limits between the divine character and as marks of the personality and culture of its human writer in the text. Therefore, in the present article we take on the challenge of seeking an understanding of the principle that considers the

Bible, as a text of divine authorship, acting by inspiration on humans. In this sense, a theory to analyze the biblical text places before us the difficulties in understanding the boundaries and intersections between the human writer and the divine author in the sense of analyzing ourselves as marks of the authorship personality. However, it is possible to find a middle ground in which the human and the divine can be put together. Such approach starts from the same presuppositions present in the ministry of the incarnation of Jesus, which was a fullness man and fully God. From this perspective, entitled Incarnational Bible Inspiration, Jesus Christ and the Holy Bible would be the two forms of Special Revelation in which the Creator uses the human to show Himself to His creatures.

Human authors of the Bible: The Bible, as a work produced within human society, finds its first author in humanity. Several authors of the biblical books refer to themselves as authors. In many books, the name of the author is mentioned in the introduction to the work: “The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah.” (Ne 1:1), “the words of Jeremiah” (Jer. 1:1), “the proverbs of Solomon” (Prov. 1:1), “The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa” (Am 1:1). In the New Testament, thirteen letters explicitly mention Paul as their author. And others also mention the name of their author (James, Peter, Jude, John). Some biblical authors used assistants to write their works. As in the case of the letter to the Romans, in which the writer mentions his participation: “I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord” (Ro 16:22). The assistants, also known as *amanuensis*, were people “employed to copy manuscripts or write from dictation” (Brand, 2003, p. 54). In the Old Testament we have a similar case in the relationship between Jeremiah and his assistant Baruch: “Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah” (Je 36:4). The first conclusion the reader will make regarding the authorship of the Bible is that it was written by men with a diversity of styles. Different people, from different places, at different historical times, writing each with its own peculiar form. What is the factor that unites the different works that make up the Bible? The answer to this question comes from the acceptance of the supernatural aspect involved in the making of the writings.

Divine author of the Bible: Although human writers are the authors of books, at the same time they include God as the source of the biblical message. Several authors stand as spokespersons for a message of divine origin: “The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beer” (Ho 1:1), “The word of the LORD that came to Joel” (Joe 1:1), “The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD” (Ob 1), “Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai” (Jon 1:1), “The word of the LORD that came to Micah” (Mic 1:1), “The word of the LORD that came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi” (Zep 1:1), “The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi” (Mal 1:1), “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John” (Re 1:1).

Two biblical texts that deal most directly with divine action on the composition of biblical texts are 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Ti 3:16).

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pe 1:21)

The expression “breathed out by God”, used by Paul in 2 Timothy, derives from the Greek word *θεόπνευστος* (*theopneustos*), which points to divine acting in the process of preparing the Bible’s content (Arndt, 2000, p. 450). Although the verb does not clearly express the degree of involvement, it points out “to a communication which has been inspired by God... In some instances ‘Scripture inspired by God’ is rendered as ‘Scripture, the writer of which was influenced by God’ or ‘... guided by God.’” (Louw; Nida, 1996, p. 417). Peter also states that the origin of Bible content derives “from God”. However, he goes further by using a metaphor to describe the process through the expression “carried along”, which derives from the Greek verb *φερόμενοι* (*pheromenoi*) whose most basic meaning is “to bear or carry from one place to another”, focus on an act of transport (Arndt, 2000, p. 1051). The Vulgate, the biblical translation in Latin, influenced other versions that chose to translate the expression as “inspired”, without nullifying the supernatural aspect in the writing process of the Bible. Metaphorically used, the expression “carried along” was used of a sailing ship carried along by the wind,

The metaphor pictures the cooperation of the Holy Spirit with the individual writer. The prophets raised their sails, and the Holy Spirit filled them and carried their craft along in the direction he wished. Through their own unique personalities, styles of writing, and vocabularies, God moved each of them by his Spirit to communicate his truth. (Walls; Anders, 1999, p. 114)

The Bible is called as the work of two joint authorships: the human and the divine. However, these two realities generate tension, since a perfect message is transferred to imperfect language through imperfect instruments. How to deal with such discrepancies?

The tension between the human and the divine in the composition of the biblical text: From the moment one assumes the double authorship of the Bible (human and divine) a reality arises with dissonant perspectives. On the one hand, God is the source of a perfect message, on the other, humanity is the channel chosen to record this message. Humanity, with its inherent imperfections, cannot convey a message perfectly. The crucial question that arises as a consequence of this reasoning is: Does the imperfection of humanity affect the perfection of the biblical message? To answer this question, we need to analyze the concepts of Inspiration available in the theological milieu. There are several authors who attempt to categorize as Bible Inspiration theories. Some divide them into four¹, others into five², and others even six³. Gulley (2003), in his book *Systematic Theology*, presents five kinds of understanding about Bible inspiration: Intuition Theory, Illumination Theory, Mechanical Theory, Verbal Theory and Dynamic or Limited verbal Theory (Gulley, 2003, p. 303). Despite the various spectra, the theories can be

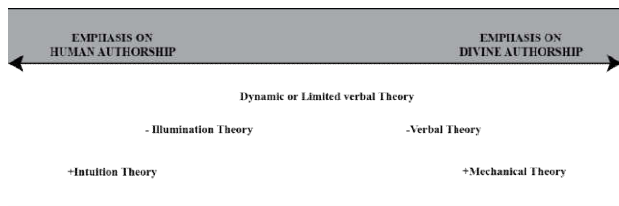
¹ Augustus Strong (1907), *Systematic Theology*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Judson Press, 202–212.

² Erickson, Millard (1998) *Christian Theology*, 8th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, pp. 231–233.

³ Basil Manly Jr. (1888), *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration Explained and Vindicated* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son), 44–60.

divided into emphasis on the human aspect or the divine aspect. While one extreme defends total human freedom without divine intervention in the writing process, the other advocates divine intervention with little human freedom.

Spectrum of Bible Inspiration Theories



In the following we will analyze the two extremes of this picture, theories that emphasize the human aspect and those that emphasize the divine aspect. In the end we will resume the middle ground by describing what we will call the Incarnational Inspiration of the Bible. This discussion allows a dialogue with Caughie (2005) when he affirms that the personality marks in a text can gain other elements, when these are understood as sacred. Sacred books bring the complexity of, in the case of the Bible, to be accepted as divinely inspired works, so that the human and the divine have their construction process. Therefore, God acts on humans, who have the task of writing what they receive for inspiration, but, in doing so, they enter Caughie's logic, impressing the marks of his authorship, with his culture and personality in the works. Balaguer (2008) questions the authorship of sacred texts and the divine inspiration concept of the Bible. The author reflects on texts that have divine authorship, divine inspiration and on human writing, stating that one must define which:

son los elementos que deben componerse para comprender la relación de los libros sagrados con la palabra de Dios: la revelación y su puesta por escrito, los profetas y los apóstoles, los libros y el canon. La relación entre todas estas realidades está llena de matices. Cae bajo lo que podría denominarse teología de la Sagrada Escritura, o teología de la inspiración de la Sagrada Escritura (BALAGUER, 2008, p.347)

Balaguer's argument therefore defends the need to define theological parameters to nuance the sacred texts, as well as the importance of deepening the divine Theology of the Bible, specifying authorship, inspiration and writing:

Así, si Dios es el autor de la revelación y no sólo su origen, es el autor de la Escritura y no sólo su origen: en estas condiciones, hay que hacer verdaderos equilibrios para no concluir que Dios es autor literario de la Sagrada Escritura. Si Dios, autor de la revelación, se dirigió al «género humano» a quien reveló los decretos de su voluntad, resulta fácil admitir también que Dios, autor de la Escritura, concibe como destinatario de los libros al género humano: la Biblia es el conjunto de libros que Dios da a los hombres (Balaguer, 2008, p. 352)

He reaffirms that God is the author of the Bible by enlightenment, but concludes that he is not the literary author because, due to the fact that it is a sacred book aimed at humans. Thus, the Bible, in its conception, constitutes a book that shows the word of God destined for humans, but in a form of writing elaborated by its own recipients.

Overvaluation of Human Authorship: Intuition Theory and Illumination Theory are two examples of inspirational theories that overvalue the human aspect in the process of making the biblical text to the detriment of divine intervention. Moreland F. W. Newman in England, and Theodore Parker in America, are representatives of the Intuition Theory, which states that biblical truths are the fruit of human intelligence alone, placing the Bible in the same book of secular works. This model of intelligence is regarded as the product of man's own powers. It is a kind of theory "of man's independence of God, or with pantheistic conceptions of man as being himself the highest manifestation of an all pervading but unconscious intelligence." (Strong, 1907, p. 202)

Friedrich Schleiermacher, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), and James Martineau, a Unitarian theologian (1805–1900) are exponents of the Illumination Theory. This theory accepts the existence of the supernatural, but it only extends the spiritual perceptivity of the biblical writers. "There is only a quantitative, not qualitative, difference between biblical writers and all other humans" (Gulley, 2003, p. 303). In this perspective the writings are not inspired, but only the authors. Understand inspiration here as a heightening or stimulation of the natural abilities of the writer "rather than the communication of any truth not already possessed" (Dockery, 1992, p. 8).

Overvaluation of Divine Authorship: Mechanical Theory and Verbal Theory can be placed at the other end of the Bible Inspiration theory group because they value the supernatural aspect in the development of Bible writing, nullifying or belittling the human aspect in the process. The origin of Mechanical Theory has roots in the conflict between Protestants and Catholic theologians after the Council of Trent. To value the importance of tradition, Catholic theologians pointed to failures in the biblical text, which would be evidence that it is unreliable. The Protestant group's reaction was to defend the Bible as God's Word as literally as possible. "This theory states that every word, even the punctuation, is dictated by God, much as a business executive would dictate a letter to his secretary." (Duffield, 1983, p. 24). Although close to the Mechanical Theory, the Verbal Theory accepts some human freedom in the writing process of the Bible. It denies that the words of the Bible were dictated, but at the same time argues that there was a kind of divine "superintendence" in the word selection process. So somehow, from this perspective, human freedom is limited by divine intervention.

The sculptor-chisel-sculpture analogy helps to visualize the way in which the verbal theory of inspiration conceives the manner in which the divine and human agencies operate when generating the writings of the Bible. As the sculptor, and not the chisel, is the author of the work of art, so God, and not the human writer, is the author of Scripture. Human writers, as the chisel, play only an instrumental role. (Canale, 2006, p. 53)

Mechanical Theory and Verbal Theory are classified as conservative in today's theological context, but they face a major challenge to explain, which some scholars call "discrepancies" in the biblical text. The dilemma can be summarized in the following question: if God has so thoroughly guided the writing process of the Bible, how can one explain the existence of errors in it?

Inspiration Theories facing the errors of the Biblical Text:

Raoul Dederen makes an interesting observation about the human aspect involved in the process of making the biblical text. According to him,

The human shape of Scripture is unmistakable. Human authors—using human language, quoting human sources, operating in specific human contexts, describing human emotions—are subject to all the weaknesses and failures of humanity. Prophets and apostles were not free from sin. (Dederen, 2001, p. 35)

What then are the human “weaknesses” and “failures” that could be found in the Bible?

Gerhard F. Hasel in his article titled “Are There Mistakes in the Bible?” declare that, “Nevertheless, we cannot exclude the possibility of discrepancies or a lack of precision in minor details in the text” (Hasel, 2010, p. 36). Although not extensive, he provides some examples of such discrepancies:

In 2 Samuel 8:4, David is said to have taken 700 horsemen from Hadadezer while in 1 Chronicles 18:3, 4 the figure is given as 7000. According to 1 Kings 4:26, Solomon had 40,000 stalls for horses, but, in 2 Chronicles 9:25, he had only 4000 stalls. In Matthew 27:54, the centurion says, “Truly, this was the Son of God.” In Luke 23:47, however, the centurion is quoted as saying, “Truly, this man was righteous.” In the book of Acts, Stephen told the Jews that Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem (Acts 7:16). According to the book of Genesis, however, Abraham bought the cave from Ephron the Hittite (Gen 23:8), and it was Jacob who bought his plot of land from the sons of Hamor in Shechem (Gen 33:19).

Right after his short list, Hasel makes the caveat that “some of these discrepancies may have perfectly good explanations; others may be due to copyists’ mistakes or human frailties.” (Hasel, 2010, p. 36). While the defenders of the Intuition Theory and Illumination Theory see no problem with the errors in the biblical text because they understand that the Bible is a human composition, subject to human error, the advocates of Mechanical Theory and Verbal Theory seek an explanation for every possible error. They defend the infallibility of the biblical text because it is the literal Word of a God who cannot err. Gleason L. Archer (1982), in his book “Encyclopaedia of Bible Difficulties” makes in the introduction of his work an apology to the inerrancy of the Bible. According to him, “the rise of rationalism and the deistic movement in the eighteenth century led to a drastic modification of the inerrant status of the Bible” (Archer, 1982, p. 19). In the development of his work, the author presents several arguments to explain discrepancies in the biblical text. When textual historical arguments are not enough, Archer appeals to autograph⁴ manuscripts, stating that “the Bible as originally given by God was free from error.” Since we no longer have access to the autographs, only copies of them, Archer’s final argument is unverifiable. Accepting it is already an act of faith since it may or may not be right. Using faith in the context of the Bible is not necessarily a problem when it comes to accepting its inspiration. However, an approach that

brings both the divine and the human into the writing process of the Bible is possible without necessarily excluding its value as the true Word of God. Such an approach will be referred to in this work as Incarnational Inspiration of the Bible, which is based on the same assumptions as the incarnation of Jesus, the Word made flesh.

The incarnational Bible inspiration: In the theological milieu, the classification of divine revelation into two main groups is common: natural (NR) and special revelation (ER)⁵. NR would happen through God’s created things, which would point to a Creator. However, NR is limited because although it does show aspects of a creation, it does not show the characteristics of the Creator. Thus, SR is needed, which shows more clearly what God is like. The two forms of SR is the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Bible. The person of Jesus Christ and the writings of the Holy Bible are therefore distinct forms of the SR of God. However, they have many things in common, Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, the Bible is the Word of God made letters.

Jesus, the Word of God made flesh: At the opening of the gospel of John we find a statement regarding the divinity of Jesus. The author mentions his eternity and then declares his incarnation. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (Jo 1.14)

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul adds the human aspect to the process of incarnation of Jesus.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Fp 2.5–9)

The phrase “likeness of men” derives from the Greek word is understood by Dybdahl as a reference “to Jesus’ body consisting of flesh and bones” (Dybdahl, 2010, p. 1555). Indeed, it cannot be denied that the appearance that Jesus assumed in his incarnation was similar to that of human beings. However, various biblical texts show that such an appearance went beyond aesthetics. Jesus physically felt the same effects that sin brought to mankind. So like other humans he ate (Mark 2:16), slept (Matt. 8:24), and grew tired (John 4:6). He knew sorrow and anxiety (Matt. 26:37; cf. John 11:35; 12:27), as well as temptation (Matt. 4:1). He was acquainted with hunger (Matt. 4:2) and thirst (John 19:28). He enjoyed the friendship of others (John 11:5) and was conscious of their hatred and jealousy (John 7:7; 15:18; Mark 15:10) (Dederen, 2001, p. 163).

He became fully human. This was no metamorphosis, so frequent in Greek myths, but a genuine incarnation. Nor was it merely the appearance of humanity, but genuine humanity. Christ’s humanity was real and complete. A preexistent divine Being humbled Himself and took human nature. A genuine incarnation occurred. (Dederen, 2001, p. 162)

⁴ Autographs is a term used in theology to refer to the original manuscripts written by biblical authors.

⁵ See, Dederen, R. (2001). *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology* (electronic ed., Vol. 12, p. 23). Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association.

While the list of human aspects may increase, there is another side to the incarnation of Jesus that needs equally to be emphasized. Despite being completely man, he was also completely God. The author of Hebrews makes this very clear with the following statement: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hb 4:15). Jesus was affected but not infected by sin. His physical body felt the pains that humanity carries as a consequence of sin, but its spiritual nature was sinless. "In him," writes John, "there is no sin" (1 John 3:5). This is the "inexpressible gift" (2 Cor. 9:15), a being that was one hundred percent man and one hundred percent God. Two natures mysteriously united in one person.

Statements like these are neither contradictions nor absurdities when perceived in the light of the human-divine personal union set forth in the Scriptures. They make sense only if one assumes that these two natures were united in a single person, the God-man. (Dederen, 2001, p. 169)

Bible, the Word of God made letters: Dynamic or Limited verbal Theory try to equalize the human and divine aspect in the process of making the biblical text. While they seek to respect the individuality of the biblical writers, they do not deny the origin and divine supervision in the process. "In this sense it differs from verbal inspiration, in which the Spirit helps in the choice of words. It also extends inspiration to the words used, but inerrancy can be limited to matters of doctrine and ethics." (Gulley, 2003, p. 304). F. Canale develops a Bible Revelation-Inspiration proposal very close to the Dynamic model of Inspiration. While the author acknowledges the divine influence in the Bible text, he did not exclude the human aspect, with its inherent imperfections.

Because the guidance of the Holy Spirit respected human modes of thinking and writing, we should not expect to find in Scripture the absolute perfection that belongs only to the inner life of the Trinity. On the contrary, we should not be surprised to find in Scripture imperfections and limitations that essentially belong to human modes of knowing and writing (Canale, 2006, p. 67).

Here we can then approach Jesus and the Bible as two models of incarnation through which God revealed his will. Jesus, though God, took the form of man, receiving upon himself the natural effects of the human physical body. Likewise the Bible, though being God's message, is written in human language and thus subject to the limitations of this medium. In either case the human aspect should not be viewed as a "flaw" in the process of divine revelation, but rather a necessity for the Creator to speak in the accent of the creature. Jesus, the Word made flesh, and the Bible, the Word made letters, are distinct forms of divine revelation, but they share many similarities. Both dressed in human frailty to make themselves accessible to humans. Both are one hundred percent divine and one hundred percent human. Splitting the natures is impossible and unnecessary. Perhaps here we see the western tendency to dichotomize everything.

Conclusion

There are several attempts to explain the Revelation-Inspiration process of the Bible text (Intuition Theory, Illumination Theory, Mechanical Theory, Verbal Theory and

Dynamic or Limited verbal Theory). These theories can be grouped according to their emphasis on the human or divine aspect. While on the one hand are those that overestimate the human aspect, reducing or denying divine intervention, on the other are those that overestimate God's action, excluding or rejecting the action of the human author in the process. While the Revelation-Inspiration models that deny the divine factor see no problem with the errors contained in the biblical text, theories that place God as the main author of the text strive to find explanations for the discrepancies in the Bible. However, it is possible to find a middle ground that accepts the human aspect in the biblical text, and thus consequently the possibility of human failure, without necessarily denying the divine origin and accompaniment. Such perspective is based on the concept of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. His incarnation represents the mysterious process of union between the divine and the human in one being. Such an association was necessary so that the divine could be understood by the human. The Bible is the Word of God made letters. In it we find the revelation of divine truths written in human language. Thus we have a mysterious union between the perfect content transmitted through a defective medium. Jesus and the Bible are ways of Special Revelation, through which the Creator showed his face to his creatures. Both one hundred percent human and one hundred percent divine. The problem of authorship of biblical texts raises debates about the limits of human presence as writers of the text, which brings the impact of human presence in literature. Balaguer (2008) analyzes that God inspired biblical texts, but that these books have a literacy built by the humans who wrote it, so that it seeks to demarcate the Bible as a manifestation of God communicating with humanity, but in the form of construction of works that bring the language, figures, logics and limitations of the languages used by the writers.

However, if the books, as stated by Caughie (2005), brings the marks of the personality of their authors, in the case of Bible Inspiration we have the construction of texts marked by literary aspects, brought by their writers, under divine inspiration. Thus, this article sought to dialogue about the limit of human presence and divine inspiration in the books of the Bible, a complex theme that brings theoretical approaches to Theology and Literary Theory, as it involves broad debates about the limits of authorship and the possibility of understand this presence in books. The Incarnational Bible Inspiration model defends the supernatural aspect as a source and accompaniment in the process of making the biblical text, without negating the fragility of the human language used for the record. Thus, numerical, spelling, and grammatical errors in no way represent the negation of the divine aspect of the Bible, but rather reveal the human face contained therein. Finally, the Bible carries within itself the mystery of the incarnation by unifying the divine and the human into one book. Separating them is impossible. Rather, it is better to acknowledge God's effort to make him understandable through fragile, limited, and human language.

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