

The Word of Truth, Sealed by the Spirit
*Perspectives on the Inspiration and Truth
of Sacred Scripture*

Edited by

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**SAINT PAUL
SEMINARY PRESS**

COVER IMAGE: Mosaic and tabernacle of the Immaculate Conception chapel
at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Cincinnati
Photo by Matthew C. Genung
Cover design by Willem Mineur

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Published 2022 by
Saint Paul Seminary Press
2260 Summit Ave., Saint Paul, Minnesota 55105

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022945888
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022945888>

Catholic Theological Formation Series
ISSN 2765-9283
ISBN 978-1-953936-09-7 (paperback)
ISBN 978-1-953936-59-2 (ebook)

spspress.com

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Introduction

“All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16). This biblical truth, while on its face easy enough to understand, has taken on considerable strain under the weight of historical and literary criticism. Another Pauline passage teaches something similar, but with reference to the Gospel Paul proclaims: the Gospel is the word of truth that seals with the Spirit (cf. Eph 1:13). 1 John 1:1–4 indicates that the Gospel is also proclaimed in written form, which has the capacity to create fellowship between God and men. The Gospel, proclaimed by word and deed, is also proclaimed in writing, which has the power to transform in the Spirit because of its inspired nature. The strict relationship between Scripture, the Spirit, and truth is proclaimed by Scripture itself, yet needs to be reflected upon more fully in our day “in order to respond better to the necessity of interpreting the sacred texts in accordance with their nature.”¹

This book is a response to that necessity. It is the fruit of the sixth Quinn Biblical Conference, convened by Fr. Kevin Zilverberg at Christ the King Retreat Center in Buffalo, MN, June 27–30, 2021. The Monsignor Jerome D. Quinn Endowment for Biblical Studies generously funded the conference, under the auspices of The Saint Paul Seminary in Saint Paul, MN, and its Institute for Catholic Theological Formation. Zilverberg invited Catholic seminary professors of Sacred Scripture and other Catholic biblical scholars to gather

1. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word That Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*, trans. Thomas Esposito and Stephen Gregg (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), General Introduction, §I.1.

and study themes of contemporary importance in the field of biblical studies in order to equip them to carry out their service to the Church. Although the conference presenters chose their topics in light of the needs of Catholic seminaries, the reader will find that their appeal extends well beyond that context. We hope that this book finds an audience not only among Catholic seminary and university professors and their students, but also Protestant scholars and students, as well as catechized lay people of all Christian denominations.

The 2021 conference topic, “The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture,” echoed the title of the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s 2014 document that sought to present the Commission’s work studying the relationship between inspiration and truth in Sacred Scripture, and specifically what the Sacred Scriptures themselves testify about their origin in God and their truth. This task was given to the Biblical Commission in order to penetrate more deeply and to advance the teaching of the Second Vatican Council promulgated in *Dei verbum*, an endeavor which Pope Benedict XVI specifically called for in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*. The Quinn Conference, then, was a gathering of biblical scholars and theologians to consider this work of the Biblical Commission within the context of recent Magisterium and theological reflection, and to contribute to the same stream of reflection called for by the Church on the theme of biblical inspiration and truth.

The chapters in this volume are revisions of the papers presented at the conference, each of which underwent a double-blind peer review process that required two reviewers to approve their publication. The chapters are of two basic types. The first type, found in chapters 1–2, consists in analysis and reflection upon (1) the questions addressed by the Biblical Commission and (2) the product of the Biblical Commission’s work, in *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*. The second type of contribution, chapters 3–7, responds to a particular aspect of the Biblical Commission’s document within the larger context of the Magisterium on Sacred Scripture. Each of these chapters studies an exegetical or hermeneutical question arising from a particular biblical text, in order to advance the current dialogue on the questions of biblical inspiration and truth.

In the first chapter, “The Inspiration and Truth of Scripture: Do They Still Matter?,” Luis Sánchez-Navarro asks the basic question regarding whether or not the topic of the PBC document is even relevant. He considers the history of the Church’s teaching on the question of inspiration and truth treated in magisterial and theological documents leading up to the Second Vatican Council. This serves as a foundation for the discussion of the question in contemporary biblical studies. He investigates whether the inspired character of Scripture

affects the way one goes about interpreting them. To answer this he evaluates important theological and exegetical contributions of the postconciliar period in terms of their divergent presuppositions on the inspired status of the biblical texts. Finally, he shows what the consequences of these different hermeneutical positions bring to bear on the moral life. The author proposes that the relationship between revelation, biblical inspiration, and truth is not only the fundamental question which the interpreter of Scripture must face, it is also the basic question that needs to be addressed in order to understand how the Bible is relevant to the life of the Christian today.

In chapter 2, Michael Magee focuses specifically on the PBC document, and provides a critical analysis of it by situating it within the recent history of the Church's attempts to clarify the theology of biblical inspiration and truth and their interrelationship. He evaluates the document based upon its achievements in this regard. He scores the results of the PBC study in relation to the recommendations of the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, specifically its call for clarification of the concepts of biblical truth and inspiration. He also refers to magisterial pronouncements, including *Dei verbum*, and major nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology related to Catholic biblical hermeneutics.

The doctrine of biblical inspiration is founded upon an understanding of the nature of the Scriptures as originating in God. In chapter 3, "The Divine Voice of Sinai in Emended Scripture," Matthew Genung reflects on the PBC document's statement regarding the supreme importance of Exodus 19 in answering the question about what the Scriptures themselves say about their origin in God. He considers this statement in light of the historical-critical understanding of the redactional process of biblical authorship. He surveys evidence for understanding some of the redactional aspects of Exodus 19 within its larger context, seeking to show that not only does Scripture alert the reader to its divine origin, but it also indicates that its character as emended Scripture pertains to its inspiration. The redactional nature of the biblical text should not be ignored in the interpretation of either the literal or spiritual sense. Recognizing the redactional layers of an emended text allows greater penetration into the cadence of the divine voice, allowing one to be more attuned to what it means that God's voice is heard in Scripture.

In chapter 4, "Inspiration and Truth When Prophecy Fails: Ezekiel's Temple Vision," Anthony Pagliarini asks about the possibility of understanding the Book of Ezekiel as inspired Scripture given the non-fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the restored Jerusalem Temple. How can the discrepancy between prophecy and history be reconciled with the theology of biblical

inspiration and truth? He approaches this question, in dialogue with critical scholarship, by first situating the Temple Vision within the rhetorical context of the Book of Ezekiel. Even here, the Vision at one level seems to amount to a failure of prophecy. When reexamined in light of the Church's theology of inspiration, specifically the teaching of *Dei verbum*, new vistas are opened for its interpretation. The major part of this contribution explores these vistas.

The issue of biblical truth, the inspired character of the Bible, and historicity is encountered in the New Testament as well as the Old, particularly in the Gospels. Chapter 5 addresses the question of a reliable methodology to determine the historicity of seemingly conflicting reports of the same events recounted in the canonical Gospels. This is the focus of "Ratzinger on the Historicity of the Gospels: A Case Study of the Last Supper Narrative" by Aaron Pidel. This chapter first identifies a set of four tests which Joseph Ratzinger employed in order to determine whether or not the devil is real or is a mythological construction, tests which allow the convergence of faith and reason on the historical data. Pidel then elaborates on the suitability of these tests to explore the extent of the historical grounding of events narrated in the Gospels, and to unveil the authorial intent within the context of a historical faith. Acknowledging with *Dei verbum* that the evangelists recounted historical events not according to standards of modern historiography, but imbuing them with theological symbolism, the author confronts the difficulty of determining the truth intended by the evangelists in their historical narratives. Ratzinger's analysis of the biblical accounts of the Last Supper is the case study for an explicit application of these tests, resulting in a methodologically explicit hermeneutic of faith and reason in exegesis.

If the truth claimed in a biblical text is historically and culturally contingent, the character of that text as inspired is undermined. This seems to be the case in some Pauline texts regarding the subordination of women to men. In chapter 6, "Changing Gender Roles and the Unchanging Message of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16," Marcin Kowalski addresses this difficulty raised in the PBC document. If Paul's letters originate in God, how can their teaching be superseded by cultural developments? Is Paul's teaching on sexuality and the relationship between men and women outdated in the twenty-first century or is it still relevant and even necessary for today's Church and society? These are the questions treated in this chapter through an exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. Kowalski uses rhetorical and socio-cultural analysis in his study of the pericope within the context of the entire letter. He frames its rhetorical *dispositio* to understand the thrust of the author's arguments, and carefully treats the exegetical difficulties in the text. The author accomplishes this in dialogue

with the best scholarship. He demonstrates the balanced relationship between theological truth based on Pauline arguments from biblical authority, ecclesial tradition, natural law, and advertence to transitory customs. These arguments are intertwined for a rhetorical force aimed at building up the fledgling church in Corinth. This Pauline strategy can help us to understand the nature of his letters as divinely inspired and communicating truth not only pertinent to the immediate first-century circumstances envisaged in the letter, but of perennial value and even of great importance for our day.

Rounding out the volume by bridging both Testaments, in chapter 7, “The Old Testament as an Earthly Translation of an Inner-Trinitarian Dialogue: Implications for Inspiration,” Kelly Anderson evaluates a phenomenon encountered in certain Old Testament texts that depict a conversation between God and Wisdom, and/or within God himself. These “inner-Trinitarian dialogue” texts are taken up by other biblical texts in which human figures, animated by the Spirit and by divine Wisdom, become participants in the divine creative activity within the life of Israel. The author shows this phenomenon specifically in passages narrating the construction of the Tabernacle, the Temple in Jerusalem, and its symbolic portrayal in the Song of Solomon. The same phenomenon is shown in New Testament texts that apply Old Testament passages of divine dialogue to Christ, by which they communicate the identity and meaning of the life of Jesus. The author argues that this phenomenon serves as an analogy to understand the operation of biblical inspiration, as well as the relationship of inspired Scripture to the eternal dialogue of God.

Each of these chapters contributes to the question of the relationship between biblical inspiration and truth in its own way. Each pursues a unique line of inquiry or applies a different literary or historical-critical method. In this way, they show different facets of the nature of Scripture as the word of God in human language. We hope that this book, by showing the fruits of critical inquiry and the employment of a variety of methods, will promote further reflection and dialogue on the inspired Scriptures and the truth contained in them.

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April 13, 2022