

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION: THE LIBERAL MODEL

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The purpose of this article is to describe the broad characteristics of the liberal model of revelation-inspiration as it relates to the epistemological origin of Holy Scripture and evaluate it along with the classical model described in my earlier article.¹ The question before us still is the same that prompted the analysis of the classical model: Is a new theoretical interpretation of the epistemological origin of Scripture necessary? Would it not be more practical and effective to choose one of the many available interpretations?

Philosophical and cultural developments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries led to the formulation of a new approach to biblical interpretation, namely the historical-critical method. According to Gerhard Ebeling, this method, along with its corresponding model of revelation-inspiration, attained "well-nigh undisputed dominance" already during the second half of the nineteenth century.² This I referred to earlier as the "liberal (encounter-existential)" model. We must

¹Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Classical Model," *AUSS* 32 (1994): 7-28.

²Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 18. Even though the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation was a product of the Enlightenment (see Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 18-23), its development did not require a new model of revelation-inspiration (cf. Klug, 14-15). Critical evaluation of the historical-critical method must be developed on the level of philosophical presuppositions. To note, as did Eta Linneman, that the method works "as if there were not God," bringing the Bible to the same level as other human literary productions, or that it lets everyday experience determine what is reality and what is not, cannot suffice (*Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990], 84, 88). These characteristics, true though they may be, stand on the basis of (1) carefully developed philosophical principles and (2) a new way of understanding revelation-inspiration. If the historical-critical method is to be challenged, more than a mere return to the classic interpretation of the presuppositional structure and a moderate view of verbal inspiration (*ibid.*, 144) is required.

now turn our attention to its presuppositional structures and the specific elements that characterize it.³

1. *Presuppositional Structure of the Liberal Model*

During the Enlightenment period, new philosophical trends began to criticize, challenge, modify, and replace some of the basic principles on which the classical interpretation of the presuppositional structure were grounded. Following René Descartes' turn to the subject, classical realism was rejected and replaced by different forms of idealism. More significant, however, was the epistemology's radical departure from intellectualism. Reason was reinterpreted by limiting its reach to the space-time continuum.

Immanuel Kant, reinterpreting reason, argued that the intellect did not have the capability of reaching into the timeless nature of ultimate reality (essence or second *ousia*).⁴ Since for classical theology, ultimate reality in nature and supernature was timeless, Kant's limitation of reason's power to the realm of spatio-temporal reality deprived the Classical Model of revelation-inspiration of its basic ground. As stated by Hendrikus Berkhof, Kant's foundational work also constituted "a radical new beginning for evangelical theology. As a result of its appearance, orthodox scholasticism, rationalism, and supernaturalism found that at a single stroke, the road forward had been blocked." Furthermore, Kant's philosophical structure required "the modern way of posing questions, and modern methodology, in theology."⁵ His

³Norman L. Geisler identifies and discusses Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, Benedict Spinoza, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant as contributors in the development of the new philosophical ideas that lie at the basis of the liberal conception of revelation-inspiration ("Philosophical Presuppositions of Biblical Errancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979], 312-327). William Nix, working with trends rather than philosophers, identifies pietism, deism, materialism, naturalism, skepticism, agnosticism, romanticism, idealism, and existentialism as ideological trends that lead to liberal theology ("The Doctrine of Inspiration since the Reformation, Part II: Changing Climates of Opinion," *JETS* 27 [1984]: 441-456). He concludes that "between the early seventeenth and early twentieth centuries a series of changes in the climates of opinion gradually prepared the ground for a direct and open confrontation between religion and science over the issues of revelation, inspiration and the authority of Scripture" (457).

⁴Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1939), 54.

⁵Hendrikus Berkhof, *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey*, tr. by John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 1-2. For an introduction to Kant's thought specifically written for theologians see Royce Gordon Gruenler, *Meaning and Understanding: The Philosophical Framework for Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation Series, 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 35-45; Stanley Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992], 26-31; and Berkhof, 1-18.

philosophy includes, on one hand, the timeless nature of God and his truth, which is still uncritically accepted, and on the other hand, the limitation of man's reason to the spatio-temporal realm that does not allow for cognitive contact between man's reason and a timeless or supernatural object. The result of Kant's epistemological revolution was the conclusion that cognitive revelation of supernatural truths is impossible. Moreover, neither natural theology nor metaphysics, with their proofs of God's existence, could be fitted into this new philosophical interpretation of the presuppositional structure. Briefly put, the "Copernican revolution" produced by Kant occurred within the epistemological rather than the ontological realm. The existence of God and of the human soul are maintained, as is the classical timeless interpretation of their natures; what is disavowed in Kant's epistemological revolution is the possibility for a cognitive communication between God and man.⁶

2. *Revelation in the Liberal Model*

Kantian epistemology, when accepted, seems to render impossible any attempt to explain revelation. Since Christian theology has rather uncritically assumed that the role of extra-biblical philosophy in theology is to provide the interpretation of the presuppositional structure required for its development, Kant's revolution became a challenge that Christian theology, sooner or later, had to evaluate. The problem consisted, basically, in the fact that philosophy was criticizing and reinterpreting its classical views. Christian theology is still faced with the same question: Which interpretation of the presuppositional structure should be chosen? The choice cannot be made on rational absolute grounds, but rather in terms of preferences or traditions. Those who still believe that the classical interpretation of the presuppositional structure is to be chosen become "conservatives"; those who believe that the Kantian interpretation should be chosen became "liberals."

The first questions that a liberal theologian must answer regard whether revelation-inspiration is possible and what is its nature. Moreover, the place of Scripture as source of theology also needs clarification. Is it possible, then, to accept the new Kantian definition of the presuppositional structure and at the same time to claim the possibility and existence of divine revelation?

⁶Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 46. "Kant, the greatest philosopher of the movement, denied the very possibility of factual knowledge concerning a super-sensible order, and this appeared to seal the fate of the historic doctrine of revelation" (James I. Packer, "Contemporary Views of Revelation," 92). See also Carl F. Henry, "Divine Revelation," 261, 267.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, "the father of Modern Theology," undertook the difficult task of creating a new conception of revelation on the basis of Kant's rejection of classical intellectualism.⁷ Schleiermacher not only provided the new model, but also developed it in a technical fashion that is still at the foundation of the many ways in which revelation has been interpreted within the tradition of liberal theology.⁸ On the foundation laid by Schleiermacher, other theologians contributed both to the formulation and increasing popularity of the liberal model of revelation and inspiration, among them notably Rudolf Otto, Martin Buber, Emil Brunner, and Karl Barth.⁹ We must now query what are the main features of the liberal model of the epistemological origin of Scripture as expressed by Schleiermacher, Otto, Buber, Brunner, and Barth. No attempt to develop in depth the doctrine of these representatives of the liberal model is attempted. Our search is rather for the basic structure of the model they all represent.¹⁰

Divine Activity

The liberal model of revelation-inspiration does not challenge or change the classical understanding of God.¹¹ God is still conceived to be

⁷For an introduction to Schleiermacher's thought, see Richard R. Niebuhr, "Friedrich Schleiermacher," in *A Handbook of Christian Theologians*, enlarged edition, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 17-35; *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (New York: Scribner's, 1964); and Keith Clements, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987).

⁸The central role played by Schleiermacher as the founder of the liberal model of theology is underlined, for instance, by Gnuse, 9; Abraham, "Inspiration, Revelation and Divine Action: A Study in Modern Methodist Theology," 47; and Packer, "Contemporary Views of Revelation," 92.

⁹I am aware that in his *Church Dogmatics* (CD), Barth consciously attempted to depart from liberal theology as conceived by Schleiermacher. For instance, Barth explicitly rejected the specific way in which Schleiermacher explained some aspects of the human contribution in the epistemological origin of Scripture (CD, I/1, 126). His theological approach departs from Schleiermacherian liberal theology in substantial aspects and properly deserves the designation Neo-Orthodox. However different Barth's and Brunner's general approaches to theology may be from those of 18th- and 19th-century liberal theologies on the issue of the epistemological origin of Scripture, the differences do not seem to reveal a different model but rather a more complete and explicit formulation of the liberal model originated by Schleiermacher.

¹⁰Regarding the way in which the idea of "theological model" is utilized in this article see Canale, 8-10.

¹¹Plato's two-world theory can be detected at the base of the liberal model of theology. Regarding Plato's influence on Schleiermacher's thought, see, e.g., Terrence N. Tice, "Introduction," in *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, by Friedrich Schleiermacher, tr. Richard Crouter (Cambridge, Engl.: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 25.

“absolutely timeless.”¹² Divine activity, consequently, is understood to operate within the timeless level of reality. “By the Eternity of God,” Schleiermacher states, “we understand the absolutely timeless causality of God, which conditions not only all that is temporal but time itself as well.”¹³ The way in which the Bible presents God’s causality within history cannot be integrated by the presuppositional structure of the liberal model. This is why Schleiermacher remarks that “divine causality is only equal in compass to the finite in so far as it is opposite to it in kind, since if it were like it in kind, as it is often represented as being in anthropomorphic ideas of God, it too would belong to the sphere of interaction and thus be a part of the totality of the natural order.”¹⁴ Yet, divine activity “extends as widely as the order of nature and the finite causality contained in it.” Applying this concept of divine activity rigorously, Schleiermacher concludes that God’s creation “must be represented as the event in time which conditions all change,” yet, must do so without making “the divine activity itself a temporal activity.”¹⁵ Consequently, any idea that may suggest a temporal sequence in God’s activity must be consistently eliminated.¹⁶ This is the kind of divine activity that generates revelation.

Rudolf Otto strengthened Schleiermacher’s view by emphasizing the otherness of the reality causing revelation in man. This objective reality, which tradition calls God, Otto designates as the “numinous.”¹⁷ This “numinous” objective reality “outside the self” is qualified as “*Mysterium Tremendum*.”¹⁸ “*Mysterium*” means in a pure negative sense “that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar.”¹⁹ “*Tremendum*” means “absolute unapproachability” and “absolute overpoweringness.”²⁰ Moreover, the “numinous” is character-

¹²There is no doubt that Schleiermacher subscribed to the absolute timelessness of God. In this regard, see his brief but clear and well-articulated presentation (*The Christian Faith*, tr. from the 2d German ed. (1830) by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark. 1928), § 52, 1-2 and postscript.

¹³*Ibid.*, § 52.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, § 51.1.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, § 41.

¹⁶See, e.g., *ibid.*, § 42.1-2.

¹⁷Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, tr. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford, 1923), 11.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 11-13.7

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 20.

ized as the "wholly other", whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own."²¹ Otto and Barth understand the divine as that reality which absolutely differs from nature and humanity. In so doing they not only assume the traditional conception of the timelessness of God but bring it to its most extreme expression. As in the case of Schleiermacher, Otto's "numinous wholly other" cannot act historically in history but only as the transcendent cause of human religious experiences.

Buber interprets the whole of reality in relational terms. I-it refers to the nonrelational world of things in nature and history.²² I-thou refers to the world of relations.²³ "The world of *It* is set in the context of space and time. The world of *Thou* is not set in the context of either of these."²⁴ Knowledge and words belong to the world of *It*.²⁵ What man in the world of *It* (knowledge) calls God, Otto identifies in the world of reality (ontology) as the Eternal Thou.²⁶ Buber not only affirms the timeless nature of the Eternal Thou but, agreeing with Otto and Barth, understands Him as the absolutely transcendent wholly other.²⁷ This God does not act historically in history. To act historically in history corresponds to Buber's nonpersonal world of *It*. God's action is directly consummated in our own *I* through the mediation of the *Thou* of all beings.²⁸ In other words God acts "personally" in the

²¹Ibid., 28.

²²"As experience, the world belongs to the primary word I-it" (Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, tr. Ronald Gregor Smith [New York: Scribner's, 1937], 6). "The history of the individual and that of the human race, in whatever they may continually part company, agree at least in this one respect, that they indicate a progressive augmentation of the world of It" (ibid., 37).

²³"The primary word I-Thou establishes the world of relation" (ibid., 6). According to Buber the I-Thou world of relations includes three spheres: nature, humankind, and intelligible forms (ibid.). God, being the Eternal Thou, does not belong to the world of relation but as the Wholly Other is the transcendent cause of all relations and the world of "It" as well.

²⁴Ibid., 33 and 100.

²⁵Ibid., 40-41.

²⁶Ibid., 75-76.

²⁷Ibid., 79. This absolute transcendence of God's being includes the closeness of real immanence to the point that panentheistic overtones seem to be at least implied in Buber's concept of God as Eternal Thou. Consider for instance the following statement: "Of course God is the 'wholly Other'; but He is also the wholly Same, the wholly Present. Of course He is the *Mysterium Tremendum* that appears and overthrows; but He is also the mystery of the self-evident, nearer to me than my I" (ibid.).

timeless dimension of the *Thou*. As will be seen below under the essence of revelation, "personal" refers to something that occurs logically on an existential (ontic) noncognitive level prior to its presence on the cognitive level of which it is the objective cause.

Emil Brunner, following Buber's analysis, also understands God as "pure 'Thou,'"²⁹ as "absolute Subject."³⁰ Even though rejecting a timeless interpretation of God in a Platonic sense, Brunner is still unable to overcome the traditional timeless interpretation of God's eternity.³¹ For God, says Brunner, "the temporal—the separation into past, present, and future—do[es] not exist."³² In this context God's revelatory activity is conceived to have "always and everywhere the character of a sudden event. It stands out from all ordinary happenings, from the 'normal' course of development, and is a kind of 'incursion from another dimension.'"³³

Barth understands God's being as act rather than essence.³⁴ But act is not to be understood as something analogous to our human actions.³⁵ God conceived as act or event expresses the conception that God is an ontic reality grounded not in an eternal essence but rather in his eternal

²⁸"Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*; by means of every particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*. Through this mediation of the *Thou* of all beings fulfilment, and non-fulfilment, of relations comes to them: the inborn *Thou* is realised in each relation and consummated in none. It is consummated only in the direct relation with the *Thou* that by its nature cannot become *It*" (ibid., 75).

²⁹Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter*, tr. Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), 87.

³⁰"But God is not a Person, but Person, absolutely; not a Subject but absolute subject" (Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge*, tr. Olive Wyon [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946], 24).

³¹Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, tr. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1949), 266-270.

³²Ibid., 270. It should be noticed to his credit, however, that Brunner's concept of God's eternity comes very close to the biblical historical temporal concept. However, the specific rejection of temporal succession of past, present, and future in the divine life contradicts Scripture and flows from the Platonic tradition he is trying to overcome. Systematically, however, Brunner seems only to modify rather than overcome the timelessness of the classical conception of God's being and eternity.

³³Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, 30.

³⁴CD II/1, 257-272.

³⁵Ibid., 264.

decision to be what he is.³⁶ This act or event includes at the same time God's being and his works.³⁷ The concept of revelation in Barth is necessarily tied to the concept of God as act. "God is who He is in the act of His revelation."³⁸ Because he is an act, God is a person who realizes and unites in himself "the fullness of all being."³⁹ In a very real sense, then, God's act includes and causes not only himself but also the entire universe of nature and history.⁴⁰ In short, "God exists in His act. God is His own decision. God lives from and by Himself."⁴¹ In a true systematic fashion Barth immediately adds that "whatever else we may have to say must always correspond to this first definition."⁴²

Furthermore, according to Barth this act or event who is God in his revelation has been "executed once for all in eternity."⁴³ Barth has wrestled extensively with the issue of God's eternity. He has attempted, as has Brunner in a less technical and detailed way, to bring time into the eternal act that is God. Barth is aware that an explanation of the historicity of the cross is to be provided while at the same time leaving undisturbed the traditional idea of God's timeless eternity. He discusses the issue extensively.⁴⁴ Barth's position is only a minor modification of the traditional timeless conception of God embraced notably by Boethius and Thomas Aquinas.⁴⁵ He declares that eternity is not simplicity that excludes the complexities and manifoldness of time (past, present, and future) and space, but on the contrary it includes in itself the complexity of time but in a simultaneous way.⁴⁶ The succession of

³⁶"The fact that God's being is event, the event of God's act, necessarily (if when we speak of it, we turn our eyes solely on His revelation) means that it is His own conscious, willed and executed decision" (ibid., 271).

³⁷Ibid., 260.

³⁸Ibid., 257.

³⁹Ibid., 268.

⁴⁰Ibid., 260.

⁴¹Ibid., 272.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 271.

⁴⁴See for instance *CD*, II/1, 608-677.

⁴⁵Ibid., 610-611.

⁴⁶"The being is eternal in whose duration beginning, succession and end are not three but one, not separate as a first, a second and a third occasion, but one simultaneous occasion as beginning, middle and end. Eternity is the simultaneity of beginning, middle and end, and to that extent it is pure duration. Eternity is God in the sense in which in himself and in all things God is simultaneous, i.e., beginning and middle as well as end, without separation, distance or contradiction. Eternity is not, therefore, time, although

time (past, present, and future), therefore, is still denied to the being and act of God and his revelation. Thus, the basic ontological feature that characterizes the very essence of a timeless interpretation of God's being is still maintained by Barth. God's act of revelation, therefore, will not occur in the order of succession of our time but rather in the order of the simultaneity of his eternity. As we will see later under content of revelation, even the central event of Jesus Christ actually occurs in God's (simultaneous time) rather than in our time.

At this point variations between these main representatives of the liberal model seem minimal. They do, however, set the stage for more significant variations at the level of human activity and the content of revelation.

Human Activity

The main reason for the existence of a liberal model of revelation-inspiration is epistemological (interpretation of reason), rather than ontological (interpretation of the being of God or man). The liberal model of revelation replaces the classical interpretation of reason as being the active intellect capable, with supernatural help, of reaching into the timeless level of eternal divine truth, for with Kant's interpretation, reason is limited to the temporal-spatial realm. Truth about God, says Schleiermacher, "could not proceed outwardly from any fact, and even if it did in some incomprehensible way come to a human soul, it could not be apprehended by that soul, and retained as a thought; and if it could not be in any way perceived and retained, it could not become operative."⁴⁷ It must also be remembered that Kant's interpretation of human reason did not allow for the natural use of the active intellect. Thus, it follows that if Kant's transcendentalism is accepted, no room is allowed for the human intellect to be elevated in order to reach the timeless divine truth at a supernatural level. On the basis of this epistemological switch, revelation cannot be said to occur in the cognitive realm. Yet both Kant and Schleiermacher claim that, besides being capable of reason and action, the human soul has the capability of self-consciousness, that is, of a conscious awareness of itself.⁴⁸

time is certainly God's creation or more correctly, a form of His creation. Time is distinguished from eternity by the fact that in it beginning, middle and end are distinct and even opposed as past, present and future" (ibid., 608).

⁴⁷Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 10 postscript.

⁴⁸"Self-consciousness" is the technical term Schleiermacher uses to refer to feeling and piety (*The Christian Faith*, § 3, 2), yet it is not synonymous with them. Specifically, Schleiermacher uses the term "self-consciousness" to avoid any use of "the word 'feeling' in a sense so wide as to include unconscious states" (ibid.). See Grenz, 44.

Kant, speaking about aesthetics and art, defines feeling regarding sensory experiences as an inner modification in consciousness of the cognitive subject (self) about itself. The feeling experience gives rise to contents of pleasure and displeasure, and these form the basis for "a quite separate faculty of discriminating and estimating, that contributes nothing to knowledge."⁴⁹

Schleiermacher and the liberal model of theology take Kant's concept of feeling and consider it as the technical, formal expression of the religious idea of piety. Specifically, religious feelings are said to occur in the area of human self-consciousness, which differs from knowledge in that it is totally passive.⁵⁰ This is the area of the self in which religion and revelation occur, taking place when God, the Eternal, enters into an immediate relationship with the human being, thereby originating piety or the feeling of absolute dependence within human self-consciousness.⁵¹

Otto, basically agreeing with Schleiermacher, points out that there must be a mental predisposition for revelation in man himself, "potentially present in the spirit as a dim or obscure *a priori* cognition."⁵² However, this priori required to contact the numinous wholly other is not reason but feeling, which Otto designates as "creature-consciousness' or creature-feeling."⁵³ The latter is basically defined as "the emotion of a creature, abased and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures."⁵⁴

Martin Buber analyzes the receptivity of man from the ontic rather than the epistemological perspective considered by Schleiermacher and Otto. Perception, knowledge, feeling, and imagination—according to Buber—belong to the realm of *It*, that is, to the realm of things in space

⁴⁹Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, tr. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), 42.

⁵⁰Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 3, 3.

⁵¹This happens directly in one's self-consciousness without the intervention of sensory perception or cognitive reason, and moreover the "self-identical essence of piety is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation to God" (see *ibid.*, § 4, 3).

⁵²Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 164.

⁵³"We said above that the nature of the numinous can only be suggested by means of the special way in which it is reflected in the mind in terms of feeling. 'Its nature is such that it grips or stirs the human mind with this and that determinate affective state'" (*ibid.*, 12).

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 10.

and time.⁵⁵ The I-Thou world of timeless relation involves nature, men, and intelligible forms.⁵⁶ Consequently, human beings possess the ontic capability for the existential encounter at the timeless level of the Eternal Thou.⁵⁷ Feelings play the same epistemological role but only as a “mere accompaniment to the metaphysical and metapsychical fact of the relation, which is fulfilled not in the soul but between *I* and *Thou*.”⁵⁸ The ontic receptivity of human existence emphasized by Buber harmonizes with the epistemological receptivity of feelings suggested by Schleiermacher and Otto.

Emil Brunner identifies “faith” as the human reception of revelation. Faith is “first of all an act of knowledge.”⁵⁹ However, we are far from Aquinas’s conception of faith residing in the intellect.⁶⁰ According to Brunner, reason functions within the “I-it,” nonpersonal dimension while faith works “in the ‘I-Thou’ dimension, as a perception of the way in which love is recognized in love, and not in any other way.”⁶¹ So faith that receives revelation is an act of knowledge, not in the intellectual rational sense, but rather in the timeless existential personal sense. Brunner, then, understands faith as the human side of the divine-human existential personal encounter. “In faith I do not think, but God leads me to think; He does not communicate ‘something’ to me, but ‘Himself.’”⁶² So faith is knowledge but of a different kind (personal-existential) which works within its own timeless level, whereas reason works within the space-temporal dimension and the subject-object structure of things (“I-It”).⁶³ Brunner disagrees with Schleiermacher, Otto, and Buber in seeing human reason, rather than feeling, as the cognitive capability that translates the personal existential

⁵⁵“I perceive something. I am sensible to something. I imagine something. I will something. I feel something. I think something. The life of human beings does not consist of all this and the like alone. This and the like together establish the realm of *It*” (ibid., 4).

⁵⁶Ibid., 6.

⁵⁷“The *Thou* meets me through grace—it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being, is indeed *the* act of my being. The *Thou* meets me. but I step into direct relation with it” (ibid., 11).

⁵⁸Ibid., 81.

⁵⁹Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, 34.

⁶⁰Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2a-2ae, 4.2.

⁶¹Ibid., 36.

⁶²Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter*, 85.

⁶³“Revealed knowledge is poles apart from rational knowledge. These two forms of knowledge are as far from each other as heaven is from earth” (Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, 16).

content of revelation into knowledge and speech.⁶⁴ It should be noticed here that Brunner seems to understand reason within the limits of Kant's epistemology rather than according to the interpretation of the Aristotelic-Thomistic tradition.

Barth's position develops at great length and with detailed technical analysis a view in general similar to that of Brunner. However, he goes beyond Brunner in clearly rejecting the existence of an a priori natural capability of man for the reception of revelation.⁶⁵ Barth affirms that God's act of revelation requires logically and necessarily a corresponding capability for such an act in man.⁶⁶ However, in Barth's view God's act of revelation by itself simultaneously and miraculously creates in man the receptivity for revelation, namely faith.⁶⁷ This existential and timeless encounter affects the whole being of men including his "will and conscience and feeling and all other anthropological centers."⁶⁸

It seems clear that according to the liberal model, the human reception of God's timeless revelatory activity is displaced from reason to a supposed timeless depth of man's being. This existential (ontic) encounter indirectly also affects man's consciousness (epistemological level) either in the area of feeling and imagination or even in the realm of reason understood within the temporal limits expressed in Kant's epistemology.

The Essence or Nature of Revelation

Revelation, according to Schleiermacher, is a "divine and therefore eternal act."⁶⁹ Within a Kantian interpretation of the presuppositional structure, it is impossible to accept that God's revelatory activity operating "upon man as a cognitive being"⁷⁰ can become an important

⁶⁴Ibid., 15-17.

⁶⁵There is no human awareness corresponding to the divine utterance (CD I/1, 149). "Where God speaks, it is meaningless to cast about for the corresponding act" (ibid., 162, 224).

⁶⁶Ibid., 220.

⁶⁷Barth explains "that the possibility of knowing corresponding to the real Word of God has simply come to him, man, that it sets forth a quite inconceivable *novum* in direct contrast to all his ability and capacity, and is only to be regarded as a pure fact, like the Word of God itself" (ibid., 222).

⁶⁸Ibid., 231.

⁶⁹Ibid., § 13.1.

⁷⁰Ibid., § 10 postscript. Here Schleiermacher's acceptance of Kant's epistemological theory can be detected. Religion does not belong either to the scientific or ethical realms (*On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, tr. Richard Crouter [Cambridge, Engl.: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 77). Nash is correct in labeling this position

central feature of the liberal model of revelation-inspiration. If revelation cannot occur on the cognitive level, the only possible way to argue in favor of both the possibility and reality of divine revelation is to find in man a realm other than reason in which revelation would be possible. This is precisely the key to the liberal model suggested by Schleiermacher. Divine revelation operates within the realm of man's feelings (piety) conceived as a faculty besides reason (science) and action (morals).⁷¹ It can be clearly perceived that if God's eternal revelatory activity reaches human feelings, rather than human reason, it cannot communicate divine truths or propositions. According to the liberal model, divine revelation is possible and real. Yet, it produces no knowledge, information, meaning, or propositions, but rather a feeling of absolute dependence. God's action, then, appears only as the "whence" and the "co-determinant" of such a feeling.⁷² Schleiermacher has clearly summarized the liberal position regarding the essence of revelation and inspiration by remarking that "revelation is only to be assumed when not a single moment but a whole existence is determined by such a divine communication, and that what is then proclaimed by such an existence is to be regarded as revealed."⁷³

Otto follows Schleiermacher's epistemological approach rather than exploring the ontic existential foundation of such an epistemology of self-consciousness as the feeling of absolute dependence. According to Otto the essence of revelation consists in the human experience of the "numinous."

As was already pointed out, the "numinous" is "mysterious." That the "numinous" we experience is "mysterious" means that it "is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other' whose kind and character are incomensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb."⁷⁴ This experience, as in

"theological agnosticism" (374), which is certainly a result of Kant's agnosticism. However, considering that agnosticism is the limitation of knowledge to a certain area rather than the total absence of knowledge, one could argue that the liberal model embraces an absolute form of theological agnosticism which amounts to systematic theological skepticism.

⁷¹Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 89-90.

⁷²Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, 4. The consensus of liberal theologians during the last two centuries, that "God has not spoken, and indeed, cannot speak" (Nash, 373), seems to be a consequence of Schleiermacher's interpretation of revelation.

⁷³*Ibid.*, § 10, postscript.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 28.

Schleiermacher, cannot produce knowledge but only "creature-feeling."⁷⁵ In a clear sense, then, Otto's view also proposes a noncognitive origin of revelation.

According to Buber, revelation occurs as an existential encounter in the mutuality of the "I-Thou" relation. The essence of this encounter is that it connects the existence of God with the existence of man. That encounter occurs in the timelessness of the "I-Thou" relation. Consequently, in the encounter of revelation "man receives, and he receives no specific 'content' but a Presence, a Presence as power."⁷⁶ However, in the personal encounter "there is the inexpressible confirmation of meaning. Meaning is assured. Nothing can any longer be meaningless."⁷⁷ Yet this meaning received in the encounter cannot "be transmitted and made into knowledge generally current and admissible."⁷⁸ Buber's conception of the essence of revelation as noncognitive existential encounter is clearly visible in the following passage.

That before which, in which, out of which, and into which we live, even the mystery, has remained what it was. It has become present to us and in its presentness has proclaimed itself to us as salvation; we have "known" it, but we acquire no knowledge from it which might lessen or moderate its mysteriousness.⁷⁹

In no uncertain terms Brunner agrees that in essence revelation is a noncognitive, non-historical, existential event that takes place at the "I-Thou" level.⁸⁰

Karl Barth is also convinced that divine revelation is essentially a divine, personal, noncognitive nonhistorical event in the order of everyday temporal succession.⁸¹ However, Barth goes a step further in

⁷⁵ For "creature-feeling" to arise "there must be something 'numinous', something bearing the character of a 'numen', to which the mind turns spontaneously" (Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 11).

⁷⁶Buber, *I and Thou*, 110.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 111.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰For instance, Brunner explains that "in dealing with genuine, primary faith, i.e., when God reveals Himself to me in His Word, we are not then concerned with a 'something.' In His Word, God does not deliver to me a course of lectures in dogmatic theology, He does not submit to me or interpret for me the content of a confession of faith, but He makes Himself accessible to me" (*The Divine-Human Encounter*, 84, c.f. 87, 89). See also idem, *Revelation and Reason*, 8, 27, 2830-31; and *Theology of Crisis*, 32-35.

⁸¹In its ultimate sense, "God's Word is not a thing to be described, nor is it a concept to be defined. It is neither a content nor an idea. It is not 'a truth,' not even the very highest truth. It is the truth because it is God's person speaking, *Dei loquentis*

claiming that the "Eternal Act of His Word" as it is spoken also includes and generates a historical "corespondent" in the created realm that always is co-given or accompanies the inner grounding revelatory spiritual act.⁸² This historical correspondent to the "Eternal Act of the Word of God," however, is not to be identified with the essence of Revelation.⁸³ Barth seems to introduce this variation in order to make room, within the liberal model of revelation, for the biblical claim that Jesus Christ is "the objective reality of revelation," in other words, that "according to Holy Scripture God's revelation takes place in the fact that God's Word became a man and that this man has become God's Word. The incarnation of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ, is God's revelation."⁸⁴ This historical correspondent plays a significant role in Barth's position on the content of revelation which is discussed in our next section.

By now the fact that the essence of the liberal model of revelation and inspiration does not belong to the realm of knowledge but rather to the inner realm of personal noncognitive encounter with God has become clear. Thus, the divine-human encounter which constitutes the essence of revelation takes place within the realm of man's self-consciousness and feeling, and in that realm it originates in the environment of noncognitive, timeless, existential personal encounter.⁸⁵

persona. It is not something objective. It is the objective, because it is the subjective, namely, God's subjective. God's word means God speaking" (CD, I/1, 155). God's speech is equal to his eternal act, that is equal to who he is. In other words Barth is not contradicting himself when he talks about *Dei loquentis persona* because the *loquentis* is equal to his eternal act and does not belong to the level of history and therefore of reason, imagination, feeling, and action.

⁸²Ibid., 151.

⁸³Barth himself explains that since "the Word of God is itself God's act," "it has nothing to do with the general problem of historical understanding. Of course the question of some sort of historical understanding always arises when the Word of God is manifest to us in its contemporaneousness. But it is not that sort of historical understanding as such which signifies the hearing, and is the basis of the proclamation, of the Word of God. Where the Word of God is heard and proclaimed, something happens which in spite of all interpretative skill cannot be brought about by interpretative skill" (CD I/1, 168).

⁸⁴CD I/2, 1; see 1-44.

⁸⁵In his *On Religion*, Schleiermacher had already stated that the divine encounter "is not really a separate moment at all. The penetration of existence within this immediate union ceases as soon as it reaches consciousness. Then a vivid and clear perspective arises before you, like the image of an absent mistress in the eyes of her young lover; or feeling works its way out from deep within you and spreads over your whole being, like the blush of modesty and love over a young girl's face." He concludes "that what we have to do with here is beyond time and yet, precisely because of this, is rightly placed at the apex of all things temporal" (87-88).

In the preceding section it has been shown that man has a passive capability to be acted upon by the timeless divine activity which grounds the personal encounter structure.

The Content of Revelation

Because in the liberal model the content of revelation is the noncognitive, divine-human encounter, it follows that no idea, information, or words are originated by the divine activity. The event of revelation communicates neither timeless nor temporal historical truths. The way in which this content is "translated" into historically conditioned ideas and words will be dealt with later on under the section on inspiration. But before we move on to consider the way in which the liberal model conceives the way in which Scripture was written down, it is necessary to consider whether the historical temporal existence of Jesus of Nazareth plays any role as source of biblical content or whether it is only the product of the religious imagination of the community.

Otto criticizes Schleiermacher's position because he conceives Christ only "as the supreme divining *subject*, not as the *object* of divination *par excellence*."⁸⁶ Otto asks whether it would be possible to conceive Christ in harmony with Christianity's claim that in his own person he is "'holiness made manifest', that is, a person in whose being, life, and mode of living we realize of ourselves by 'intuition and feeling' the self-revealing power and presence of the Godhead."⁸⁷ Otto's proposal is worked out in Kantian terms. Against Schleiermacher Otto suggests that divination is not a universal faculty shared by every human being. Only some holy men and prophets have the capability to experience the numinous and express it in their own lives, acts, and words. In this way these men become objective revelations of holiness made manifest. We are able to recognize these men, notably Christ, as objective impressions of the numen on us because a priori, in our own inner consciousness, we possess an "element of cognition, comprehension, and valuation," namely, the category of the holy. Thus, the numinous "impression" made by Christ in us is not the result of every-day historical occurrences but rather of the a priori category of the holy which allows us to discover in the man Jesus' divination his objective experience of

⁸⁶Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 159. Otto defines divination as the faculty "of genuinely cognizing and recognizing the holy in its appearances" (ibid., 148).

⁸⁷Ibid., 159.

the numinous.⁸⁸ In this indirect sense, then, it could be said that Jesus is also the content of revelation.

Brunner seems to go further than Otto. He boldly states that a person "in space and time, is himself the Word. The Word of God, because it is a personal word, is present as a person. This is what the Christian calls revelation; 'the Word was made flesh and we have seen his glory.'⁸⁹ Yet, Brunner hastens to qualify this statement by warning us that the revelation of the Word in space and time is not direct and consequently should not be confused with "miraculous theophanies."⁹⁰ The revelation of the Word in space and time, explains Brunner, is indirect. "Thus the historical appearance of the human personality of Jesus is not, as such, revelation; it is revelation only in so far as in this historical, human personality the eternal Son of God is recognized. The *incognito* of his historical appearance can be pierced only by the eye of faith."⁹¹ It is difficult to see how either Otto's or Brunner's position could take the historical Jesus as a direct source of revelation. It seems that only the timeless, noncognitive existential divine-human encounter and its salvific experience is the content of revelation.

Barth's articulation of the content of revelation is more elaborate. He certainly agrees that the existential encounter produced by the "Eternal Act of the Word" in man is the content of revelation to which the Bible writers are witnesses. As does Brunner, Barth also attempts to go beyond the existential encounter to include Christ as the content of revelation. Consequently, it is not infrequent to read statements to the effect that revelation is equal with Jesus Christ. For instance, early in his *Church Dogmatics* Barth affirms that "revelation in fact does not differ from the Person of Jesus Christ, and again does not differ from the reconciliation that took place in Him. To say revelation is to say, 'The Word became flesh.'⁹²

However, Barth also identifies Jesus Christ with the eternal nonhistorical act of God's Word which is the core of revelation as existential encounter.⁹³ Here Barth works on the basis of the idea that

⁸⁸Ibid., 160-165.

⁸⁹Brunner, *The Theology of Crisis*, 34.

⁹⁰Ibid., 34.

⁹¹Ibid., 35.

⁹²Barth, *CD I/1*, 134.

⁹³Barth's scheme requires three levels of "time" or "history" to explain the phenomenon of the revelation of the Word of God in the man Jesus of Nazareth. First he speaks of God's own being as not timeless but rather "historical even in its eternity" (*CD*, III/1, 66). This "historicity" of God is conceived to be the very source of time (*ibid.*, 67).

in its essence the act of revelation creates its external correspondent in the world of space and time. These external correspondents are called "signs." He points out that "among the signs of the objective reality of revelation we have to understand certain definite events and relations and orders within the world in which revelation is an objective reality, and therefore within the world which is also our world, the world of nature and history."⁹⁴ In this way Barth explains the historical facts (fallen, historicist history) in Scripture including Israel's history, Jesus of Nazareth, and the Christian church.⁹⁵

Ontologically natural and historical phenomena become signs because they are chosen by the eternal act of God to play that role.⁹⁶ The historicist meaning of nature or history has nothing to do in the choosing. As a matter of fact, Barth clearly states that the whole of signs contained in biblical history "might equally well have been quite different."⁹⁷ Moreover, epistemologically, between the external sign (historicist time) and the internal reality of the Word of God (eternal time of God and grace) there can be only a correspondence of contradic-

This historical eternity however is conceived by Barth as simultaneity, where the proper succession that belongs to the essence of time does not exist (*ibid.*; see the detailed discussion on God's eternity in *CD*, II/1, 608-677). On the contrary, simultaneity logically and traditionally describes the very essence of timelessness. Second, Barth speaks of the mutually corresponding times of creation and redemption (*CD*, III/1, 75). This time is grounded in grace and "is constituted by God's own presence in Jesus Christ in the world created by Him" (*ibid.*, 73). The description of this time of grace, the time of the incarnation, is made by Barth in temporal terms that clearly assume the absence of temporal succession, that is, the time of the incarnation is still not time but eternity (*ibid.*, 73-74). Finally, Barth speaks of "fallen time" that is our time. "It is the time whose flux has become a flight." Barth recognizes that this "is our only time" (*ibid.*, 7). When Barth turns to the issue of historicity he affirms that the historicity of creation and grace is nonhistorical in the historicist sense. Historicist history is our real history in the order of succession. Creation, redemption, and therefore revelation occur in the nonhistorical part of what Barth also calls "prehistory." It seems clear, then, that the encounter of revelation and the act of the revelation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ belong to the nonhistorical side, closer to the eternal act of God.

⁹⁴*CD* I/2, 223. "The fact that God's revelation is also a sign-giving is one side, the objective side, as it were, of its subjective reality" (*ibid.*, 224).

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 224-227.

⁹⁶The eternal "choosing" is explained by Barth in the case of the historicist humanity of Jesus Christ as an eternal *assumptio* which amounts to an eternal adoptionism in which the historicist human nature of Jesus of Nazareth is assumed in the eternal act that God is (*ibid.*, 155). In short, for Barth the Johannine *egeneto* amounts to the eternal adoption of the man Jesus of Nazareth (*ibid.*, 159-171). By virtue of that adoption the historical Jesus can be the external form of the Word of God that remains always the same.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 225.

tion. Barth specifically clarifies that “the place where God’s Word is manifest is, objectively and subjectively, the cosmos in which sin rules. The form of the Word of God is therefore really that of the cosmos which stands in contradiction to God. It as little has in it the capacity of revealing God to us as we on our part have the capacity for knowing God in it.”⁹⁸

Here we face a clearly ontological and epistemological duality in the Platonic and Kantian traditions. In their being chosen by God the signs have a reality and meaning (eternal time, time of grace) different and contradictory to the reality and meaning that correspond to them in the real world of space and time.⁹⁹ The duality between timelessness and temporality stems from Platonic tradition; the rejection of analogy between the two orders stems from the Kantian tradition. Truly, signs, including Scripture which is obviously a sign also, are sacraments whose meaning, always given, not by the external form, but by the internal, spiritual act of the Word of God, is always one and the same “*justificatio* or *sanctificatio hominis*.”¹⁰⁰

By way of conclusion on the content of revelation we can suggest that Barth clearly teaches that the ultimate content of Scripture is always the existential encounter produced, via sacrament, by the “Eternal Act of the Word of God.” In that he agrees with the liberal model. On the ontological side, however, his conception of the omnipotence and sovereignty of the eternal act of God seems to suggest that biblical writers were also given by God some “signs” or “forms” in historicist history. These could be considered as “content” of revelation, though of a different and lower kind than the real revelation in the Word. These signs basically would include the history of Israel and the life of Jesus of Nazareth. From the epistemological point of view, however, the one in which this article is interested, Barth’s explanation that God assumed the historicist history of the sign, which is worked out not by him directly, but by the human agent, seems to suggest that biblical authors were able to identify God’s signs, the external form of his Word, only on the basis of their personal noncognitive encounter with God. Either way it seems that Barth has made an effort to suggest that the content of revelation attested by the biblical writers also includes natural and historical phenomena chosen by God, mainly the history of Israel and the life of Jesus Christ. Yet because of his clear emphasis that the real content of revelation consists not in its external

⁹⁸CD I/1, 189-190.

⁹⁹CD I/2, 223.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 230; see also 228-232.

form (sign) but rather in the noncognitive, nonhistorical existential encounter in which God meets human beings, Barth evidently works within the liberal model of revelation-inspiration.

It seems clear that according to the liberal model, the ideas, information, concepts, and data we find in Scripture have been epistemologically originated by human cognitive activity without any contribution from God. The entire contents of Scripture, then, are human and historically conditioned. Thus, the liberal model of revelation juxtaposes the divine and the human in such a way that the contact between them does not involve any direct communication of truth or information, but rather provides an indirect stimulus to write (within historical limitations) about that which properly belongs to the timeless level of reality, namely, God and the religious experience.

The liberal model includes a variety of submodels which identify revelation with a specific kind of divine activity;¹⁰¹ yet, these submodels always work within the parameters drawn by the liberal model of revelation. Thus, Avery Dulles' classification of models of revelation—"Revelation as History," "Revelation as Inner Experience," "Revelation as Dialectical Presence," and "Revelation as New Awareness"—appears to set forth variations or submodels of the liberal model.¹⁰²

3. *Inspiration in the Liberal Model*

The liberal model maintains that the process of writing down Scriptures is essentially "an exclusively human activity."¹⁰³ The human writer of Scripture worked only with historically conditioned contents. No special divine charism is claimed to have assisted biblical writers.

However, there is a way in which this model traces religious discourse back to God: The inner timeless encounter of absolute dependence is considered to be the ultimate cause that motivates the origination of all religious discourse, including, of course, the Bible.

Schleiermacher connects the feeling of absolute dependence with the origin of biblical and dogmatic writings by claiming that human self-consciousness includes two inseparable, interconnected levels, one sensible and the other absolute. Consequently, he speaks of an absolute

¹⁰¹For the existence of different levels of models and paradigms, see, e.g., Küng, 134-135.

¹⁰²Dulles, *Models*, 53-114; see also 27.

¹⁰³Nix, 456; see also Nash, 375, and Gordon Lewis, "The Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], 231-233.

and a sensible self-consciousness or feeling.¹⁰⁴ Absolute self-consciousness is able "to manifest itself in time, by entering into relation with the sensible self-consciousness so as to constitute a moment."¹⁰⁵ Thus, since within human self-consciousness the feeling of absolute dependence (originated by a timeless God) always co-occurs with feelings of pleasure and pain (originated by sensory temporal experiences), the feeling of absolute dependence is always linked to the content of the sensible self-consciousness through which it expresses itself. In the very instant of its origination, this content becomes the content of its external historical manifestation, and when the feeling of absolute dependence is linked to it, the result is emotion.¹⁰⁶ Even when emotions express the feeling of absolute dependence, they are not knowledge, however, for they belong to the precognitive level of inner self-consciousness. Consequently, the writing down of religious literature becomes "the attempt to translate the inward emotions into thoughts."¹⁰⁷ Biblical teachings, and Christian doctrines as well, are "nothing but the expressions given to the Christian self-consciousness and its connexions."¹⁰⁸

As we have already pointed out, Otto, following Schleiermacher's lead, speaks of a human faculty of divination that allows some to *genuinely* cognize and recognize "the holy in its appearances."¹⁰⁹ These cognitions, however, are not identified with rational knowledge but rather with intuitions of the eternal beyond the temporal, which "in turn, assume shape in definite statements and propositions, capable of a certain groping formulation, which are not without analogy with theoretic propositions, but are to be clearly distinguished from them by their free and merely felt, not reasoned, character."¹¹⁰

The process of writing down the existential content of revelation is for Buber a process of translation or transmutation between two incompatible orders, the "I-Thou" order of the eternal encounter and the "I-It" order of spatio-temporal objectivity and knowledge.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 5, 4-5.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., § 5, 4.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., § 5, 5.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., § 13, postscript.

¹⁰⁸Ibid. See also § 16, postscript.

¹⁰⁹Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 148.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 150-151.

¹¹¹The writer needs "to grasp as an object that which he has seen with the force of presence, he will have to compare it with objects, establish it in its order among classes of objects, describe and analyze it objectively. Only as *It* can it enter the structure of knowledge" (Buber, *I and Thou*, 40).

Brunner explicitly rejects the classical theory of verbal inspiration.¹¹² However, he explicitly affirms the guidance of the Holy Spirit on the Bible writers (inspiration) but in a way that does not rule out “human search, human weakness, and the possibility of mistakes in action and in behavior.”¹¹³ The real problem, however, in Brunner’s doctrine of inspiration is determined by his previously formulated concept of revelation as a timeless, nonhistorical, noncognitive existential encounter within the “I-Thou” order. After such an encounter the Bible writer “speaks *about* God, about his Lord, Christ; God is now the *Object* of his proclamation.”¹¹⁴ Clearly following the same general pattern established by Buber, Brunner claims that the written “word of the Apostle through preaching stands, as mediator, between the ‘Thou-word’ through which he became an Apostle, and the ‘Thou-word’ through which the ‘other’ becomes a believer, through which the Christian community, the Church, comes into being.”¹¹⁵ Obviously this same structure applies to the written word in Scripture. The written word is the *It* that as a sacrament mediates between the two divine actions in the apostle and the believer. The content, of course, comes from the Eternal *Thou* of God and not from the written form or content of the *It* order of human language.

Barth also clearly rejects the seventeenth-century doctrine of inspiration “as false doctrine.”¹¹⁶ The process by which Scripture was written is conceived to be a purely human process of “witnessing to revelation.”¹¹⁷ As witnesses to revelation, human authors created by their own agency the formal, temporal, external, cognitive “correspondent” or “written sign” to the eternal spiritual existential noncognitive Act of the Word of God.¹¹⁸ The human element does not cease to be

¹¹²Brunner, *Revelation and Reason*, 127-130.

¹¹³Ibid., 128.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 120.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁶CD I/2, 525.

¹¹⁷CD I/1, 125-126.

¹¹⁸“It is quite impossible that there should be a direct identity between the human word of Holy Scripture and the Word of God, and therefore between the creaturely reality in itself and as such and the reality of God the Creator. It is impossible that there should have been a transmutation of the one into the other or an admixture of the one with the other. This is not the case even in the person of Christ where the identity between God and man, in all the originality and indissolubility in which it confronts us, is an assumed identity” (CD I/2, 499). Barth goes on to draw an analogy between the incarnation of the Word in the humanity of Christ and the humanity of Scripture (ibid., 500-501). As discussed earlier in this article, in both cases the human part is eternally

human, as well as fully and totally historically conditioned.¹¹⁹ It necessarily follows that errors are contained in Scripture.¹²⁰

As we already pointed out, the content of revelation according to Barth consists in the internal, timeless, nonhistorical, "Eternal Act of His Word" and the external correspondent of historical and natural signs, including the history of Israel and the life of Jesus of Nazareth, willed and assumed in the very self-same act. It is easy to see how biblical writers acting within their natural and therefore fallible cognitive capacities may have gathered historical information from their own witnessing of facts or through a process of oral or written tradition. Yet, were they also able to talk about the real content of revelation, the nonhistorical, noncognitive encounter with the Word of God? Barth answers in the affirmative. The activity of speaking about the Word of God is characterized, in good liberal terms, as divination, while the language produced by divination is characterized as saga. Thus, divination is the cognitive process by which the unaided human intuition attempts to translate the timeless existential content of the encounter into the contradictory realm of time and space thus producing a written account under the category of saga (poetry).¹²¹ It

chosen, assumed, or adopted by God's eternal decision. Ontologically, then, it can be said that God is the ultimate cause of the external form or sign. Epistemologically, though, that is regarding its actual content and meaning, it is entirely caused by the temporal, historical, historicist nature of the human being and reason. For a discussion of Barth's analogy between Christ and Scripture, see Frank Hasel, "The Christological Analogy of Scripture in Karl Barth," *TZ* 50 (1994): 41-49.

¹¹⁹Talking about the human authors of Scripture, Barth remarks that "their action was their own, and like every human action, an act conditioned by and itself conditioning its temporal and spatial environment" (*CD* I/2, 505). "Not only part but all that they say is historically related and conditioned" (*ibid.*, 509).

¹²⁰Prophets and apostles "even in their office, even in their function as witnesses, even in the act of writing down their witness, were real, historical men as we are, and therefore sinful in their action, and capable and actually guilty of error in their spoken and written word" (*ibid.*, 529).

¹²¹Regarding the nature of human language about the objective revelation produced by the Word of God, Barth argues the "in addition to the 'historical' there has always been a legitimate 'non-historical' and pre-historical view of history, and its 'non-historical' and pre-historical depiction in the form of saga" (*CD*, III/1, 81). Saga is clearly defined as "an intuitive and poetic picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is enacted once and for all within the confines of time and space" (*ibid.*). The cognitive process by which the intuitive translation of the nonhistorical to the historical is understood by Barth as divination, which "means the vision of the historical emergence which precedes 'historical' events and which can be guessed from that which has emerged and in which 'historical' history takes place" (*ibid.*, 83). In short, divination "looks to the basic and impelling occurrence behind the everyday aspect of history, where the latter is not only no less history than on this everyday aspect but has indeed its source and is to that extent history in a higher sense" (*ibid.*).

should be remembered (1) that such a translation is made between incompatible nonanalogical levels, and (2) that in the first level we not only have no space and time but also no knowledge as we know it, and (3) that the intuition and linguistic expression is made by fallen men without any supernatural aid.¹²² According to Barth, then, Scripture is a humanly conceived and produced document which generally is a mixture of history and saga, with some exceptional occurrence of either pure saga (as in the creation accounts) or pure history.¹²³ No divinely originated cognitive contents are to be found in the whole of Scripture. Scripture itself is one of the many external historical signs that God uses sacramentally, in connection with which God may choose to produce the existential encounter in the believer.¹²⁴

Finally, if inspiration may still refer to a divine influence on the writing of Scripture, the liberal model, following Schleiermacher's lead, seems to favor a switch regarding the locus where such activity might be recognized from the individual to the social level.¹²⁵ Accordingly, inspiration would work, not on the writers, but rather on the entire community that historically conditions the contents of emotions, knowledge, and words utilized by these writers. This "social" view of inspiration, however, does not change the fact that the epistemological origin of Scripture is human.

It is possible to say, then, that the liberal model of inspiration has no place for direct divine activity in the cognitive-linguistic process of writing Scripture. The writing of Scripture was achieved by the power of human imagination, which replaces reason. In essence, moreover, the process of writing Scripture was historical and therefore fallible and limited.¹²⁶ Borrowing the terms utilized by the classical model, it is possible to suggest that according to the liberal model the reach of human activity in the writing of Scripture is full and plenary. By the same token the divine activity seems to be eliminated fully and completely.

¹²²That is why Barth comments that divination "looks to the point where from the standpoint of 'history' everything is dark, although in fact it is only from this point that 'history' can emerge and be clear" (ibid., 83).

¹²³Ibid., 82.

¹²⁴CD I/2, 532-533.

¹²⁵See *The Christian Faith*, § 130.

¹²⁶Consequently, the liberal model of revelation-inspiration allows for errors to be found not only in biblical expressions but also in biblical teachings. Moreover, the task of theology includes the discovering and elimination of such errors.

4. *Implications for Theology*

A study of the far-reaching implications of the acceptance of the liberal model of revelation-inspiration for the constitution of Christian theology cannot be probed in this article. But the importance of such a study cannot be understated, since the liberal model seems to have been accepted in the theological circles of a vast majority of Christian denominations.¹²⁷ Therefore, it is appropriate to outline some of the results of applying the liberal model of revelation-inspiration to Scripture as the source of theological data in order to have a better understanding of the full theological significance of this model. First of all, it should be noticed that since according to the liberal model the contents and words of Scripture are not produced by human reason but by human imagination,¹²⁸ Christian theology is left without objective cognitive foundations. Theological pluralism becomes an unavoidable result of the liberal model of revelation-inspiration.¹²⁹ Second, since biblical words and meanings are wholly human, biblical exegesis is to be undertaken with the same tools and procedures utilized by the historical and literary sciences.¹³⁰ Third, liberal theology has felt free to play, so to speak, with the biblical contents in their possible role as sources of theology, which are processed mainly under two basic categories: history and literature. Because the content of theology in the liberal model is not historical but rather transcendent and timeless, such play has no direct bearing on the constitution and determination of the contents of Christian theology. And fourth, philosophy, science, tradition, and experience are called by the liberal model to play a grounding role as sources of theology, a role that properly belongs to Scripture.

5. *Conclusion*

In my previous article the classical model was explored. In this one, with the description of the most common general features of the liberal

¹²⁷Its outreach is said to include, among others, Roman Catholicism (Schökel, 218) and most Southern Baptist seminaries and colleges (Nash, 34). Gordon Lewis has studied the case of Berkouwer, who began with the classical model of revelation-inspiration, but later switched to the liberal model (236). This case should not be considered an isolated one, however.

¹²⁸The role of imagination in the constitution of theology has been given extensive analytical and technical consideration in David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

¹²⁹See Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 10, postscript.

¹³⁰See *ibid.*, § 27, 3, and § 130, 2.

model, we have completed our historical journey in search of the general characteristics of the models by which the explanation of the epistemological origin of Scripture has been formulated throughout the history of Christian theology. As the reader may have noticed, my purpose was not and is not to criticize either model. It is my personal opinion that one has to recognize that both models have been developed with a high degree of inner coherence and that both are theoretically possible. The purpose for describing both the classical and liberal models was to provide the necessary context to help us to see whether a proper explanation of the epistemological origin of Scripture may require a new model or whether Christian theology can still attempt its proper task by utilizing various versions of the existing models.

From the brief analytical description of the classical and liberal models of revelation and inspiration, it seems possible to draw at least the following general conclusions:

First, as the consequences of both models are briefly considered it becomes apparent that great portions of Scripture (classical model) or the whole content of Scripture (liberal model) are rendered practically irrelevant as sources of theology. Thus, Christian theology is driven to draw the contents for its doctrines more from science, philosophy, experience, and tradition than from Scripture. Only when inspiration is understood as revelation in the classical model or, to put it in another way, when in the classical model inspiration is disconnected from the doctrine of revelation, the whole of Scripture becomes theoretically authoritative as a source of theology in its entirety.

Second, the formulation of the liberal model of inspiration and revelation was required by epistemological changes produced within the presuppositional framework that contradicted the presuppositions utilized by the classical model. Accordingly, human consciousness came to be conceived as limited to the historical realm, and therefore, unable to have cognitive contact with a nonhistorical, nontemporal reality, namely God.

Third, both models seem to have difficulties integrating the two main types of data that should be accounted for in any doctrine of revelation-inspiration. These main types of data are (1) what Scripture says about itself (biblical doctrine about itself) and (2) what Scripture is (phenomena of Scripture). The classical model seems to have difficulties in properly accounting for the phenomena of Scripture, while the liberal model appears to find greater difficulty in following what Scripture says about itself.

Fourth, both models seem to be incapable of providing an explanation of the epistemological origin of Scripture in which both the divine and the human agencies are properly recognized in their specific contributions to the constitution of biblical contents and words. Again, the classical model has

difficulties accounting for the contributions of the human agency while the liberal model is unable to properly include the divine as depicted in Scripture.

Fifth, it seems clear that the difficulties presented so far are the result of the presuppositional structure on which these models are built. The common denominator shared by these two models comes into view when their conviction that God's nature and activities are to be interpreted as timeless is uncovered. The analysis of these two models, then, seems to indicate that a timeless interpretation of the divine being and its activity is the structural cause of the shortcomings each model appears unable to overcome.

Sixth, the reason why both models follow a timeless interpretation of God lies in the fact that neither of them follow the methodological principle of *sola Scriptura* but rather build their views utilizing extrabiblical philosophical principles and methodologies.

Finally, in their departure from the *sola Scriptura* principle, both models follow a procedure that is essentially unscientific. A methodology that interprets an object according to categories that are alien to it seems to ignore the basic scientific principle according to which any object of scientific inquiry should be allowed to express itself freely and fully. A scientific approach to the study of the epistemological origin of Scripture, then, can neither follow the classical nor liberal models of revelation-inspiration because they apply to the object of study presuppositions that are alien to it. A scientific approach to the investigation of the epistemological origin of Scripture should be built on the basis of a total commitment to the *sola Scriptura* principle from which both the presuppositional structure and the data for a new model of revelation and inspiration must flow.

These brief suggestions regarding the common characteristics shared by the classical and liberal models of revelation-inspiration seem to indicate the necessity not only for the formulation of a new model, but also, once it is built, that its theological consequences be followed. Such a new model should be built on the basis of the biblical ground uncovered in my first article and following the methodology discussed in the second. Once the possibility, methodology, and need for the development of a new model of revelation and inspiration have been explored, we may dedicate attention to the actual formulation of the basic structure of the new model. Later will come the actual development of a fullfledged theory of revelation and inspiration that may discuss in a detailed way all the issues that are, in one way or another, related to the epistemological origin of Scripture.