

# THE TRIUNE GOD AS THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE

• Ricardo Aldana •

“The Holy Spirit, who unites in himself the loving will of the Father and the Son, also incorporates the sacred writers’ loving reception of the Word into this unity—and so unites Father and Son also from within Scripture itself.”

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## *Introduction: defining the question*

Exegesis and theology are called to re-discover anew the unity of the Scriptures as a mystery that reaches into God’s own being. We use the term “mystery” here in the traditional sense, meaning, in the words of Newman, a “Truth Sacramental:” that is, “a high invisible grace lodged in an outward form, a precious possession to be piously and thankfully guarded for the sake of the heavenly reality contained in it.”<sup>1</sup> The adoption of the word mystery in this context is appropriate, because the Bible confronts us from the outset with a reality that exceeds all exhaustive comprehension: the reality of human words expressing the one Word of God.

The divine inspiration of Scripture’s human words is the original and abiding guarantee of their unity, and this unity is in turn

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<sup>1</sup>J. H. Newman, “Sermon 18,” in *Parish Sermons*; cited by Louis Bouyer, *Le mystère de la foi*, (Geneva, 2006), 63; Eng., *Newman’s Vision of Faith: A Theology for General Times of Apostasy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

a mystery (in the sense just explained) on account of its origin in God and his action of inspiration. But the content of Scripture, too, is itself an unfathomably mysterious, singular unity. And this unity stands at the very heart of all theological reflection. The unity of the two Testaments is at the origin of the confession of Christian faith. By the same token, it is the permanent point of departure for theology, which theologians may never move beyond nor leave behind.

Scripture, then, contains God's revelation; it contains the one and only Word of the Father that expresses the whole of God's being and the whole of his good-pleasure (*eudokia*) touching creation. Yet Scripture expresses this one Word in a mysterious fashion by means of the dual unity of the Old and New Testaments. This dual unity, in turn, contains manifold particular mysteries, each one of which is unfathomable in itself. There is, for instance, an interplay between the internal unity of the Old Testament, which cannot be closed in on itself, and the vast and varied New Testament references to the Old Testament (references that are not the same in Matthew as in John, or in the Letter to the Romans, or in the Book of the Apocalypse). By means of this interplay, the Word of the definitive fulfillment always comes forth anew from the Word of the promise. At the same time, this definitive Word, in his newness as *novissimum* and *eschaton* (Heb 1:2), recapitulates the whole of humanity, through Israel's mission to serve as historical mediator between Jesus Christ and mankind as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, even the New Testament itself is characterized by a richly complex internal unity; think of how the one Gospel is proclaimed in four distinct accounts, or of the way in which each respective book contains a theology that is both distinct from, yet complementary to, that of the others. All of God's revelation is present in the Scriptures, because all of salvation is present there—but precisely as mystery, in the sense explained above. For this reason, as Newman saw, no one can set limits to what the Scriptures contain; that a doctrine is not explicitly enunciated as

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<sup>2</sup>See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit I. Schau der Gestalt*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1988), 604–19; Eng., *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1: *Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio, S.J., and John Riches (New York: Crossroads Publications; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982).

such need not mean that it is not somehow present in a more veiled or implicit fashion.

The unity of Scripture, both in its origin and its content, has important implications for exegesis. For example, the literal sense of Scripture—as it is understood, for example, by St. Thomas Aquinas in his biblical commentaries *ad litteram* (*Super Iob*, *Super Isaiam*)—does not refer only to the letter of each individual text, read as an expression of the (probable) “intention” of its human author. Rather, the literal sense of Scripture is precisely the meaning that the whole of the Bible gives to each individual book, indeed, to each verse. At bottom, this conception of the literal sense, which is characteristic of pre-modern exegesis, is identical with the intuition behind the kind of “canonical reading” of Scripture that has recently been proposed as a way to overcome the fragmentation of historicist exegesis of the text as a merely human artifact.

One thing should be clear: the unity of Scripture is invisible to us so long as we look at the Bible merely as a collection of *texts*. Its texts, taken precisely as texts, do not contain the source of their own unity. Nor does this source lie simply in the religion of Israel, or in the history of its people, at least not as these are considered by historicist *Religionsgeschichte*. Some have sought to rescue the Bible’s unity from the objectifying grasp of profane historiography by suggesting that it is the reader who creates, or recreates, this unity himself. Theologically, this would mean that the Church, in reading the Scripture, is the creator of the Bible’s unity.

Now, the main difficulty with this conception is not the commission of a *petitio principii* in supposing the existence of a book created by its being read. For there is a sense in which the Church *did* create the Scriptures, giving human words for the expression of the divine Word. If a hermeneutic circle terminating in the reader is problematic in the case of the Bible, it is because no finite subject, individual or collective, is capable of arriving (as it were from the outside) at *the* meaning of the Scriptures. Rather, the Church, in her totality, is exceeded, burst open, by the very Word that she receives. There has to be another Reader, one capable of recognizing the meaning of the inspired words. The very canon that the Church establishes and defines must obey this other reading—this other norm (canon), this other acceptance of the biblical word as canon—as the force that binds heaven to what is spoken on earth.

In this context, it is worth doing a bit of philosophy of religion. What does it mean for God to speak? Does he speak *himself* to men? There is a general tendency in Islam, which has crystallized into a more explicit thesis in some schools of Muslim theology, to hold that the Qur'an was written in heaven and has no human author. By the same token, the Prophet received it, in its complete form, from heaven. There is no dialogue; everything is written down as it has been dictated once and for all.<sup>3</sup>

The criticism that can be leveled against this Islamic conception of revelation is that it implies that God does not really speak in the proper sense, for he does not genuinely express himself *to anybody*. Jewish theology, by contrast to Islam, insists on a certain distance between God, the creator of the word, and the historically given word itself. This distance seems to account better for the dialogical character of God's speech, without which it would not be speech in the proper sense. Nevertheless, the distance between God and word leaves open the question as to whether and to what extent the *dabar Adonai*, the word of the Lord, can truly be said to be the internal word of God himself, a communication in which God has genuinely given *himself* to man.

As Claude Bruaire has shown, however, the primacy of negative theology implied by this Jewish solution cannot be the last word about God. On Bruaire's account, in fact, we cannot dismiss the idea that in God there is word (*langage en Dieu*), and that this word can be addressed to us (*langage de Dieu*), making possible our prayer in response (*langage à Dieu*). Indeed, for Bruaire, philosophy can even show positively that this claim makes sense; the logic of the human word, in "syllogistic" relation to desire and freedom, provides a tool for this purpose—a tool developed and applied in the light of revelation.<sup>4</sup>

Bruaire's account of God's speech helps us grasp the distinctiveness of the Christian idea of revelation, which begins with the fact that God has spoken *himself*, using, not secondary words, but the definitive Word about himself: "The Word was God . . . the Word became flesh." Now, if God has really spoken, if he has really

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. R. Arnaldez, "El creyente Musulman," in *Tratado de antropología de lo sagrado*, 5, ed. Julien Ries (Madrid, 2005), 359–61.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Claude Bruaire, *L'affirmation de Dieu. Essai sur la logique de l'existence* (Seuil, 1964), 179 and esp. 229–52.

given his own Logos, then, by his gracious economy, he has also ‘let it go’: He does not wish to recover it except by means of the love with which it is returned to him by his creatures. Applied to Scripture: God’s one Word is uttered in human words, and the Bible is its summing up—which is why the Bible contains the final word both about God and about his creation.<sup>5</sup>

Our task in what follows is to illumine the unity of Scripture as God’s Word in human words, human words summing up a history that unfolds in the dual unity of the two Testaments. The pursuit of this task will require pondering the unity of the Scriptures in light of the triunity of God, of which this unity is an expression and a communication. We will begin our reflections on a more christological note (section 1). This consideration will enable us in turn to highlight the unity of Scripture as a fruit of the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the eternal love with which the Father has pronounced his Word, and with which this Word responds to the Father (section 2). Finally, we will go on to focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling the one Word of the Father to include the response of the creature—God’s Word in human words—(section 3), a response embodied in its immaculate perfection in the Yes of the Virgin Mary as the womb of the Scriptures (section 4).

### 1. In Christo

The content of the words of Scripture is the Word of the Father, Jesus Christ; God’s saying himself in this Word is as much God’s manifesting himself among men as it is his giving himself to them.<sup>6</sup> Revelation and salvation go together, and they converge

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Balthasar, “Wort, Schrift, Tradition,” in *Verbum Caro. Skizzen zur Theologie I* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1990), 20–24; Eng., “The Word, Scripture and Tradition,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 1: *Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 11–26.

<sup>6</sup>In affirming this, we rely on the correspondence between metaphysics and theology underlying Balthasar’s Trilogie: God’s self-manifestation in glory (theological aesthetics) corresponds, in divine freedom, to beauty as a transcendental property of being; God’s gift of himself (Theo-drama) corresponds to goodness; God’s speaking himself (Theo-logic) corresponds to the truth of being. Cf. *Epilog* (Einsiedeln, Trier: Johannes Verlag, 1987), 45–66; Eng., *Epilogue*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

precisely where God himself appears before man in his essence as Love. Ferdinand Ulrich, in his philosophical meditations on the Tower of Babel, has shown the need for one unique word amidst all the plurality of languages—the word of being as love. There must, Ulrich argues, be one word from on high to give meaning to all earthly language.<sup>7</sup> A fortiori, we could argue, the plurality of the Scriptures needs the *Verbum abbreviatum* in Christ in order to communicate its content.<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that the need for one word to unite the plurality of languages and the one Word to unite the plurality of the Scriptures are intrinsic to each another, because the recapitulation of the Scriptures in Christ is in some sense identical with his recapitulation of the destiny of creation; the former recapitulation presupposes the first word of the Creator, the *occulta inspiratio vocationis* [the hidden in-breathing of the call] (St. Augustine) that is the first form of created being.<sup>9</sup>

The foregoing suggests a deep unity between the notions of divine revelation and divine inspiration, which we must neither conflate nor separate. A schematization that separates revelation as the manifestation of God's truth from inspiration as the divine guarantee of the inerrancy of Scripture has no basis either in liturgical tradition or in ancient theological reflection. Inspiration always means the in-breathing of the unique Word of God into the human wording of the Scriptures. At the same time, revelation and inspiration are not simply identical. Revelation is God's self-utterance in his unique Word; inspired Scripture is the testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning this unique Word that is spoken by the Father to men and spoken by the Son with men.

Revelation, then, belongs chiefly to the realm of the Word, inspiration chiefly to the realm of the Spirit. However, just as the

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. his study "Die Babylonische Transcendenz. Der Eine *Logos* und die vielen Sprachen," in *Logo-Tokos. Der Mensch und das Wort* (Freiburg, 2003).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Henri de Lubac, *L'Écriture dans la Tradition* (Paris, 1966), 233ff.; Eng., *Scripture in the Tradition*, with an introduction by Peter Casarella, trans. Luke O'Neill (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 2001).

<sup>9</sup>Confessions 11.8.10. Commenting on the last books of the Confessions, Balthasar affirms that "the form of being, therefore, is dialogue from the beginning: the call of the divine word and—through conversion—the creature's response" (*Das Ganze im Fragment* [Einsiedeln, Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1990], 26; Eng., *A Theological Anthropology* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967]).

Son of God and the Spirit of God may not be separated from each another, revelation and inspiration also suffer no mutual separation. We can thus affirm a certain identity between the incarnate Word and the biblical word. As Balthasar puts it, Jesus Christ,

the central Word which God speaks . . . made his appearance in the sign of obedience, to fulfill the will of the Father, and thereby to redeem and justify the creation. He fulfills it inasmuch as he lets his earthly life as Word made flesh be configured, step by step, by all the forms of the word in the law and the prophets . . . . Therefore he assimilates the scriptural word into his own life, making it live and there take flesh, becoming wholly actual and concrete.<sup>10</sup>

These considerations highlight the legitimacy of conceiving the unity of Scripture in light of Jesus, not only as the Truth that grounds all truths, but, more concretely, as the *Gestalt*—the organic configuration of the totality—of Scripture.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the lines of the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms would all move in different—and sometimes opposite—directions, if they were not drawn together by and in the figure of Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> Of course, he himself is obedient to these lines, as has been said. On the other hand, he is also absolute novelty in himself. He is the new beginning that both recapitulates everything that comes before and gives it its origin, the source and center of the unity of the Scriptures:

And although Jesus made his life as man the compendium of all the scriptures, and realized in himself all its promises of eternal life (Jn 5:39–40), still there can be a scripture subsequent to him; and this fact is proof that the fulfillment of the Father’s decree does not imply its annihilation; . . . that he makes fulfillment issue in a new promise so as to remain at all times what he is, namely, the One who ever and again fulfills beyond all expectation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Balthasar, “The Word, Scripture and Tradition,” in *The Word Made Flesh*, 13.

<sup>11</sup>Adrian Walker, “Living Water: Reading Scripture in the Body of Christ With Benedict XVI,” *Second Spring* 12 (2010): 60–70. Also see the reprint of this article in the present issue.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit* I, 595–604.

<sup>13</sup>Balthasar, “The Word, Scripture and Tradition,” in *The Word Made Flesh*, 14.

## 2. De Spiritu Sancto

As we have just seen, the unity of Scripture is a creation of Christ. It is so in a double sense.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, Christ is the *Gestalt* of Scripture and, as such, he creates its unity; without him, the various streams of Scripture could not flow together to form an *unum*. In another sense, as *Gestalt* he also communicates the very depth from which he himself proceeds; that is, he communicates the dynamism of the Father's gift, giving himself over to the Spirit so as to render the Spirit the expression and source of unity. "On the one hand, the incarnate Word absorbs the Scripture into himself so as to bring to fulfillment what it is: the word of God the Father in the Son. On the other hand, he makes it go forth from himself so as to bring to fulfillment what it is: the word of the Spirit that Christ sends at the end of his life, when he returns to the Father."<sup>15</sup>

The Son of God gives Scripture its inner shape, through the Father's act of revelation-salvation that the Son realizes, and by means of the *fait accompli* of this revelation-salvation, which abides within the sphere of the Spirit. The entire Scripture is *Evangelium Christi* and *Evangelium de Christo*,<sup>16</sup> the first as revelation in action, the second as its proclamation, which has been entrusted to the Holy Spirit. We must not forget, however, that the very act of revelation that is fulfilled by Christ is also guided from its beginning by the Holy Spirit. The "trinitarian inversion," which Hans Urs von Balthasar describes as characteristic of the "economy,"<sup>17</sup> reemerges here, because the One who inspires is not the simply Word; rather,

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. de Lubac, *L'Écriture dans la Tradition*, especially "L'Acte du Christ," 133–47, and "Le Fait du Christ," 203–20, where de Lubac considers Jesus Christ as both the active founder of the unity of Scripture and its object.

<sup>15</sup>Balthasar, "Wort, Schrift, Tradition," 24.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. de Lubac, *L'Écriture dans la Tradition*; Bouyer, *La Bible et L'évangile*. The difference in the complementary perspectives of the two French theologians is of no consequence here. De Lubac sets forth the abiding value of traditional exegesis. Bouyer's perspective is that of the pure gaze of faith on modern exegesis.

<sup>17</sup>Balthasar, *Theo-Dramatik II. Die Personen des Spiels. 2. Die Personen in Christus* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998), 167–75, 476–79; Eng., *Theo-Drama*, vol. 3: *Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).

there is a sense in which the Word himself is brought to the letter of Scripture by the Holy Spirit.

In terms of the Christian life, this means that the Father has not only given us his Word already constituted in Scripture, but has also given us the Love with which to speak this enscriptured Word. By a divine *synkatabasis* [economic condescension], the Father “lets go” of something of his Word, and he recovers it only in and through our contemplation, by means of which his Word is “returned” to him. It is no accident, then, that the tradition has perceived an intense interweaving of Eucharist and the Scriptures;<sup>18</sup> both, singly and together, include the act of the Church who shares in returning the sent Son *in sinu Patris*.

Mary conceives *ek Pneumatou hagiou* [by the Holy Spirit] (Mt 1:20). At the beginning of the mission to “the twelve tribes of Israel,” we are shown “[to] *Pneuma [tou] Theou katabainon hosei peristeran [kai] erchomenon ep’auton [Iesoun]*” [the Spirit of God descending as a dove upon him] (Mt 3:16). For this reason, when Christ presents himself at the beginning of his public mission in Nazareth, he declares that “*Pneuma Kyriou ep’eme*” [the Spirit of the Lord is upon me] (Lk 4:18). Analogously, the Word of the Father, given over in his kenosis to men, is brought by the work of the Holy Spirit to the letter of Scripture—just as he is borne by the Holy Spirit from the womb of the Father into the womb of Mary.

Enscripturation, we could say, involves the Father’s “recognition” of his eternal Word—his eternal self-utterance in Another—in time, that is, in the biblical history summed up in Scripture. Nevertheless, the history of Israel, Jesus, and the nascent Church that is recorded in Scripture would not be sufficient to “ensure” this recognition without the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, who does not replace this history in its temporality, but transfigures it from within (and does so already during its initial occurrence). In order for the Father to recognize his Word in Scripture, the Spirit must vouch for it; Scripture must be testimony on the part of Him who is the Eternal Witness to the love of the Father and the Son, which is now opened out onto creation.

God, having really given over his only Word, does not lose it in creation and in the kenosis of the Son. No, the Holy Spirit

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. Walker, “Living Water: Reading Scripture in the Body of Christ with Benedict XVI.”

takes charge of all “rupture” and “distance,” holding it within the unity of the eternal witness that he is. And, in the inspiration of Scripture, he performs this same service from within the response of faith that he himself awakens. Thanks to the Spirit of Truth, then, God the Father receives his Word from the human words of those inspired by that Spirit, both in the history that is lived and in the history that is written. The Father hears his Word, not only in eternity, but also by reading it in the holy books. If Christ is the wondrous singer of the Psalms (St. Augustine), it is the Father who hears his eternal Son’s song of praise resounding in them.

An important corollary of the foregoing remarks is that, since the whole of the biblical books is a unity given by the Holy Spirit, its literal meaning is already spiritual. That is, the letter does not explain its own configuration as a literary unity, which instead derives from the Spirit of God. And herein lies the necessity of remaining open to a *magis* within the *littera*—a “more” that we can legitimately call, with the tradition, the “spiritual sense.” In a certain respect, this *magis* precedes the letter of Scripture, because the origin of the Scripture is the Father’s handing over his Word to the Spirit who inspires it. From another point of view, however, spiritual reading of Scripture presupposes an already-established canon. The Christian’s reading of the Bible reconstructs the canon (*in fieri*) from the spiritual meaning—the self-gift of God as Word and Spirit—that is at the origin of the Bible. Of course, *in facto esse*, canonical reading is the same as spiritual reading, because the canon contains the Spirit’s whole witness to the Word.

### 3. Processio Scripturae a Deo in processione Spiritus

So far, we have attempted to illumine the unity of the Scriptures through meditation on their inclusion in the mutual self-gift of the Son and the Spirit as attested by the Eternal Witness of that self-gift, the Holy Spirit. But doesn’t this procedure turn history, in textbook Hegelian fashion, into an unfolding of the Spirit in which both creation and the Trinity collapse into an all-encompassing Logos, so that otherness disappears into a monological unity without dialogue? We can formulate the same question more simply: If the ontology of Scripture “from below” is fulfilled solely by the

response of the incarnate Word—the death and resurrection of the Lord—to the Father who sends him, can we say that God has really spoken *with* men, considering that the subject of the humanity that bears the word of response is a divine person? In other words: Has God spoken with anyone other than God himself?

We can frame our answer to this question in terms of trinitarian theology, which commits us to saying that the real distinction between Father and Son enables authentic dialogue in God, though it is one that takes place *in Spiritu Sancto* [in the Holy Spirit]. The Father is *suiipsius expressio active generans Filium* [expression of his very self as actively generating the Son], and the Son is *Patris expressio passive generate* [passively generated expression of the Father]. There is a real distinction between the person of the Father, who speaks himself in the Son, and the person of the Son, who is spoken by him. And this distinction requires that the Father say himself to the Son—and so give the whole of his divinity to him—and that the Son say the Father back to the Father—returning the gift to him in the ‘more’ of his eternal “Yes, Father” (Matthew 11:25). The Son, in his receptivity of the Father’s gift, is already Eucharist, already *Berakhá* to the Father. But there is more: The dative (the Son gives to the Father) in some sense inverts the order of activity and passivity involved in the accusative (i.e. of the Father’s generating the Son). For the Father now “undergoes” love, and the Son is the agent lover. There is a sense, in fact, in which the Son, in his very sonship (as a return self-gift to the Father), is always already internal to the Father’s being and paternal generating. That is, by his eternal Amen (Rev 3:14) to his own being generated, the Son in some sense makes the Father’s paternity possible.<sup>19</sup> The Son, in his receptivity of the Father’s gift, is already Eucharist, already *Berakhá* to the Father.

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<sup>19</sup>Adrienne von Speyr comments: “Here, the full significance of the Son as Word comes to light, because he is the faithful, veridical witness by being the Word who expresses all that the Father is. And when he reduces himself to a single word—Amen—he shows himself precisely in this reduction to be the divine Word, to be Son.” Among the attributes of the Son, his status as the “Amen” expresses his sonship in a more complete way than the others, because it belongs, and is conformed, completely to the Father, and “expresses perfectly the coming-from-the Father and returning-to-the Father that are proper to the Son” (*Apokalypse* [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1950], 202–03).

Now, the real distinction of the persons would threaten to disappear in a final overcoming of otherness,<sup>20</sup> or in a communion without a real distinction of processions,<sup>21</sup> if the coeternal love of the divine persons *were not also* a third person in his own right. Though the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, he is also their very union in person. On the one hand, then, he personifies the dative of love that is implied in the accusative of the love by which each of the other two divine persons gives himself for the sake of the beloved ‘Thou’ (he is the Spirit of the Father and Spirit of the Son). On the other hand, the Spirit is a new accusative (and so a new dative), to whom the Father and Son direct their mutual action, in a unity enabling each truly to renounce himself for the divine other.<sup>22</sup>

The function of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, then, is to embody personal love, and to do so precisely by being himself a person who, as love itself does, at once unites and distinguishes. If the trinitarian life were not an event of *love*, it would sink back into

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<sup>20</sup>“Hegel, the philosopher of Spirit, has forgotten the Holy Spirit, or, more precisely, he has failed to advert to the Spirit’s distinctive, personal mode of being and has completely reinterpreted what the Church says about him” (L. Oening-Hanhoff, cited by Hans Urs von Balthasar in *Theologik III. Der Geist der Wahrheit* [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1987], 40; Eng., *Theo-Logic*, vol. 3: *The Spirit of Truth*, trans. Graham Harrison [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005], 46).

<sup>21</sup>A tendency of this sort seems to animate Gisbert Greshake’s argument against any *prius* or *prior* in trinitarian theology. The German theologian rejects the *taxis*, the order of the divine processions upheld by tradition, which he sees as a consequence of the Hellenizing influence of the philosophy of the One, whereas, in his view, the original logic of the revelation of the Trinity entails a conception of divinity in terms of egalitarian communion, without any “ontological or logical *prius/prior*” (*Il Dio unitrino* [Brescia, 2000], 216). The contemporary approach to the trinity of God in light of an interpersonal event enables us to overcome, Greshake argues, the model of “trinitarian order” with the Father as the principle, source, and origin of the whole divinity (cf. 215–18, 231). But what real exchange, what real self-donation, would Greshake’s Levinasian personalism actually allow in the heart of the Trinity? Arianism and other early forms of subordinationism may have conflated the order of the divine processions with an inadequate philosophy of the One, but the Scriptures set forth this order as clearly as they proclaim the identity of Jesus in his unique relation to God.

<sup>22</sup>On the necessity of approaching the mystery of the Trinity in terms of the dominical saying that “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself” (Lk 9:23), see Adrienne von Speyr, *Das Wort und die Mystik II. Objektive Mystik* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1970), 116–17.

some impersonal logical process, where, in the end, the Word would not have been given. However, since the event between the Father and the Son is already absolute love, grounded in its own logos, it need not be subordinated to any logic of unfolding totality,<sup>23</sup> but can remain *in itself*. That is, it can result in and be a different person, a person who is immediate to the other two, yet distinct from them both—and so can guarantee both the immediate oneness and the distinctness needed if the divine substance is to be charity. The Holy Spirit is love in himself—in the love between Father and Son. He is not a new Word, finally reducible to the one Word in God, but personifies the “spirit” in which this one Word is to be heard and said. He is not another Logos, different from the one expressed paternally and filially; he is rather the love that makes possible and sustains these two expressions and that authentically interprets them beyond themselves.

#### 4. Ex Maria Virgine

The foregoing helps to shed light on how the Holy Spirit can inspire the Scriptures in which the Father reveals himself by speaking his one Word—precisely from the human hearts of the sacred writers, whose obedience of faith is the culmination of the ontology “from below” presupposed by the Scriptures. The Scriptures are not given exclusively “from above,” and the sacred writers are not lifeless instruments, transmitting truths that are incomprehensible and alien to them. The discovery that it took some generations before the historical tradition of the word found written expression—many, in the case of the Old Testament, and at least one or two in the case of the New—has rendered this understanding of inspiration untenable.

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<sup>23</sup>John Milbank’s allusions to Hegel (curiously, in regard to Gregory of Nyssa, 208) seem to suggest a biblical theology in which the “divine inverbation” (186) of creation, as the continuing unfolding of the divine narrative—as in Hegel’s great syllogism—in bodily nature and in politics, ultimately coincides with a Platonism within which it is not clear how otherness can be sustained. See *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford, 1998). As F. Ulrich observes, the event of narration for its own sake tends toward solipsism (cf. *Gebet als geschöpflicher Grundakt* [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1973], 10).

Yet this affirmation of the participation of the sacred writers—and of the historical tradition from which they emerge—in the inspiration of the Bible leaves us with a final question. How can the grace of the Spirit inspire a heart that is not just human, but, by reason of sin, is incapable in its unbelief of upholding the Covenant or of following Christ? Mustn't the event of inspiration-revelation ultimately reduce back again to a solitary divine action that uses the creature as its instrument, but does not truly incorporate it into the speaking of the Word? Adrienne von Speyr sheds light on this question through her development of the analogy between the Incarnation of the Word and the inspiration of Scripture, which she propounds with an original emphasis that is rich in theological implications.

According to von Speyr, the Scriptures, analogously to the Incarnate Word, are co-constituted by a “Marian dimension” (*das Marianische*, or very simply, “the Marian”).<sup>24</sup> At the core of the Marian dimension is Mary's *fiat*. At the Annunciation, she pronounces this *fiat* in the presence of the angel with a faith so full and so open as to make her totally available to the Holy Spirit. This same unlimited breadth of Mary's Yes then allows the Holy Spirit to use her faith for the whole reception of God's revelation. The inerrancy of Scripture—or, better, the perfect correspondence of its human words to God's self-expression throughout the whole of the two Testaments—is thus constituted by Mary's *fiat*, which the Spirit extends, in a communion that he himself creates, to the otherwise never-perfect response of the prophets, evangelists, and apostles. The Holy Spirit breathes himself into the sacred writer, but he also does so as the s/Spirit of Mary.

Just as Mary's body is transformed by the Word who grows in her during the time of her pregnancy, and just as her soul goes from being the soul of the Immaculate Virgin to being the soul of the Immaculate Virgin-Mother, so also the Word, entering into the

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<sup>24</sup>In the German language, the use of an adjective in its substantive form is much more common than in other languages. The notion expressed here is similar to the *mariana ratio Ecclesiae* of John Paul II, which could be translated as the “Marian principle” or the “Marian dimension” of the Church. See the discourse of 22 December 1987, as well as *Mulieris dignitatem*, 27. While the pope uses the idea exclusively in an ecclesiological sense, by the analogy of faith it can and should be extended to a wider sphere. He himself did so in *Redemptor Hominis*, though without using the concept explicitly.

human words of the sacred writers (the “theologians,” in the language of Dionysius the Aeropagite) and adapting himself to them by the work of the Holy Spirit, creates the Scripture from within Marian love. Needless to say, Mary is not the author of the sacred books. She does not have to be. The “Marian dimension” that informs them consists precisely in Mary’s not being seen, in her disappearing in the service of God, but in a love that has given everything in this service and that makes possible the service of others.<sup>25</sup> Just as Mary uttered her Yes on behalf of all humanity (St. Thomas Aquinas), she also uttered it on behalf of every reception of the Word.

Ancient tradition already recognized the necessity of a perfect faith as the created condition of possibility for the revelation of God. This is why, according to Saint Augustine, God’s first creature is a City of God that clings to him in heaven. Similarly, the Eastern tradition speaks of a created Wisdom at God’s side. Echoes of this teaching can be found in both Saints Thomas and Bonaventure. In the introductions to their respective commentaries *In Sententiis*, for example, created wisdom—Christian doctrine—appears in the guise of the four rivers of paradise, God’s first creature. The City of God and created Wisdom are also the Spouse of God: they represent creation itself in its nuptial dimension, which corresponds to God’s primary creative intention.<sup>26</sup> They also represent scriptural revelation, which Scripture itself already associates with Nuptial Wisdom, for example, in Sirach, where the

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<sup>25</sup>The principal texts of Adrienne von Speyr regarding the presence of the Marian dimension in biblical history are, for the Old Testament, found in the small book *Mary in the Redemption* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003); cf. also *Die Schöpfung* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1972), *Die Sendung der Propheten* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1953); Eng., *The Mission of the Prophets* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), *Elia* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 2008<sup>2</sup>); Eng., *Elijah* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), and *Das Hohelied* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998<sup>2</sup>); Spanish: *La Creación. La Misión de los Profetas. Elías. El Cantar de los Cantares* (Rafaela, Argentina, 2005), which contain mostly implicit allusions to the presence of the Marian dimension throughout biblical history. For the New Testament, see the “Traktatus über den Advent des Sohnes,” in *Das Wort und die Mystik II. Objektive Mystik*, 119–66.

<sup>26</sup>See Louis Bouyer, *Sophie ou le monde en Dieu* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, coll. “Théologies,” 1994).

Torah seems to be identical with Wisdom, the first creature of God (Sir 24).

These figures, though eloquent, are incomplete so long as they lack any truly historical subject of the sort that Scripture would require. The effort has, of course, been made to identify created Wisdom, or the Spouse, with the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ,<sup>27</sup> who is certainly an authentically historical subject. Nevertheless, this identification also has a potential drawback: While it includes the dialogue between humanity and God within the dialogue of the divine Persons, the very mode of the inclusion risks “silencing” humanity by absorbing it into the sacred manhood of Christ. This “christification,” taken simply by itself, is liable to what Balthasar called the “cosmological reduction” of faith typical of ancient apologetics.<sup>28</sup> How, then, do we avoid reducing the content of Scripture to an a-temporal Truth that can be abstracted from the historicity of the Old and New Testaments, a historicity always borne by concrete historical persons?<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>For example, *Romance in Principio erat Verbum* of St. John of the Cross, or the whole Christology of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort. This is also the case in contemporary Russian sophiology’s reflections on the divine humanity of Christ.

<sup>28</sup>Cf. the first chapter of Balthasar’s *Glaubhaft ist nur Liebe* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 2000); Eng., *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Communio Books/Ignatius Press, 2004).

<sup>29</sup>In this regard, Balthasar’s position is as reserved as it is bold, as respectful of, and persuaded by, the biblical Christology of the Fathers as it is open to the fresh perspectives opened by modern exegesis in its approach to history. The closeness of ancient theology to biblical history is guaranteed by the obedience of faith, which is transformed into the following of Christ, into a personal history that begins in the contemplation of the Scripture that has him as its center. Today, if we set aside improper philosophical conditioning and “look through the prism of time” to see Christian life as a following of Christ, “then the historical-critical task would necessarily shimmer with a more positive light, even for Catholic theologians,” because the “implicit Christology” that it discovers corresponds to the wealth of what have been traditionally called the Mysteries of the Life of Christ. These mysteries contain more than what theology says about them: “Implicit theology contains more than what explicit theology contains; stated otherwise, the total mystery of grace and its absolute claim in the heart of history” is something greater than theology (“Zwei Glaubensweisen,” in *Spiritus Creator* [Einsiedeln, Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 1999], 89, 91; Eng., *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3: *Creator Spirit*, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993]). Cf. also Balthasar’s introduction to his edition of *De Civitate Dei*; the

It is just here that we grasp the import of Adrienne von Speyr's theology of the "Marian dimension" as a principle of Scripture. This theology does justice, on the one hand, to the traditional intuition that the Revelation of God requires an unflinching faith and, on the other hand, to the theological requirement that this faith be historically embodied.<sup>30</sup> This gives us the answer to our question about how the Spirit can inspire unbelieving hearts: He does so by extending Mary's real historical Yes, in its immaculateness, to the real historical faith of the prophets, apostles, and evangelists. The fashioning of the Scriptures thus depends on the joint invocation of the Father's Word by the Spirit and the Bride. The same cry extends in turn to the sacred writers—and, indeed, to the whole Church, and every one of its members, as the readers of Scripture:

The Spirit and the Church call out, in a unity brought into being through the Mother's readiness, their shared exclamation, "Come!" and this cry becomes the characteristic sign of faith. Ultimately, everyone who lives in faith calls out this "Come!" He does so in his prayer as a believer in the Church . . . . But at the very moment when the believer has adopted this cry of the Church as his most personal concern, he hands it back over to the Church again. He . . . must keep this entire mission, its fulfillment, his entire faith, the power of the Lord's coming, at the disposal of the communion of saints, so that the Lord may bring his coming to fruition in each believer. And the Church, in turn, cries out together with the Spirit, because she herself is brought to fruition in the Spirit; because she, as Spouse of Christ, experiences through the Spirit the realization of the Lord's coming; she cannot be conceived outside of the will of

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article "Radix Iese," on the christological significance of both the historical and the current existence of Israel, in *Sponsa Verbi*; and above all, his intense dialogue with Martin Buber in *Einsame Zweisprache* (Freiburg: Johannes Verlag, 2002), especially the chapter on the mission of Israel. The insight that the Church needs Israel in order to understand the meaning of Scripture supports the argument set forth by Cardinal Lustiger in *La Promesa* (Madrid, 2002). Though the Church needs only Christ, Christ himself comes from the Father and from Israel. The discovery of the Semitic background of the New Testament in the second half of the twentieth century—though often received in a reductive fashion—fundamentally substantiates this conviction.

<sup>30</sup>It is not that von Speyr denies the heavenly pre-existence of created Wisdom; it is that she re-reads it in terms of the predestination of Mary of Nazareth and of her earthly participation in the mission of her Son; there is no Mary without heavenly wisdom, but there is also no heavenly wisdom without Mary.

the triune God, because her spirit is the spirit of the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

By way of conclusion, we can say in light of von Speyr's theology of the Marian dimension, that the unity of Scripture, like the entire work of salvation history, has its foundation, not only in trinitarian love, but also in created freedom's loving participation therein. In particular, the Holy Spirit, who unites in himself the loving will of the Father and the Son, also incorporates the sacred writers' loving reception of the Word into this unity—and so unites Father and Son also from within Scripture itself. It falls to us, in contemplation of the Scripture as the actual self-gift of God, to return the Father's personal Word to him, “breathing the Holy Spirit.”<sup>32</sup>—*Translated by Anne P. Devlin and Adrian J. Walker.* □

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<sup>31</sup>von Speyr, *Apokalypse*, 820–21. The spousal dimension of Mary-Church belongs properly to each member of the Church, who thus participates in the very conception of the Word: “When the Son establishes the Church, he raises Mary to the state of spiritual sponsality, just as he himself becomes the Spouse. There is, therefore, a further development in his relation with his mother: the Church, and an invitation is directed to all those who, in their prayer, retrace the footsteps of Mary. Henceforth, the Christian who prays will bring about, by his prayer, a coming of the Lord that will have effects for the whole Church in correspondence with the first birth from the Mother. Her *fiat* becomes the *fiat* of the whole Church, not as an anonymous mass but as a communion of persons which, before God, retains all its differentiation. . . . It is a matter of the particularization of each one of the saints in the communion of saints, of the importance of each one's mission within the general task of the Church. If God becomes man, He appears with the most particularly characteristic personality. Because no one exists more personally than God” (Adrienne von Speyr, *Der grenzenlose Gott* [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1981], 95–96; Eng., *The Boundless God*, trans. Helena M. Tomko [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004]). This mystery of communion and personalization depends on, and shares in, the tri-unity of God himself.

<sup>32</sup>St. John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 38; cf. *Love's Living Flame*, final stanza.