

BIBLICAL INSPIRATION THROUGH THE LENS OF MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE:
THE COHERENCE OF VERBAL PLENARY INSPIRATION
AND THE MOLINIST POSITION OF FOREKNOWLEDGE

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I. INTRODUCTION

For hundreds, if not thousands, of years the Word of God has undergone examination after examination. Since the Enlightenment period, in particular, the Biblical text has been under extreme scrutiny as to whether or not it could be trusted as the authoritative Word of God. Scholars have attempted to explain the nature of the text and gathered into a variety of camps each advocating their own view of the subject. These varying views place the book into some vastly different categories. Some scholars claim it to be quasi-supernatural, part natural and part supernatural, where this book *contains* the word of God, but still contain errors especially on scientific matters, etc. Still others claim it to be purely supernatural where the Bible is the Word of God; infallible and inerrant.

One of the primary issues which work hand in hand with the study of the nature of the Scripture is the providential and sovereign nature of God. The view that one holds in these areas greatly affects how one understands the nature of the Bible itself. God's foreknowledge is the key factor which is held under the microscope when providence and sovereignty are explored. In today's philosophical and theological circles, foreknowledge is a hot button topic. This is due to the fact that so many other understandings flow out from this bountiful fount. The nature of the Bible is likewise affected by this

doctrine. The position one holds fast to concerning foreknowledge greatly determines how one views the nature of the Biblical text itself.

It is therefore the goal of this work to investigate some of the primary views of foreknowledge while also giving due diligence to the primary views of the inspiration of scripture. Once all matters have been examined it should be clear that Middle Knowledge or the Molinist View of foreknowledge provides the most coherent explanation for the verbal plenary confluent nature of the Bible.

II. VIEWS OF FOREKNOWLEDGE

Before one would begin to unearth all the particulars concerning the way in which the Bible was written, it is necessary to first unpack the philosophical issue of God's foreknowledge. The issue which lies at the heart of the matter is free will. Can free will exist where an all knowing God possesses knowledge of the future and thereby not determine said future? Tully Borland of Purdue University elaborates:

Quite possibly the most contested area of God's knowledge has been his knowledge of the future. On the one hand there is the problem of how God's foreknowledge is possible without canceling the possibility of his creatures' ability to act freely. If God knows that some event E will happen in the future, there is a sense in which E must happen. But if God knows the future exhaustively, then it seems as if the entire future is fixed and humans are not genuinely free (See Foreknowledge and Freewill). On the other hand, if creatures are free and act indeterminately then it may be that God cannot know

what exactly his creatures will do and this lack of knowledge may limit his providential care for them. The theist is thus forced to try to retain a strong sense of (a) God's knowledge of the future and (b) God's providence, while at the same time not excluding the possibility of (c) free creaturely action.¹

In this contested battleground four primary camps, each with their own sub-camps, have emerged in attempting to explain the phenomena of a providential sovereign God and the coexistence of free will creatures. The path which this investigation will follow concerning these camps will be from a liberal view to a conservative view. The first and most liberal view on this spectrum is termed open theism. The open theism view takes an interesting position concerning God's knowledge. In this view God is likened to the grand chess player of the universe. As one move on the chess board unfolds God through his omnipotence is able to "manage" current events in order to bring about what he wants to bring about. In this view foreknowledge is virtually nonexistent. James Rissler of Oglethorpe University provides a basic analysis of open theism:

Open Theism is the thesis that, because God loves us and desires that we freely choose to reciprocate His love, He has made His knowledge of, and plans for, the future conditional upon our actions. Though omniscient, God does not know what we will freely do in the future. Though omnipotent, He has chosen to invite us to freely collaborate with Him in governing and developing His creation, thereby also allowing us the freedom to thwart

¹ Tully Borland. "[Omniscience and Divine Foreknowledge](http://www.iep.utm.edu/)" <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> Home Page [Web Site]; accessed 28 March 2014; available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/omnisci/> 11-12.

His hopes for us. God desires that each of us freely enter into a loving and dynamic personal relationship with Him, and He has therefore left it open to us to choose for or against His will.

While Open Theists affirm that God knows all the truths that can be known, they claim that there simply are not yet truths about what will occur in the "open," undetermined future. Alternatively, there are such contingent truths, but these truths cannot be known by anyone, including God.²

Open theism places God in the same boat as mankind in that the future cannot be known.

The goal of the open theist is to provide a context for free will creatures to exist in a free will universe where a choice can be made for or against God. This view seeks to move as far away from a deterministic universe where creatures in essence have no free will. In doing so, open theists have taken the plunge into waters which quickly flow in a direction which limits some of the fundamental attributes of God. William Lane Craig offers further details about these limitations in a response to Gregory A. Boyd (a proponent of Open Theism), "Despite his protestations to the contrary, Gregory Boyd espouses a view that threatens to undermine divine omniscience."³ Craig goes on to say, "Moreover, he fails to consider the full scope of the evidence. As I explain in my essay, it is

² James Rissler. "[Open Theism](http://www.iep.utm.edu/)" <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> Home Page [Web Site] ; accessed 28 March 2014; available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/o-theism/> 1.

³ James K. Beilby and Paul R Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001.), 55.

impossible to have a biblically sound doctrine of providence on the open view.”⁴ Providence and Omniscience are two of the primary characteristics of a greatest conceivable being. If any doctrine were to compromise either of these, then it must be scrutinized under the most powerful of lenses.

The next view of God’s foreknowledge which must be addressed is termed the “simple view” of foreknowledge. In this view the simple affirmation that God does indeed know the future is the crux of the matter. Those who affirm the simple view of foreknowledge do not propose to explain the mechanism or the “how” of foreknowledge. David Hunt gives explanation of this dynamic:

The expression *simple foreknowledge* is sometimes used to designate a particular means by which God knows the future, namely, via a direct apprehension of the future itself. A useful way of thinking about such knowledge is to imagine that God is equipped with a “time telescope” that allows him to observe temporally distant events. Now I must admit that I find this a very natural and attractive way of thinking about God’s knowledge of the future: not the least of its virtues is that it explains how God might by his beliefs about the future in such a way that these beliefs could count as knowledge rather than correct guesses⁵

Hunt goes on to say:

By “simple” foreknowledge, then, I shall mean the view that the *simple* affirmation of (F) – uncomplicated by exceptions, additions, qualifications et cetera – is by itself wholly compatible with human freedom, divine agency and enhanced providential control. If the reader finds it

⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

useful in following the arguments to think of God inspecting the future through a "time telescope," this should do little harm so long as it is understood this is not part of the thesis that I am defending here.⁶

It is easy to see here by this brief description that the simple view merely affirms and doesn't seek to explain. In doing so this view opens the tent door for the proverbial camels' nose. The primary issue which is represented by the proverbial camel is fatalism. William Lane Craig expounds, "David Hunt's provocative position is that fatalism is true - but not to worry, for fatalism is compatible with libertarian freedom!"⁷ The stinging sarcasm from Craig's response to Hunt illustrates some very serious issues with holding to the simple view. Craig goes on to assail:

But we have the very best of reasons for thinking that temporal necessity as Hunt imagines it is not closed under entailment - namely, fatalism posits a constraint on our actions that is completely unintelligible. It is curious that Hunt actually cites me approvingly on this point but then turns around and says "divine foreknowledge deprives Adam of alternatives" (p.88), though not of free will. If divine foreknowledge leaves Adam causally free, what mysterious force deprives him of alternatives?⁸

The simple view just does not come far enough in its own explanation of this topic to warrant serious consideration. To simply affirm without explanation is at times a valuable tool in dealing with matters such as these. However, other views offer

⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁷ Ibid., 109.

⁸ Ibid., 112.

more coherent answers especially as this all relates to the writing of scripture.

The third view on the spectrum is that of the Augustinian/Calvinist view. This view would fall into a category termed deterministic knowledge. Borland again provides some background:

The DK (Deterministic Knowledge) view has been attributed to a number of philosophers and theologians, most notable to the Christian Father, Saint Augustine, and the Protestant Reformer John Calvin. The basic idea is relatively simple. According to DK, God is completely in control of the unfolding of time including everything that happens in the future. This is because he predestines the future. Here, "predestines" means that God determines the outcome of the future. Since the future is determined by God, once God initiates his plan for the future, necessarily, his plan unfolds and there is no possibility of any divergence from the plan. Thus, once God knows his plan and initiates it, God can deduce any event which follows from it because he knows either self-evidently or *a priori*, (1) the plan prior to its unfolding, (2) that he wants it to unfold, and knows (3) that God gets exactly what he wants.⁹

With this understanding, one can clearly see that God is the cause of all things. He decrees and it occurs. Immediately some serious issues come to mind when this dynamic is considered. While this view strongly establishes the sovereignty and providential nature of God, it also limits human freedom. Another issue which has serious implications concerns the nature of evil, pain, and suffering. Craig offers some

⁹ Tully Borland, "Omniscience and Divine Foreknowledge" [http://www.iep.utm.edu/Home Page](http://www.iep.utm.edu/Home_Page) [Web Site]; accessed 28 March 2014; available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/omnisci/> 14.

insight to these difficulties in a response to Paul Helm's defense of the Augustinian/Calvinist position:

Helm cannot say that God did not intend for those evil acts to occur, for this would contradict God's universal providence. They are planned by God and, while not directly caused by God, they are indirectly causally determined by God, thereby implicating God in evil. Permission is exonerating only if the immediate cause of the action is a libertarian agent who freely chooses to perform that action.¹⁰

Borland adds to this understanding:

Another problem is that it seems that God is the author of not only the good and redemptive acts in the world, but also pain, suffering, and in general, all the evil. Since God's plan includes evil, human actions as a component, and God's will is sufficient for bringing about his plan, it would seem that God is the ultimate cause of evil.¹¹

This is a serious issue which makes this position difficult to defend. In order to make this system work, terms must be redefined and other leaps must be made.

This leads to the final view of divine foreknowledge termed Middle knowledge or the Molinist position named after 16th century Jesuit theologian Luis De Molina. The Molinist position presupposes three categories of knowledge. The first of these categories would be termed natural knowledge. John D. Laing of Southwestern Bible Seminary explains:

Natural knowledge is that part of God's knowledge which He knows by His very nature or essence, and since His

¹⁰ James K. Beilby and Paul R Eddy, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*. (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2001.), 205.

¹¹ Tully Borland, "Omniscience and Divine Foreknowledge" [http://www.iep.utm.edu/Home Page](http://www.iep.utm.edu/Home_Page) [Web Site]; accessed 28 March 2014; available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/omnisci/> 15.

essence is necessary, so is that which is known through it. That is, the content of natural knowledge includes all metaphysically necessary truths. For example, the statement, "All bachelors are unmarried" is both necessary and part of natural knowledge. Other examples include other tautologies, mathematical certainties (e.g., $1+1=2$), and all possibilities (since all possibilities are necessarily so). Natural knowledge can therefore be thought of as including a virtually infinite number of propositions of the form, *It is possible that p*, as well as a number of propositions of the form, *It is the case that p*. Thus, natural knowledge, properly conceived, is that part of God's knowledge which could not have been different from what it is.¹²

The other end of the spectrum is free knowledge. Laing offers further details:

Free knowledge is that part of God's knowledge which He knows by His knowledge of His own will, both His desires and what He will, in fact, do. The content of this knowledge is made up of truths which refer to what *actually exists* (or *has existed*, or *will exist*). For example, the statement, "John Laing exists," although certainly true, is dependent upon God's choice to create me (or, more properly, to actualize a world where I am brought about), and hence, is part of God's free knowledge. Free knowledge can therefore be thought of as including a number of propositions of the form, *It is the case that p* (Note that propositions of the forms, *It was the case that p*, and *It will be the case that p*, can be reduced to a proposition which refers to the present).¹³

These traditional categories of epistemology, natural and free knowledge, set forth by Thomas Aquinas provide the fertile soil for Middle knowledge to spring forth. Laing offers details on the third type of knowledge:

¹² John D. Laing, "[Middle Knowledge](http://www.iep.utm.edu/middlekn/)" [http://www.iep.utm.edu/ Home Page \[Web Site\]](http://www.iep.utm.edu/Home Page [Web Site]) ; accessed 25 March 2014; available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/middlekn/> 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

As previously noted, middle knowledge is so named because it comes between natural and free knowledge in God's deliberations regarding the creative process. According to the theory, middle knowledge is like natural knowledge in that it is prevolitional, or prior to God's choice to create. This, of course, also means that the content of middle knowledge is true independent of God's will and therefore, He has no control over it. Yet, it is not the same as natural knowledge because, like free knowledge, its content is contingent. The doctrine of middle knowledge proposes that God has knowledge of metaphysically necessary states of affairs via natural knowledge, of what He intends to do via free knowledge, and in addition, of what free creatures would do if they were instantiated (via middle knowledge). Thus, the content of middle knowledge is made up of truths which refer to what *would be the case* if various states of affairs were to obtain.¹⁴

Laing goes on to add further explanation:

The theory of middle knowledge presents a picture of divine omniscience which includes not only knowledge of the past, present and future, but also knowledge of conditional future contingents (propositions which refer to how free creatures will choose in various circumstances), counterfactuals (propositions which refer to how things would actually be if circumstances were different than they are or will be), and counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (propositions which refer to what a free creature would have chosen (freely) to do if things had been different). This knowledge, together with natural knowledge, informs God's decision about what He will do with reference to creation.¹⁵

Middle knowledge logically sets forth a set of circumstances where human free agents and a providential/sovereign God can happily coexist. While the Molinist position has its detractors it offers the best explanation for a true free will being, the problem of evil, and for the pure providence and sovereignty of

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

God to be manifest. The main objection to the Molinist position is grounded in the metaphysical realm. Borland provides a brief explanation of this difficulty:

This kind of objection can be put in a slightly different way. How is it that God knows which of the true subjunctives of freedom are factual rather than counterfactuals of freedom? Recall that a factual of freedom has a true antecedent and a counterfactual of freedom a false antecedent. But the truth or falsity of the antecedent cannot be known prior to God's creative activity.¹⁶

This type of concern seems to be at the core of most objections to the Molinist position. While every aspect of the Molinist cannot be exhaustively explained, it is the most reasonable of the four camps in that, especially on the theological plane, it provides the most logical grounds for the coexistence of true free will creatures and a true providential/sovereign God.

In reference to the issue at hand, the Inspiration of Scripture, the Molinist perspective also provides the best explanation for the Bibles' nature, composition, and authority. The Bible itself claims to be the Word of God. It also displays the marks of humanity being the product of human hands. Questions have risen to the surface concerning this dynamic. Is the Bible purely a human work? Is the Bible purely a mystical work? Or is the Bible a composition of both human and divinity? The question arises as to which of these does the evidence

¹⁶ Tully Borland, "[Omniscience and Divine Foreknowledge](http://www.iep.utm.edu/omnisci/)" [http://www.iep.utm.edu/ Home Page \[Web Site\]](http://www.iep.utm.edu/Home Page [Web Site]); accessed 28 March 2014; available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/omnisci/> 17.

support. This leads to the following section of this investigation where the nature of the Bible will be scrutinized in light of the Molinist position providing the strongest explanation for its composition.

III. VIEWS OF INSPIRATION

A three car pile-up happens as a dog runs into the road. Four different onlookers each from their own perspective relate the details of the event. The fixed starting point or vantage point from which each peered into this scene greatly determines how each person would interpret the event. Four different "stories" of what actually occurred materialize on the officers notes. The truth rests somewhere among the differing reports. The same dynamic takes root in philosophical and theological discussions. Fixed starting points or vantage points greatly determine how a given topic is addresses and assessed. The topic of the inspiration of the Bible is not immune from this dynamic. Just as there were four onlookers who relayed the facts from the aforementioned wreck, there are four primary views of inspiration which have been purported. These views are termed; the limited view, the neo-orthodox view, the dictation view, and the plenary verbal confluent view.

The limited view is just as it sounds. The amount of inspiration is limited to only certain aspects of scripture. This limited inspiration is offered to protect the main issues

of scripture which pertain to Soteriology. Issues such as archaeological, geographical, and scientific are up for grabs.

S. Michael Houdmann explains some details of the limited view:

This view asserts that while there may be factual and historical errors in the Bible, the Holy Spirit guided the authors so that no doctrinal errors resulted from their works. The problem with this view is how one can trust the Bible in doctrinal concerns when it is prone to error in its historical accounts? The reliability of the Bible is called into doubt in this view, and if we can't trust a literary work to get mundane details right, how can we trust it for weightier issues? This view also seems to ignore the fact that while the Bible is a story of redemption from Genesis to Revelation, it is a story told against the backdrop of human history, the doctrine being interwoven within the history. One can't just arbitrarily say that this account is factually inaccurate yet state it contains a kernel of doctrinal truth.¹⁷

Andrew Corbett adds to these understandings:

The 'Partial Inspiration' theory suggests that only parts of the Bible are inspired. Some portions of it are of little or no value to the modern reader because these passages (such as the genealogies of First Chronicles) are not inspired by God, according to this view. Prior to the discovery of many Biblically confirming archaeological finds in recent times, liberal scholars generally denied the inspiration of the Bible's geographical details and ancient history (including its characters). This denial supported their assertions that the Bible was only partially inspired. But the discovery of an overwhelming number of significant archaeological finds erodes this theory.¹⁸

¹⁷ S. Michael Houdmann, "What Are the Different Theories of Biblical Inspiration?" gotquestions.org Home Page [Web Site]; accessed 4 April 2014; available from <http://www.gotquestions.org/inspiration-theories.html> 2.

¹⁸ Andrew Corbett, "The Inspiration of the Bible." Andrewcorbett.net Home Page [Web Site]; accessed 8 April 2014; available from http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCgQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.andrewcorbett.net%2Ffe-books%2Ftranslations%2Fchapt2.PDF&ei=iENZU_vBM6XayAHNm4HYDQ&usg=AFQjCNFBjifn2Hs6Ldf3zV7GHauqBbc_mg&bvm=bv.65397613,d.aWc 17-18.

The next theory of inspiration is termed the Neo-orthodox view. This view, championed by Karl Barth, establishes the Bible as human witness of divine revelation. Therefore, the Bible is a purely a human work and is therefore susceptible to error. The foundation which produces this thought process is grounded in one's view of God. Douglas E. Woolley elaborates:

The neo-orthodox view sees the Bible as an errant human written record of God's revealed acts and God's personal revelation in Christ. Christ is the Word of God, and "the Bible is simply a witness to Christ" and "only a fallible human record of that revelation" of Christ (Geisler and Nix 172, 175). The Bible only "becomes the Word of God as the reader encounters Christ in his own subjective experience" (Enns 162). In comparison, "The orthodox believe the Bible *is* God's Word; liberals believe the Bible *contains* God's Word; neo-orthodox hold that the Bible *becomes* God's Word" (Geisler and Nix 171).¹⁹

S. Michael Houdmann explains further:

The neo-orthodox view of inspiration is based on their view of the transcendence of God. Neo-orthodoxy taught that God is so completely different from us (i.e., utterly transcendent) that the only way we could ever know Him is through His revelation to us. This view of the transcendence of God is so restrictive that it denies any concept of natural theology (i.e., that God can be known through His creation). Furthermore, it denies that the Bible is the Word of God. Rather, the Bible is a witness, or mediator, to the Word of God, which is God Himself. The words in the Bible aren't God's words, but God can use them to speak to individuals. Other than that, the words in the Bible are fallible words written by fallible men.²⁰

¹⁹ Douglas Woolley, "[Theories of the Inspiration of Scripture](http://www.dougandmarsha.com/theology_corner.html)" dougandmarsha.com/theology_corner.html Home Page [Web Site]; accessed 4 April 2014; available from http://www.dougandmarsha.com/essay-seminary/ch21_inspiration%20of_scriptures.htm 3.

²⁰ S. Michael Houdmann, "[What Are the Different Theories of Biblical Inspiration?](http://www.gotquestions.org/inspiration-theories.html)" gotquestions.org Home Page [Web Site]; accessed 4 April 2014; available from <http://www.gotquestions.org/inspiration-theories.html> 1-2.

The neo-orthodox view attempts to hold the Lord God in the highest of high positions, which is not necessarily a negative. It only becomes a negative when it unjustly diminishes doctrines such as the inspiration of Scripture. Houdmann concludes,

From what we can see, the neo-orthodox view of inspiration is no view of inspiration at all. If the Bible is the fallible product of fallible men, then it really has no value at all, at least not any more than any other book written by men. God could very well "speak" to us through works of fiction as He could through the Bible.²¹

The third view which impacts this discussion is the dictation view of inspiration. The image which comes to mind when this view is mentioned is that of an administrative assistant and "the boss" dictating a letter to a business partner. That image is valid when considering the mechanism of inspiration in this ideology. The writers of the Bible were simply instruments in the hand of the Almighty. Woolley explains this dynamic:

In this theory the writers of Scripture were merely secretaries for God and their writing was simply a "mechanical exercise of recording dictation" that "bypassed their human intellect" (Roslim and Duncan 36-37). This view holds that the writers were passive and "only wrote the words they were told to write" (Enns 161), thus ensuring an infallible and inerrant product. Even though evangelicals and fundamentalists "hold that the biblical writers were completely controlled by the Holy Spirit" (Packer 78), they believe that the "mechanical dictation overbalances in the direction of the divine . . . at the expense of man's full involvement" (Belcher 17) and they disagree with the theory since the style and vocabulary

²¹ Ibid., 2.

vary between books of the Bible, which would not be the case if God dictated the entire Bible.²²

Corbett agrees:

The Mechanical Dictation theory of inspiration says that God gave precise words to His Biblical authors to record in Scripture. It is also referred to as 'Verbal Inspiration'.² This theory paints a picture of God being like a manager dictating to his secretary. The 'secretary' is required to copy down exactly the very words used by the one dictating the message. Passages such as- "*Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.*" (Proverbs 30:5-6) seem to support this theory. This view regards the Biblical authors as having no input into the text at all. This seems to run contrary to the Biblical text itself where the emotions, personalities and events of the Biblical authors are noted.²³

This theory held a more dominant position in history than it does in this day and age among scholars. Nevertheless, it still deserves attention as it can draw attention from the most valid position termed Verbal Plenary Confluent Inspiration which is the final perspective that will be investigated.

Verbal Plenary Inspiration is the orthodox view where the teachings of Paul (2 Timothy 3:16-17) and Peter (2 Peter 1:21) come clearly into view. Woolley explains the terms, Verbal and plenary:

²² Douglas Woolley. "Theories of the Inspiration of Scripture" dougandmarsha.com/theology_corner.html Home Page [Web Site]; accessed 4 April 2014; available from http://www.dougandmarsha.com/essay-seminary/ch21_inspiration%20of_scriptures.htm 3.

²³ Andrew Corbett. "The Inspiration of the Bible." Andrewcorbett.net Home Page [Web Site]; accessed 8 April 2014; available from http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCgQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.andrewcorbett.net%2Ffe-books%2Ftranslations%2Fchapt2.PDF&ei=iENZU_vBM6XayAHNm4HYDQ&usg=AFQjCNFBjifn2Hs6Ldf3zV7GHauqBbc_mg&bvm=bv.65397613,d.aWc 16.

Because the Bible characterizes inspiration as verbal and plenary, the orthodox view of inspiration held by evangelicals and most fundamentalists is called the verbal plenary inspiration theory (Enns 162). It is said to be verbal because "The very words of the prophets were God-given, not by dictation but by the Spirit-directed employment of the prophet's own vocabulary and style" (Geisler and Nix 192). Based on 2 Tim. 3:16, inspiration is plenary, meaning "full, complete, extending to every part" (Geisler and Nix 52), since "all" of Scripture is "equally" God-breathed. Some words in the Bible were spoken by men, angels, Satan, demons, or God, but "all have come into being because God inspired the writers, and they recorded faithfully the message they received"²⁴

The other three views that have been considered either overemphasize or deemphasize the role of God or man in producing the Scriptures. The Verbal plenary view maintains the sovereignty of the Lord God, upholds the authority of the written words, and acknowledges the proper role of the human authors. This proper balance is crucial to attain because the scriptures internally testify to these things and they (the Scriptures) also bear the marks of human writers. The evidence exceedingly points to this reality. Corbett concurs:

The theory of *Plenary Inspiration* considers that God inspired the writings of various authors (as distinct from the authors themselves). Within the inspiration process of their writings God was able to take the creative abilities of these authors and inspire them to produce the *perfect* Word of God (Psalm 19:7). The result of this process was that we now have a Bible that often exposes the heart, emotions, and trials of its authors. We find this throughout the Psalms of David and the epistles of Paul. Within this theory, the inspiration of God's Word is more

²⁴ Douglas Woolley. "Theories of the Inspiration of Scripture" [dougandmarsha.com/theology_corner.html](http://www.dougandmarsha.com/theology_corner.html) Home Page [Web Site]; accessed 4 April 2014; available from http://www.dougandmarsha.com/essay-seminary/ch21_inspiration%20of_scriptures.htm 1.

concerned about conveying the mind of God through the literary expression of its authors, than it is about the mechanical dictating of precise words.²⁵

It would seem after a brief examination of these four views that the Verbal Plenary View most properly allows for the logical evident cooperation of freewill beings and the providential/sovereign God in producing the inerrant Word of God. This understanding brings into focus to the next subject of discussion. This subject centers squarely on the evidence in the scriptures. Does the scripture testify that it is the Word of God? Does the scripture indeed bear the marks of human writers? Is there evidence of these two dynamics properly merging into one?

REVELATORY DICTATION, HUMAN PERSONALITY, AND CONFLUENCE IN THE
BIBLICAL TEXT

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”
Genesis 1:1 (NASB) Certain verses in the Bible can cause one to stop and ponder for quite a while. Many questions emerge from just a brief examination of this verse. One question which may not be at the top of the list but deserves some serious thought is who wrote this and how did they know to write it. Despite many attempts to squelch the answer, Moses still stands as the

²⁵ Andrew Corbett. “The Inspiration of the Bible.” Andrewcorbett.net Home Page [Web Site] ; accessed 8 April 2014; available from http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCgQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.andrewcorbett.net%2Fbooks%2Ftranslations%2Fchapt2.PDF&ei=iENZU_vBM6XayAHNm4HYDQ&usg=AFQjCNFBjifn2Hs6Ldf3zV7GHauqBbc_mg&bvm=bv.65397613,d.aWc 16.

author of these words. The question remains, how did he know this to be true? How did he know the details that surrounded Adam, Abraham, and Noah? How was he able to pen the details of the six days of creation? Where did Moses get this information? Since he was not able to empirically verify these events there must have been some other way where he was able to have all these details of peoples, places, and events.

Conservative scholars agree that the process of revelatory inspiration was responsible for Moses penning the words of the early Pentateuch. If Middle Knowledge provides the most logical set of circumstances for sovereignty, providence, and free will, and if the verbal plenary confluent nature of the Bible is also the most logical position, then the Bible should show forth these dynamics as being true. The Pentateuch itself provides a vast backdrop under the authorship of Moses which will serve as the necessary evidence to show that the authors of the Bible wrote freely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit producing an authoritative and inerrant work. Moses penned that which was solely revealed, he penned that which he empirically verified, he penned that which was revealed and empirically verified. All of this was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

J.I. Packer offers the formula, "Scripture, though divine, is human."²⁶ The complete basis for examination would be in place if one were to flip this formula, "Scripture, though human, is divine." Examining both of these formulas should be beneficial in explaining the unique nature of the Bible.

SCRIPTURE, THOUGH HUMAN, IS DIVINE

The six days of creation, the revelation of Jesus unto John the Apostle, the prophetic utterances of Isaiah, Jeremiah, et cetera are all concrete examples of the divine nature of the Bible. The only way that the writers could know about these events would be that they were directly revealed by God. The Old Testament is replete with prophetic utterances where God speaks and the writer writes. The case of Balaam in the book of Numbers explains this very dynamic. W.E. Vine offers insight:

Balaam himself said, "I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more" (Num.22. 18) and again, later, "Have I now any power at all to speak anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak" (22. 38). On the next occasion it says, "The Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said,..." (23. 5) Again, replying to Balak's remonstrance he says, "Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord putteth in my mouth?" (23. 12). The next record is that "the Lord put a word in his mouth, and said..." (v. 16) Finally, when Balak's anger is kindled because of his utterances, Balaam says, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord speaketh that will I speak" (24. 13).

²⁶ J.I. Packer, *Engaging The Written Word of God*. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1999), 157.

All of this shows clearly that the Spirit of God determined, in the case of the prophet, not only the form of his prophecy but the very words.²⁷

This very dynamic would be summed up by the aforementioned title, Scripture, though human, is divine. The divine takes precedence here because of the revelatory nature of the event. The words which Balaam spoke were the very words of God "placed" in his mouth. From a Molinist perspective this would be the places and times where God's prescriptive will is played out. Use the example of a train running down the tracks representing a human agent. The normal modus operandi is that the track or path chosen is that of the free agent. However, as exemplified by this account the sovereign Lord God could force a path, if you will, by pulling the proverbial switch causing a new set of tracks to be followed. Once the prescribed track is followed to its completion the original modus operandi would resume. The ultimate free will of Balaam was still intact while in this instance it was guided onto a certain path. This dynamic is not the common state of affairs. In fact, this author would venture to say that according to percentages across all humanity and all times that this occurs very minimally.

Another fascinating example (this time encountering God's permissive will played out) is in the events surrounding Joseph

²⁷ William E. Vine, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1923), 51-52.

son of Jacob. The brothers, through their own free will decision, chose to harm Joseph and send him away via slavery. The Molinist position allows for this evil to be co-opted and to take part in the permissive will of God. Did God author the evil decisions in this case? No He did not. He only, through middle knowledge was able to bring these evil decisions into His master plan. Joseph knew this to be true, "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." Genesis 50:20 (NASB)

Another intriguing example which shows divinity of Scripture is found in the book of Jeremiah. W.E. Vine writes:

Nothing could be clearer than this, as confirmation of what has been said above, that while the faculties and intelligent co-operation of a prophet were not ruled out, yet the words he was to record were arranged for by God. In confirmation of this, in verse 10, what has been spoken of as "the words of the Lord" are said to be "the words of Jeremiah." And, further still, there follows in the same chapter the statement by Baruch as to how the writing was produced. In reply to the question asked by the princes, "How didst thou write all these words at his mouth?" he says, "He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book" (verses 17,18)²⁸

These examples show forth the prescriptive will of God where his revealed word takes precedence in all matters. The ultimate free will being is maintained according to the Molinist

²⁸ Vine, William E. *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible*. (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1923), 62.

perspective as these portions of scripture are co-operatively produced. In these instances the Almighty would be in the proverbial driver seat, however the human element is seated firmly in the co-pilot position.

SCRIPTURE, THOUGH DIVINE, IS HUMAN

Of the two formulas which are under investigation this one is held under the electron microscope. "To err is human" is a common phrase. Due to this basic and common understanding, when the humanity of scripture is considered, many run from this possibility. This is mainly due to the belief that humanity and divinity cannot coexist. The idea that the Bible would bear the marks of humanity means that it must be full of errors. This dynamic is unfortunately on the rise as the word of God has lost esteem in academic circles.

Middle knowledge however makes possible for the co-operative work to be reality. William Craig explains:

Molina's doctrine has profound implications for divine providence. For it enables God to exercise providential control of free creatures without abridging the free exercise of their wills. In virtue of His knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and His freedom to decree that certain circumstances exist and certain free creatures be placed in those circumstances, God is able to bring about indirectly that events occur which He knew would happen as a direct result of the particular decisions which those creatures would freely make in those circumstances.²⁹

²⁹ William Lane Craig, "Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke From God: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration." Reasonablefaith.org Home Page [Web Site] ; accessed 15 April 2014; available from <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/men-moved-by-the-holy-spirit-spoke-from-god> 23.

The key issue which Craig explains is that of God's providential nature. It is in this attribute, grounded in the Molinist position, which the Verbal Plenary Confluent Nature of the Bible is made manifest. B.B. Warfield offers a sarcastic yet poignant explanation of the importance of providence in producing inspired scripture:

Representations are sometimes made as if, when God wished to produce sacred books which would incorporate His will - a series of letters like those of Paul, for example - He was reduced to the necessity of going down to earth and painfully scrutinizing the men He found there, seeking anxiously for the one who, on the whole, promised best for the purpose; and then violently forcing the material He wished expressed, against his natural bent, and with as little loss from his recalcitrant characteristics as possible. If God wished to give His people a series of letters like Paul's, He prepared a Paul to write them, and the Paul he brought to the task was a Paul who spontaneously would write just such letters.³⁰

Edward Young provides some further affirmation:

Do not the human writers of the New Testament also differ greatly one from another? It would seem that God had chosen specific men to write specific portions of His Word. And such was indeed the case. Not only, however, did the Lord select certain men to write certain portions of His Word but, more than that, they were used as real men. Their personalities were not held in abeyance; their talents were not obscured; they were not somehow placed in a state of suspended animation. Rather, God used them as they were. All their gifts of training and native talent God called into play.³¹

William Craig explains the roll of the Molinist position:

³⁰ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. (Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), 155.

³¹ Edward J Yound, *Thy Word is Truth: Some Thoughts on the Biblical Doctrine of Inspiration*. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 69.

Divine middle knowledge illumines such an interpretation, since God knew what Paul would write if placed in such circumstances and knew how to bring about such circumstances without extinguishing human freedom along the way. Warfield comments that when we give due weight in our thinking to the universality of providence, to the minuteness and completeness of its sway, to its invariable efficacy, then we may wonder that anything "is needed beyond this mere providential government to secure the production of sacred books, which should be in every detail absolutely accordant with the Divine will." Revelation will be needed in some cases for truths not accessible through natural reason. Moreover, we must never forget that the circumstances known to God include, not exclude, all those movements of the Holy Spirit in an author's heart to which God knew the writer would respond in appropriate ways.³²

The humanity of the writers doesn't diminish the Bible. Rather it elevates it as the power of God is demonstrated in that He could bring about such a series of events which would produce sacred texts. J.I Packer develops this concept:

The combination of immediate revelation, enhanced insight, and providential overruling that constitutes inspiration added something to the factors that constitute fully human writing but in no way subtracted from them. God used the literary creativity which he had given to these men; their humanity is part of the reality of the Bible, and it is to be celebrated and acknowledged. We don't honour God by minimizing the humanness of the Bible any more that we honour him by minimizing its divinity.³³

Moses, Paul, Peter, and many others all had very unique attributes and upbringings which would come through in their writings. One of the most unique characteristics of the Bible

³² William Lane Craig, "Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke From God: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration." Reasonablefaith.org Home Page [Web Site] ; accessed 15 April 2014; available from <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/men-moved-by-the-holy-spirit-spoke-from-god> 21.

³³ J.I. Packer, *Engaging The Written Word of God*. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1999), 158.

which shows forth its power and authority is that the coherent message which flows throughout is not corrupted by these variants but actually is highlighted by them. Again the humanity of the scripture should be celebrated. B.B. Warfield adds to this understanding:

If we bear this in mind, we shall know what estimate to place upon the common representation to the effect that the human characteristics of the writers must, and in point of fact do, condition and qualify the writings produced by them, the implication being that, therefore, we cannot get from man a pure word of God. As light that passes through the colored glass of a cathedral window, we are told, is light from heaven, but is stained by the tints of the glass through which it passes; so any word of God which is passed through the mind and soul of a man must come out discolored by the personality through which it is given, and just to that degree ceases to be the pure word of God. But what if this personality has itself been formed by God into precisely the personality it is, for the express purpose of communicating to the word given through it just the coloring which it gives it? What if the colors of the stained-glass window have been designed by the architect for the express purpose of giving to the light that floods the cathedral precisely the tone and quality it receives from them? What if the word of God that comes to His people is framed by God into the word of God it is, precisely by means of the qualities of the men formed by Him for the purpose, through which it is given?³⁴

Warfield's perspective on this subject is spot on. Realizing that the "Architect" of all and His Word are highlighted by the co-opted use of flawed mankind is absolutely the correct perspective.

³⁴ B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. (Phillipsburg: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), 155-156.

CONCLUSION

When one considers the starting point for living out a spiritual journey, it is easy to see that choosing the right starting point is of crucial importance. For many Christians today the Bible is just that, a solid starting point. For others it is a book of suggestions. If for some it is an authoritative starting point and for others it is merely a book of suggestions then it seems best to understand that nature of said book. Is it something that is truly authoritative or is it something to consider among other options? To say that the Bible contains God's Word is a slippery slope. It would seem that this would open up the ultimate cosmic game of seek and find where nothing can be truly known and certainty is just a faint glimmer on the horizon. It does not seem at all logical to hold such a position. Either the Bible is or it is not the Word of God.

The previous arguments which have been made have attempted to show a possible set of circumstances where the Bible could be the authoritative Word of God given to man through free-will human writers. The Verbal Plenary view of the Bible is the most logical position to hold in light of the given evidence. The Molinist position concerning God's foreknowledge also sets forth the most logical explanation for the coexistence of free-will

creatures and a providential/sovereign God cooperatively producing a sacred text worthy of esteem and ultimate obedience.

William Craig sums up this entire work and brings it to a close:

In conclusion, it seems to me that the traditional doctrine of the plenary, verbal, confluent inspiration of Scripture is a coherent doctrine, given divine middle knowledge. Because God knew the relevant counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, He was able to decree a world containing just those circumstances and persons such that the authors of Scripture would freely compose their respective writings, which God intended to be His gracious Word to us. In the providence of God, the Bible is thus both the Word of God and the word of man.³⁵

³⁵ William Lane Craig, "Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke From God: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration." Reasonablefaith.org Home Page [Web Site] ; accessed 15 April 2014; available from <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/men-moved-by-the-holy-spirit-spoke-from-god> 24

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