

The Inspiration and Truth
of Sacred Scripture

The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture

The Word That Comes from God and Speaks
of God for the Salvation of the World

Pontifical Biblical Commission

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Foreword

The life of the Church is founded on the Word of God. This Word is passed down in Sacred Scripture, namely, in the writings of the Old and New Testaments. According to the faith of the Church, all of these writings are inspired; they have God, who made use of human beings chosen by him for their composition, as their ultimate author. On account of their divine inspiration, the biblical books communicate the truth. Their whole value for the life and mission of the Church depends on their inspiration and truth. Writings which do not originate in God cannot communicate the Word of God, and writings which are not true cannot establish and animate the life and mission of the Church. Nevertheless, the truth present in the sacred texts is not always easily recognizable. At times, there are at least apparent contrasts between what is read in the biblical accounts and the findings of the natural and historical sciences. These sciences appear to contradict what the biblical writings affirm and place their truth in doubt. It is obvious that this situation also concerns biblical inspiration: if what is communicated in the Bible is not true, how can it have God for its author? Beginning from such questions, the Pontifical Biblical Commission set out to investigate the relationship between inspiration and truth and to verify how the biblical writings themselves address these concepts. First of all, it must be acknowledged that the sacred writings rarely speak about inspiration directly (cf. 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21); they do, however, continually attest a relationship between their human authors and God and in that way express their provenance from God. In the Old Testament, the relationship linking the human

author to God and vice versa is attested in diverse forms and has varying characteristics. In the New Testament, every relationship with God is mediated by the person of Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God. He, the Word of God made visible (cf. John 1:1, 14), is the mediator of all that comes from God.

In the Bible, we encounter many and various themes. An attentive reading, however, shows that the primary and dominating theme is God and his salvific plan for human beings. The truth which we find in Sacred Scripture essentially concerns God and his relationship with his creatures. In the New Testament, the fundamental definition of this bond is found in the words of Jesus: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). As the incarnate Word of God (cf. John 1:14), Jesus Christ is the perfect truth about God; he reveals God as Father and offers access to him, the source of all life. The other definitions of God in the biblical writings are oriented toward the Word of God made man in Jesus Christ. This incarnate word becomes the key to their interpretation.

After treating the concept of inspiration witnessed to in the biblical books, in the relationship between God and the human authors, and in the truth which these writings entrust to us, the Biblical Commission goes on to examine a number of texts that pose difficulties for interpreters from historical and ethical-social points of view. To respond to the questions that arise in the interpretation of these difficult texts, it is necessary to study them carefully, taking into account the findings of the modern sciences and, simultaneously, the main theme of the texts, namely, God and his plan of salvation. Such an approach shows how the doubts raised against their truth and origin in God can be resolved.

The present document of the Biblical Commission does not constitute an official declaration of the Church's Magisterium on this topic, nor does it intend to set forth a complete doctrine regarding inspiration and the truth of Sacred Scripture. It only wishes to report the results of an attentive exegetical study of the biblical texts regarding their origin in God and their truth. The conclusions here are offered to the other theological disciplines, to be completed and deepened according to their own particular perspectives.

I thank the members of the Biblical Commission for their patience and competence, and I express my desire that their work may contribute to a more attentive, appreciative, and joyful listening to Sacred Scripture in the Church as the Word coming from God and speaking of God for the life of the world.

His Eminence, Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller
President, Pontifical Biblical Commission

February 22, 2014

Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter

General Introduction

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

–Isaiah 55:10-11¹

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

–Hebrews 1:1-2

1. The theme “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church” was assigned to the 2008 Synod of Bishops. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, the Holy Father Benedict XVI returned to the topics of the Synod and considered them at greater depth. In particular, he emphasizes: “Certainly theological reflection has always considered inspiration and truth as two

¹ Unless directly translated from the original document, all Scripture quotes are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV); all quotes from the documents of Vatican II are from Walter Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*; and those from *Verbum Domini* are from the Vatican website.

key concepts for an ecclesial hermeneutic of the sacred Scriptures. Nonetheless, one must acknowledge the need today for a fuller and more adequate study of these realities, in order to respond better to the necessity of interpreting the sacred texts in accordance with their nature. Here I would express my fervent hope that research in this field will progress and bear fruit, both for biblical science and for the spiritual life of the faithful” (n. 19). In response to the Holy Father’s desire, the Pontifical Biblical Commission seeks to make a contribution toward a more adequate understanding of the concepts of inspiration and truth, fully aware that this corresponds in a special way to the nature of the Bible and to its significance for the life of the Church.

The liturgical assembly is the most significant and solemn place for the proclamation of the Word of God, and it is where all the faithful encounter the Bible. In the eucharistic worship, which consists of two principal parts—the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 56)—the Church celebrates “the paschal mystery: reading ‘in all the scriptures the things referring to himself’ (Luke 24:27), celebrating the Eucharist in which ‘the victory and triumph of his death are again made present,’ and at the same time giving thanks ‘to God for his unspeakable gift’ (2 Cor 9:15) in Christ Jesus, ‘to the praise of his glory’ (Eph 1:12), through the power of the Holy Spirit” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 6).

The presence of Jesus, revealer of God the Father in his word and salvific work, and the union of the community of the faithful with him are at the center of this assembly. The purpose of the whole celebration is to make Jesus present in the midst of the community of believers and to facilitate the encounter and union with him and with God the Father. Christ in his paschal mystery is proclaimed in the reading of the Word of God and celebrated in the eucharistic liturgy.

I. The Liturgy of the Word and Its Eucharistic Setting

2. Every week on Sunday, that is, on the Lord’s Day, which the Church considers “the original feast day” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*,

n. 106), the resurrection of Christ is celebrated with special joy and solemnity. On this day, on which “richer fare [must] be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s Word” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 51), several psalm verses are sung and three biblical passages are proclaimed, with one usually taken from the Old Testament, one from the non-gospel writings of the New Testament, and one from the four gospels. After the reading of each of the first two passages, the reader says, “The Word of the Lord,” and the faithful respond, “Thanks be to God.” At the end of the proclamation of the gospel, the deacon or priest declares, “The Gospel of the Lord,” and the people respond, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.” Two characteristics of reading and listening are highlighted by this brief dialogue. The reader emphasizes the importance of this action and reminds the listeners to be fully aware that what has been communicated to them is truly the Word of God or, more specifically, the Word of the Lord (Jesus), who in his very person is the Word of God (see John 1:1-2). The faithful, for their part, manifest the attitude of humble reverence with which they receive the word that God directs to them: full of gratitude, they listen with praise and joy to the Good News of the Lord Jesus.

Even if these characteristics are not always realized perfectly, the Liturgy of the Word constitutes a privileged moment of communication: God in his kindness addresses himself to his people with human words, and they receive the Word of God with thanksgiving and praise. In the Liturgy of the Word, and most of all in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the paschal mystery of Christ, the summit and fulfillment of God’s communication with humanity, is celebrated. In this communication, the redemption of human beings is achieved and, at the same time, the highest and most perfect glorification of God. The celebration is not a ritual formality, since its objective is to enable the faithful to “learn to offer themselves too. Through Christ the Mediator, they should be drawn day by day into ever closer union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 48). The fact that God addresses his word to human beings in the history of salvation and that he sends his Son, who is his Word incarnate (John 1:14), has this single purpose: to offer human beings union with himself.

II. The Context for the Study of the Inspiration and Truth of the Bible

3. On the basis of what we have stated so far about the Word of God in the Liturgy of the Word and in connection with the eucharistic celebration, we can say that we listen to it in a theological, Christological, soteriological, and ecclesiological context. God offers salvation in a definitive and complete way in his Christ, bringing about communion between himself and his human creatures, who are represented by his Church. This setting, which is the most appropriate setting for the proclamation of Sacred Scripture, also constitutes the most adequate context for studying its inspiration and truth. After the proclamation of the biblical passages, as we have said, the affirmation that they are “the Word of God” (or “Word of the Lord”) always follows. This affirmation can be understood in a double sense: first of all, as a word that comes from God, but also as a word that speaks of God. These two meanings are closely connected with each other. Only God knows God; consequently, only God can speak of God in an adequate and reliable way. Therefore, only a word that comes from God can rightly speak about God. The affirmation “the Word of the Lord” invites the faithful to be mindful of what they are hearing and to pay it appropriate attention. They must have the reverence and gratitude due to the word that comes from God, and they should be attentive to grasp and to understand what this word communicates about God and thus enter into an ever more living union with him.

Our document, which has as its title *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, will develop these two aspects. When we declare that the Bible is inspired, we affirm that all its books “have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 11). In our study of the inspiration of the Bible, we set ourselves the task of establishing what the biblical writings themselves say about their divine provenance. As regards the truth of the Bible, we must above all be aware that although it covers many different subjects, the Bible really has a primary and central theme: God himself and salvation. There are many other documentary sources and many other disciplines providing reliable information on questions of every kind; the Bible, insofar as it is the

Word of God, is the authoritative source for knowledge about God. For the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council, God himself and his project of salvation for humankind are the content of his revelation by antonomasia. Indeed, in the very first chapter of this conciliar text, it is stated: “In his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4)” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 2). The Bible is at the service of the transmission of revelation (cf. *Dei Verbum*, nn. 7–10). Therefore, as we study the truth of the Bible, we will focus our attention on precisely this question: what do the various biblical writings say about God and his project of salvation?

III. The Three Parts of the Document

4. The first part of our document deals with the inspiration of Sacred Scripture, investigating its provenance from God, while the second part studies the truth of the Word of God, highlighting the message about God and his project of salvation. We hope, on the one hand, to increase awareness that this word comes from God and, on the other, to focus the attention of hearers and readers of the Bible on that which God, for his part, wishes to communicate to us about himself and about his salvific plan for human beings. With the same attitude with which we celebrate the paschal mystery of Christ as the mystery of God and of our salvation, we are invited to receive the word that God, full of love and kindness, addresses to us. The goal is to receive, in communion with other believers, the gift of being able to hear and to understand what he discloses about himself, in order to renew and deepen our personal relationship with him.

The third part of the document goes on to deal with some challenges that arise from the Bible itself, because of certain aspects that appear to contradict its quality of being the Word of God. Here we point out in particular two challenges which confront the reader. The first derives from the enormous progress in the last two centuries of knowledge about the history, culture, and languages of the peoples

of the ancient Near East, which constituted the environment of Israel and of its Sacred Scriptures. It is not rare that there are strong contrasts between the data from these disciplines and what we can garner from the biblical account, if it is read according to the model of a chronicle giving an exact account of events, let alone in strict chronological order. These contrasts pose an initial difficulty and raise the question of whether the reader can trust the historical truth of the biblical accounts.

Another challenge arises from the fact that many biblical texts are full of violence. We can cite, by way of example, the cursing psalms and also the order given by God to Israel to exterminate entire populations. Christian readers are upset and confused by such texts. Furthermore, there are non-Christian readers who rebuke Christians for having terrifying passages in their sacred texts and accuse them of professing and propagating a religion that inspires violence.

The third part of the document intends to confront these and other interpretive challenges, showing, on the one hand, how to overcome fundamentalism (cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*; cf. *EB* 1381–90) and, on the other, how to avoid skepticism. By removing these obstacles, the way will hopefully be cleared for a mature and proper reception of the Word of God.

This text, then, intends to make a contribution so that, through a deeper understanding of the concepts of inspiration and truth, the Word of God can be received by all, in the liturgical assembly and in every other place, in a way that corresponds ever more closely to this unique gift of God, in which he communicates his very self and invites man and woman into communion with him.

Part One

The Testimony of the Biblical Writings on Their Origin from God

I. Introduction

5. In the first section, we examine what the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* understand by revelation and inspiration, the two divine actions that are fundamental in characterizing Sacred Scripture as the Word of God. We will then show how the biblical writings manifest their provenance from God; for the New Testament we have the added distinctiveness that there is no relationship with God except through Jesus. We will conclude with a reflection on the criteria that are relevant for investigating the testimony of the biblical writings with regard to their provenance from God.

1.1 Revelation and Inspiration in Dei Verbum and Verbum Domini

On *revelation*, *Dei Verbum* [DV] says, “In his goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of his will (cf. Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4)” (n. 2). God reveals himself in a “plan of revelation” (DV, n. 2). He manifests himself in creation: “God, who through the Word

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creates all things (cf. John 1:3) and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to himself in created realities (cf. Rom 1:19-20)” (*DV*, n. 3; cf. *Verbum Domini* [*VD*], n. 8). God reveals himself especially in man, created “in his image” (Gen 1:27; cf. *VD*, n. 9). Revelation is realized, then, “by deeds and words having an inner unity” (*DV*, n. 2), in the salvation history of the people of Israel (*DV*, nn. 3, 14–16), and reaches its peak “in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation” (*DV*, n. 2; cf. *DV*, nn. 4, 17–20). Speaking of its Trinitarian dimension, *Verbum Domini* 20 says: “The revelation of God the Father culminates in the Son’s gift of the Paraclete (cf. John 14:16), the Spirit of the Father and the Son, who guides us ‘into all the truth’ (John 16:13).”

Inspiration strictly concerns the books of Sacred Scripture. *Dei Verbum*, which calls God “the inspirer and author of both Testaments” (n. 16), asserts in a more detailed way that “in composing the sacred books, God chose men, and while employed by him, they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which he wanted” (n. 11). Inspiration as an activity of God, therefore, directly concerns the human authors: they are the ones who are personally inspired. But then the writings composed by them are also called inspired (*DV*, nn. 11, 14).

1.2 The Biblical Writings and Their Divine Provenance

6. We have seen that God is the only author of revelation and that the books of Sacred Scripture, which serve for the transmission of divine revelation, are inspired by him. God is the “author” of these books (*DV*, n. 16), but through human beings whom he has chosen. These do not write under dictation but are “true authors” (*DV*, n. 11) who employ their own faculties and abilities. *Dei Verbum* 11 does not specify in detail what this relationship is between the authors and God, even if it refers in its notes (nn. 18–20) to a traditional explanation based on principal and instrumental causality.

Turning to the biblical books and exploring what they themselves say about their inspiration, we recognize that, in the Bible,

only two New Testament writings speak explicitly of divine inspiration, and they relate it to some writings of the Old Testament. In 2 Timothy 3:16 it is said: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” And 2 Peter 1:20-21 affirms: “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” The rare occurrence of the term “inspiration” means that we cannot limit our research to such a restricted semantic field.

Studying the biblical texts closely, however, we perceive a noteworthy fact: the relationship between their authors and God is constantly made explicit. This happens in various ways, each of them capable of making it clear that the respective writings come from God. The task of our investigation will be to identify in the texts of Sacred Scripture the indications of the relationship between human authors and God, showing thereby the divine provenance of these books, in other words, their inspiration. We intend to present a kind of phenomenology of the “God–human author” relationship, as regards the manner in which this relationship is attested in the pages of the Bible, thus highlighting their character as a word that comes from God. In this document, then, the PBC does not intend to demonstrate the fact of the inspiration of the biblical writings, which is a task for fundamental theology. We begin, rather, from the truth of faith according to which the books of Sacred Scripture are inspired by God and communicate his Word; our contribution will be only to clarify their nature, as it appears from the testimony of the writings themselves.

We can call “witness to themselves” that particular phenomenon of the biblical books which attests the relationship of their authors with God and their provenance from God. This specific testimony will be the focus of our investigations.

7. The Church documents we have cited several times (*Dei Verbum* and *Verbum Domini*) distinguish between “revelation” and “inspiration” as two distinct divine actions. “Revelation” is presented as the fundamental act of God by which he communicates who he is and the mystery of his will (cf. *DV*, n. 2), at the same time

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rendering human beings capable of receiving revelation. “Inspiration,” however, is presented as the action by which God enables certain persons, chosen by him, to transmit his revelation faithfully in writing (cf. *DV*, n. 11). Inspiration presupposes revelation and is at the service of the faithful transmission of revelation in the biblical writings.

From the testimony of the biblical writings, we can gather only a few indications about the specific relationship between the human author and God with regard to the activity of writing. Therefore, the phenomenology that we are about to present concerning both the relationship between the human author and God, as well as the divine provenance of the written texts, presents a rather general and varied picture. We will see that the specific concept of inspiration is hardly ever specified in the Scriptures and does not even receive an explanation there. This is due to the particular nature of the testimony of the various biblical books; indeed, if, on the one hand, the texts constantly make clear the divine provenance of their content and message, on the other hand, they say little or nothing about the way in which they were written or about themselves as written documents. Consequently, the broad concept of revelation and the more specific one of its written attestation (inspiration) are seen as a single process. Very often they are spoken of in such a way that one is meant along with the other. Nevertheless, the simple fact that the declarations we have cited come from the written texts makes it clear that their authors implicitly affirm that their texts constitute the final expression and stable deposit of the revelatory acts of God.

1.3 The Writings of the New Testament and Their Relationship to Jesus

8. As regards the writings of the New Testament, we observe a particular situation: they manifest a relationship of their authors with God only through the person of Jesus. Jesus himself expresses the cause of this phenomenon very precisely: “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6), an affirmation based on the unique knowledge that the Son has of the Father (cf. Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 1:18).

The behavior of Jesus with his disciples is significant and instructive. The gospels illustrate the formation that he gives them in which the relationship with Jesus and with God that is essential for an apostle's words or an evangelist's writing to become "the Word of God" appears in a paradigmatic way. According to our sources, Jesus did not write anything himself, and he did not dictate anything to his disciples. What he did can be summarized in this way: he called some men to follow him, to share his life, to assist in his activity, to acquire an ever deeper knowledge of his person, to grow in faith in him and in communion of life with him. This is the gift that Jesus gave his disciples, his way of preparing them to be his apostles, who proclaim his message. Their word is such that Jesus characterizes future Christians as "those who will believe in me through their word" (John 17:20). And he says to his missionaries: "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (Luke 10:16; cf. John 15:20). The word of his messengers can be the foundation of the faith of all Christians because, coming from the most intimate union with Jesus, it is the word of Jesus. The personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, practiced with a living and informed faith in his person, constitutes the basic foundation for this "inspiration" that makes the apostles capable of communicating, in speech or in writing, the message of Jesus, "the Word of God." The proclamation of his gospel, not the communication of words literally pronounced by Jesus, is decisive. A typical example of this is the Gospel of John, every word of which is said to manifest the style of John and at the same time to communicate faithfully what Jesus said.

9. Here we outline, precisely on the basis of the Gospel of John, an intimate connection between the nature of the relationship with Jesus and with God (inspiration) and the content of the message that is communicated as the Word of God (truth). The central message of Jesus according to the Gospel of John is this: God the Father and his boundless love for the world, revealed in his Son (cf. John 3:16); this corresponds to *Dei Verbum*, n. 2, God and his salvation. This message cannot be received or understood with a cognitive approach that is solely intellectual or merely one of rote learning, but only in an intensely living and personal relationship, that is, according to

that same relationship with which Jesus formed his disciples. One can always speak in a formal and correct way about God and his love, but only in living faith in him and in his love can one receive the gift of God and give witness to it. It is evident, therefore, that the central message (truth) and the manner of receiving it, in order to attest it (inspiration), mutually condition each other; in either case, we are dealing with the most intense and personal communion of life with the Father, revealed in Jesus—a communion of life which is salvation.

1.4 Criteria for Demonstrating the Relationship with God in the Biblical Writings

10. According to what we have gathered from the gospels, living faith in Jesus, the Son of God, is the principal goal of the formation given by Jesus to his disciples, and in this faith their fundamental relationship with Jesus and with God is expressed. This faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5; 16:13) and is lived in an intimate, conscious, and personal union with the Father and the Son (cf. John 17:20-23). By means of this faith, the disciples are united to the person of Jesus, who is “the mediator and the fullness of all revelation” (*DV*, n. 2), and they receive from him the elements of their apostolic testimony in its oral or written expression. Because it comes from Jesus, the Word of God, such testimony can only be a word that comes from God. The personal relationship of faith (1) with the source through which God reveals himself (2) are the two decisive elements which guarantee that the words and deeds of the apostles come from God.

Jesus is “the culmination of the revelation of God the Father” (*Verbum Domini*, n. 20), a culmination preceded by a rich “economy” of divine revelation. As we have already noted, God reveals himself in creation (*DV*, n. 3) and especially in humanity, created “in his image” (Gen 1:27). He reveals himself above all in the history of the people of Israel “by deeds and words having an inner unity” (*DV*, n. 2). Outlined in this way are various forms of God’s revelation, which reaches its fullness and culmination in the person of Jesus (Heb 1:1-2).

In the case of the gospels (and more generally for the apostolic writings), the two elements decisive for provenance from God are (1) living faith in Jesus and (2) the person of Jesus who is the culmination of divine revelation. In our study of the divine provenance of the other biblical writings, two criteria will serve as a test: what personal faith in God (according to the specific phase of the “plan” of revelation) and what forms of his revelation manifest themselves in the various writings? The respective biblical writing comes from God through its author’s living faith in God and through the relationship of this author with a specific form (or with different forms) of divine revelation. It is not rare that a biblical text bases itself on an earlier inspired text and participates in this way in the same divine provenance.

With these criteria, one can usefully explore the testimony of the various biblical writings and see how, for example, legal texts, wisdom sayings, prophetic oracles, prayers of all kinds, apostolic admonitions, etc., come from God; God, therefore, by means of the human authors, is their author. It is clear that the concrete mode of divine provenance is different, as the case may be, and cannot be compared to a simple and uniform divine dictate. Nevertheless, what is constantly attested is the human author’s personal faith in God and his obedience to the various forms of divine revelation.

In this way, as we study the biblical writings themselves and explore their witness to the relationship of their authors with God, we shall seek to demonstrate more concretely how inspiration presents itself as a relationship between God, inspirer and author, and human beings, true authors chosen by God.

II. The Testimony of Select Old Testament Texts

11. We have chosen a number of books representative of the Old and New Testaments to illustrate how their origin from God is expressed in the texts themselves. For the Old Testament, we will follow the classical division of Law, Prophets, and Writings (cf. Luke 24:44); we have chosen, therefore, for our investigation the Pentateuch, the prophets and the historical books (also called the “early prophets”), and, finally, the Psalms and the book of Sirach.

2.1 *The Pentateuch*

The idea of a divine origin of the biblical texts is developed in the accounts of the Pentateuch on the basis of the concept of writing, or setting something down in writing. Thus, at particularly significant moments, Moses receives from God the task of putting into writing, for example, the founding document of the Covenant (Exod 24:4), or the text of its renewal (Exod 34:27); elsewhere he seems to fulfill the sense of these instructions, putting other relevant things into writing (Exod 17:14; Num 33:2; Deut 31:22), to the composition of the entire Torah (cf. Deut 27:3, 8; 31:9). The book of Deuteronomy gives particular importance to the specific role of Moses, presenting him as an inspired mediator of revelation and authorized interpreter of the divine Word. From this starting point, the traditional idea naturally developed that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, so that the books of Moses not only speak of him but are even held to be his compositions.

The principal affirmations about God's self-communication are found in the stories of Israel's encounter with him on the mountain of God, Sinai/Horeb (Exod 19–Num 10; Deut 5ff.). These stories seek to express, with suggestive images, the idea that God is the origin of the biblical testimony. One can say, therefore, that the basis for understanding the Bible as the Word of God was set at Sinai, because there God constituted Moses as the single mediator of his revelation. It falls to Moses to put into writing the divine revelation so that he can transmit it and preserve it as the Word of God for people of all times. The written form not only makes the transmission of the Word possible but also clearly raises the question about the human author. This, in the case of the Bible, leads to its self-awareness as the Word of God in human words. This idea (see *DV*, n. 12) is already expressed in essence in Exodus 19:19, where it is said that God answered Moses "with a voice"; thus it is clear that God "condescends" to use human language, also (and especially) when dealing with the mediator of his revelation.

12. Moreover, the divine origin of the written word is subtly enhanced in the Sinai account. In this context, the Decalogue appears as a unique and incomparable document. It can be considered as the point of departure for the idea of the divine origin of Sacred

Scripture (inspiration), because *as a text* only the Decalogue is connected with the idea of having been *written by God himself* (cf. Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1, 28; Deut 4:13; 9:10; 10:4). This text, which God himself wrote on two tablets of stone, is the basis for the concept of a divine origin of the biblical texts. This concept is developed in two directions by the narrative of the Pentateuch. On the one hand, the special authority that belongs to the Decalogue comes to light as compared with all the other laws and instructions of the Bible; on the other, it is evident that the concept of “scripture” (in the sense of something set down in writing) is connected in a special way to the mediator of revelation, Moses; later on, in fact, “Moses” and the Pentateuch are interchangeable terms.

As to the first aspect, that of the Decalogue written by God himself, it should be noted that the transmission and reception of this particular text are affirmed in the tradition of Sacred Scripture independently of its material frame consisting of the two tablets of stone. It is not the tablets on which God wrote that were preserved and venerated but the text that God wrote that becomes part of Sacred Scripture (cf. Exod 20; Deut 5).

The Ten Commandments that God put in writing and consigned to Moses—and here we come to the second aspect—point to the special relationship between God and humanity as far as Sacred Scripture is concerned. Moses, in fact, is not instituted as mediator by virtue of a divine plan, but God accedes to the prayers of human beings (Israel) who request a mediator. After God had addressed the people of Israel directly (Exod 19), the people ask Moses to act as mediator, since they fear the direct encounter with God (Exod 20:18-21). God then accedes to the will of the people and institutes Moses as mediator, speaking with him and communicating his instructions to him in detail (Exod 20:22–23:33). In the end, Moses commits these words to writing, for through them God stipulates his covenant with Israel (Exod 24:3-8). To confirm this event, God promises to give Moses the tablets on which God himself had written (Exod 24:12). It could not be expressed in a clearer and more profound way that Sacred Scripture, handed on through generations by the community of faith of Jews and of Christians, has its origin in God, even though and because it happened that it was

written by humans. This self-attestation of Sacred Scripture reaches its completion when, at the end of the Pentateuch, it is affirmed that Moses himself set down in writing the instruction imparted to the people of Israel before entering the promised land (see Deut 31:9), giving it to the people as a program for the life they would lead there in the future. Only when human beings let themselves be engaged by this word of Sacred Scripture, which is addressed to them, can they recognize it and receive it “not as a human word, but as it really is, God’s word, which is also at work in you believers” (1 Thess 2:13).

2.2 The Prophetic and Historical Books

13. The prophetic and historical books are, along with the Pentateuch, the parts of the Old Testament that insist most on the divine origin of their content. In general, God addresses himself to his people or to its leaders through human beings: Moses, the archetype of the prophets in the Pentateuch (Deut 18:18-22), the prophets in the prophetic and historical books. We will seek to show how the prophetic and historical books affirm the divine origin of their content.

2.2.1 The Prophetic Books: Collections of What the Lord Said to His People through His Messengers

The prophetic books present themselves as collections of what the Lord said to his people through the (presumed) “authors” who give their names to the collections. Indeed, these books declare insistently that the Lord is the author of their content. And they do so with various introductory or interposed expressions in the discourse. These expressions assert, or presume, that the prophetic books are discourses of the Lord, and they specify that the Lord addresses himself to his people through the authors of the books in question. In fact, much of the prophetic books is placed formally on the Lord’s lips. At the same time, these books present their authors as persons whom the Lord has sent with the task of transmitting a message to his people.

a) *The “Prophetic Formulae”*

The titles of two-thirds of the prophetic books explicitly affirm that they are of divine origin by means of “the formula of the ‘coming’ of the word of the Lord.” Prescinding from differences in detail, the formula can be summarized in the affirmation “The word of the Lord came to . . .” followed by the name of the prophet who receives the word (as in the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah) and sometimes also by the name of those for whom it is destined (as in Haggai and Malachi). These titles also declare that the content of the books in question, whether put in the mouth of God or in that of the prophet, is entirely the word of God. The remaining titles of the prophetic books indicate that they report the content of visions experienced by persons such as Isaiah, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, and Habakkuk. The title of the book of Micah juxtaposes “the formula of the event of the word of the Lord” with the mention of a vision. In the context of the prophetic books the cause of the visions, though not stated explicitly, cannot be anything other than the Lord himself. He, therefore, is the author of the books in question.

The titles are not the only part of the prophetic books that declares them to be the Word of God; the numerous “prophetic formulae” that mark the text do the same. The most frequent expression, the “prophetic formula” par excellence, is “Thus says the Lord.” By opening a discourse with this formula, the prophet presents himself as the messenger of the Lord. He informs his hearers that the discourse he addresses to them does not derive from him but has the Lord for its author.

Without pretending to be exhaustive, three other formulae which appear in the prophetic books should be noted: “oracle of the Lord,” “says the Lord/God,” and “the Lord speaks.” Unlike the first expression, called the “messenger formula,” which introduces the discourses, these latter conclude them. Acting as a signature affixed to the end of a document, they attest that the Lord is the author of the preceding discourse.

b) The Prophets: Messengers of the Lord

14. Four of the prophetic books narrate how the Lord ensured that their authors became his messengers: Isaiah (6:1-13), Jeremiah (1:4-10), Ezekiel (1:3-3:11), and Amos (7:15). The missions of Isaiah and Ezekiel are framed by a vision. The same is probably true for Jeremiah. The account of the mission of Isaiah is a good example of the genre, because it is quite developed but at the same time very succinct. In the divine council, in which Isaiah, in his vision, is present, the Lord, who is in search of a volunteer, says, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah responds: “Here I am; send me!” Accepting Isaiah’s offer, the Lord concludes: “Go and say to this people. . . .” The message of the Lord follows (Isa 6:8-10). Punctuated by the verbs “send, go, say,” the account concludes with the Lord’s discourse, which Isaiah has the task of transmitting to the people. The same is true of the other three “accounts of prophetic sending” cited above, which also conclude with the order given by the Lord to his envoy to transmit the message that he communicates (Ezek 2:3-4; 3:4-11; Amos 7:15). In the account of the sending of Jeremiah the Lord insists on the peremptory character of his command (cf. also Amos 3:8) and, at the same time, on the accuracy that must mark the transmission of the message: “But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am only a boy”; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you”’ (Jer 1:7; cf. 1:17; 26:2, 8; Deut 18:18, 20). These accounts establish the role of the messengers of the Lord which the prophetic books ascribe to their respective authors and consequently bear out the divine origin of their message.

2.2.2 The Historical Books: The Word of the Lord Has Infallible Efficacy and Calls to Conversion

a) The Books of Joshua–Kings

15. In the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, which, according to Hebrew tradition, also belong to the prophetic collection, the Lord frequently speaks as in the prophetic books. In fact, at every stage of the conquest of the Promised Land, the Lord tells

Joshua what he must do. In Joshua 20:1-6 and 24:2-15 he addresses the people through Joshua, who thus fulfills the prophetic role. In the book of Judges, the Lord or his angel often speaks to leaders, above all to Gideon, or to the people. The Lord acts in person, except in Judges 4:6-7 and 6:7-9, when he makes use of the prophetess Deborah and an anonymous prophet to address Barak and all the people, respectively.

In the books of Samuel and Kings, however, with rare exceptions, the Lord addresses his hearers through prophetic figures. Their discourses, then, are framed by the same expressions that introduce, or recur in, the prophetic books. Among the books of the Bible, in fact, it is the books of Samuel and Kings that give the most attention to the prophets and to their activity as messengers of the Lord. In the greater part of the oracles reported in Samuel and Kings, the Lord announces the disasters that he will cause to fall upon the leaders of the people, especially on one or another king or his dynasty, or on the kingdoms of Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 14:15-16) and of Judah (cf. 2 Kgs 21:10-15), because they worship deities different from him. The divine announcements of misfortune are usually accompanied by the confirmation of their fulfillment. Samuel and Kings thus present themselves, in large part, as a succession of announcements of misfortune and their fulfillment. This succession ends only with the destruction of the kingdom of Judah. In the introduction to the accounts of the Babylonian Conquest (597–587 BC), 2 Kings 24:2 actually states that the destruction of Judah was the work of the Lord, who thus fulfilled what he had announced “by his servants the prophets.” Since the Lord does not fail to accomplish what he announces, his word has an infallible efficacy. In other words, the Lord is the principal author of the history of his people; he announces its events and makes them happen.

As in the texts of which we have spoken, so also 2 Kings 17:7-20 synthesizes the history of Israel and Judah in a succession of discourses which the Lord addressed to them through “his servants the prophets.” The tone of the discourses, however, is different. The Lord does not announce misfortunes to Israel and Judah but exhorts them to convert. Because they were obstinate in their refusal of the Lord’s appeals (vv. 13-14), he ends up casting them far from his countenance.

b) The Books of Chronicles

16. As in Joshua–Kings, so also in Chronicles the discourses of the Lord abound. He speaks directly to Solomon (2 Chr 1:7, 11-12; 7:12-22). In general, the Lord addresses the king or the people through intermediaries; most of them receive a “prophetic” title, but there are those without titles. First place belongs to prophets such as Nathan (cf. 1 Chr 17:1-15). There are many others, but the Lord even uses seers such as Gad (cf. 1 Chr 21:9-12) and people who have various occupations and even foreign kings such as Neco (cf. 2 Chr 35:21) and Cyrus (cf. 2 Chr 36:23). The heads of the families of the temple musicians prophesy (cf. 1 Chr 25:1-3).

Chronicles takes up the concepts of the word of God expressed in Samuel and Kings. As in these books, but perhaps with less insistence, the discourses of the Lord have as their theme the announcement of events whose fulfillment has been established (cf. 1 Chr 11:1-3; 2 Chr 6:10; 10:15). Chronicles underlines this role of the word of the Lord in reference to the Babylonian Exile. According to 2 Chronicles 36:20-22, both the Exile and its end fulfill what the Lord announced through the mouth of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 25:11-14; 29:10). In terms that are different from 2 Kings 17:13-14, 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 picks up again the theme of the unremitting, if vain, attempts made by the Lord to keep his people from ruin by sending them messengers/prophets. Finally, it should be noted that Chronicles does not affirm the divine origin of the content of the books in question but, by making references to prophetic sources (cf. 2 Chr 36:12, 15-16, 21-22), appears to suggest it.

In short, the prophetic books present themselves entirely as the Word of the Lord. This idea occupies a predominant place in the historical books as well. Both groups, especially the historical books, specify that the Word of the Lord has an infallible efficacy and calls to conversion.

2.3 The Psalms

17. The Psalter is a collection of prayers that come from the personal and communal experience of the presence and action of the Lord. The Psalms express the prayer of Israel in the various epochs

of its history: in the period of the kings; then during the Exile, when God came to be recognized more and more as the king of Israel; and, finally, after the Exile up to the period of the Second Temple. Every psalm attests a strong and living relationship with God, and on this basis we can say that they come from God and are inspired by God. According to what the texts themselves show, one can observe, without claiming to be exhaustive, three types of relationship: (a) the experience of the intervention of God in the life of the believers; (b) the experience of the presence of God in the sanctuary; (c) the experience of God, source of all wisdom. These three types of relationship with God are lived on the basis of the Sinai covenant, which includes the promise of God's active presence in the daily life of the people and in the temple.

2.3.1 The Experience of God's Intervention in the Life of the Faithful

Those who pray experience the powerful help of God in two ways: as a response to their cry for help; as listening to the great wonders of God.

With regard to those praying as beneficiaries of God's help, we take from many possible examples the prayer of Psalm 30:8-13: "To you, O LORD, I cried, and to the LORD I made supplication: . . . Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my helper! You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever."

An experience both personal and communal of the Lord who saves is the inspiring force of the psalms of supplication and praise. This experience is always at least recalled, if not narrated, at the beginning (e.g., Pss 18:5-7; 30:2) or end (e.g., Ps 142:6-8) or even in the middle part of the psalm (e.g., Pss 22:22; 85:7-9). Midway between the human word of supplication and that of praise stands the Word (which expresses the promise and action) of God (see Ps 30:12). Having perceived it, the psalmist feels inspired to recount it to others. Thus it is awaited, received, and praised not only by an individual but by all the people.

Those who pray attend to the wonders of the Lord since God speaks to them and to all the people through the great deeds which he has accomplished in the whole of creation and in Israel's history. Psalm 19:1-5 recalls the wonders of creation and describes their way of speaking: "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." It is the task of the one who prays to understand this language that speaks of the "glory of God" (cf. Ps 147:15-20) and express it with one's own words.

Psalm 105 tells of the works of God in the history of Israel and exhorts the individual and the people: "Remember the wonderful works he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered" (v. 5). These "wonderful works he has done," recounted in the historical psalms, are also "the judgments he uttered." Although formulated by human beings in human terms, the words of this psalm are inspired by the Lord's mighty work. This voice of the Lord continues to resound in the here and now of the suppliant and of the people. It needs to be heeded.

2.3.2 The Experience of the Powerful Presence of God within the Sanctuary

18. Psalms 17 and 50 may be taken as examples. In the first text, the experience of God inspires a just man falsely accused to utter a prayer of unconditional trust in God; in the second, this experience makes God's voice heard as it denounces the erroneous behavior of the people.

The last verse of Psalm 17 expresses a certain hope: "As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness" (v. 15). Two other prayers of people who are persecuted end in a similar way. Psalm 11:7 concludes with the assertion, "The upright shall behold his face," and the penultimate verse of Psalm 27 says, "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living" (v. 13; cf. vv. 4,

8, 9). The expression “the face of God” signifies God himself, the person of God according to his true and perfect reality. The expression “behold the face of God” signifies, then, an intense, real, and personal encounter with God, not through the organ of sight, but in the “vision” of faith. The unshakeable hope of having this experience of God (“I will behold,” in the future) and the knowledge of God expressed in it are the source of the entire prayer.

Psalm 50 recounts the experience of a theophany in the temple liturgy. At the appearance of the God of the covenant (v. 5), the phenomena of Sinai are repeated, a devouring fire and a tempest (v. 3). The manifestation of the true reality of God and of his relationship with Israel (“I am God, your God!” v. 7) leads to an accusation against the people: “But now I rebuke you, and lay the charge before you” (v. 21). God criticizes his people’s behavior in two ways: their relationship with God is focused exclusively on sacrifices (vv. 8-13), and their relationship with their neighbor is diametrically opposed to the commandments of the covenant (vv. 16-22). God asks that he be praised, invoked in distress (vv. 14-15, 23), and he expects righteousness toward one’s neighbor (vv. 23). Psalm 50, at the heart of the Psalter, recalls the prophetic forms; not only does it have the Lord speak, but it brings about that every supplication and every act of praise be interpreted as obedience to the divine command. The whole prayer is therefore “inspired” by God.

2.3.3 The Experience of God, Source of Wisdom

19. Wisdom and understanding are attributes of God (cf. Pss 136:5; 147:5). It is he who communicates them (“teach me wisdom in my secret heart”; Ps 51:6), making humans wise, capable, that is, of seeing all things as God sees them. David possessed such wisdom and understanding from the moment God called him to be king of Israel (cf. Ps 78:72).

The fear of God is the condition for being instructed by God and receiving wisdom. In the opening part of Psalm 25, the supplicant begs fervently for the Lord’s instruction (“Make me know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me”; vv. 4-5), relying on God’s readiness to grant it

(vv. 8-9). The fear of God is the indispensable attitude for being beneficiaries of God's wisdom teaching: "Who are they that fear the LORD? He will teach them the way that they should choose" (Ps 25:12). Those who fear God receive not only the indication of the right way to follow but also, as Psalm 25 makes clear, a broader and deeper illumination: "The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them" (v. 14); in other words, he grants them a relationship of intimate friendship and penetrating insight into the pact which he made with Israel on Sinai. The relationship with God, expressed with the terminology of the "fear of God," is clearly the source of inspiration from which so many wisdom psalms originate.

2.4 The Book of Sirach

20. In the prophetic books, it is God himself who speaks through the prophets. As we have seen, God addresses in various ways those whom he has chosen as his mouthpiece for the people of Israel. In the Psalms, it is the person who speaks to God, but this is done in his presence and by adopting forms of expression that presuppose an intimate communion with him. In the wisdom books, however, human beings speak to each other; yet the one who speaks and the one who listens are both deeply rooted in faith in the God of the people of Israel. Frequently in the Old Testament, wisdom is explicitly attributed to the Spirit of God (cf. Job 32:8; Wis 7:22; 9:17; also 1 Cor 12:4-11). Such books are called "wisdom books" because their authors explore and point out the ways of a human life guided by wisdom. In their search, they are conscious of the fact that wisdom is a gift of God, because "there is but one who is wise, greatly to be feared, seated upon his throne" (Sir 1:8). Wishing to illustrate precisely which modes of relationship with God are attested by these writings as a basis and source for what is taught by their authors, we have focused our research on the book of Sirach because of its concise character.

From the beginning, the author is aware that "All wisdom is from the Lord, and with him it remains forever" (Sir 1:1). Already in the prologue of the book, the translator indicates a way in which

God communicated wisdom to the author: “My grandfather Jesus,” he writes, “who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them, was himself also led to write something pertaining to instruction and wisdom.” The careful and devout reading of the Sacred Scriptures, in which God speaks to the people of Israel, united the author with God, became the source of his wisdom, and led him to write his work. Thus one can clearly see a way in which the book comes from God.

What the translator affirms in the prologue is confirmed by the author himself in the heart of the book. After recounting wisdom’s praise of herself (Sir 24:1-22), he identifies it with the writing of Moses: “All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob” (Sir 24:23). Sirach goes on to explain what the result of his study of the Law is and the purpose of his writing: “I will again make instruction shine forth like the dawn, and I will make it clear from far away. I will again pour out teaching like prophecy, and leave it to all future generations. Observe that I have not labored for myself alone, but for all who seek wisdom” (Sir 24:32-34; cf. 33:18). The wisdom that everyone, even in the future, can find in his writing is the fruit of his study of the Law and of what God taught him through the trials of life (cf. Sir 4:11, 17-18). He seems to offer a portrait of himself when he speaks of “the one who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High!” (38:34) and writes: “He seeks out the wisdom of all the ancients, and is concerned with prophecies” (39:1). He then indicates as a result: “If the great Lord is willing, he will be filled with the spirit of understanding; he will pour forth words of wisdom of his own and give thanks to the Lord in prayer” (Sir 39:6). The acquisition of wisdom as a fruit of study is recognized as a gift of God and leads to the prayer of praise. Everything, then, takes place in a living and continual union with God. The author asserts, not only for himself, but for all, that the fear of God and the observance of the Law give access to wisdom: “Whoever fears the Lord will do this, and whoever holds to the law will obtain wisdom” (15:1).

In the last part of his work (44–50), Sirach concerns himself with the tradition of his people in a different way, praising the fathers and describing God acting through many people in history and in favor of Israel. With this review, he also shows how his own written work stems from the relationship with God. About Moses, in particular, he says: “He allowed him to hear his voice, and led him into the dark cloud, and gave him the commandments face to face, the law of life and knowledge, so that he might teach Jacob the covenant, and Israel his decrees” (45:5). He mentions many prophets, and in relation to Isaiah, he declares, “By his dauntless spirit he saw the future, and comforted the mourners in Zion” (48:24). Meditating on the Law and the Prophets, and hence listening to the Word of God, this wisdom author was in union with God, obtained wisdom, and acquired the elements for composing his work (see Sirach prologue).

In the concluding part, Sirach characterizes the content of his book as “instruction in understanding and knowledge” (50:27). He adds a beatitude: “Happy are those who concern themselves with these things, and those who lay them to heart will become wise. For if they put them into practice, they will be equal to anything, for the fear of the Lord is their path” (50:28–29). The beatitude requires meditation on and practice of the content of the book, and promises wisdom and the light of the Lord; all that is possible only if this written work comes from God.

2.5 Conclusion

21. Having finished the review of selected texts from the Old Testament, we can now look back at them from a synthetic perspective. The writings examined, although different as to date and place of composition, as well as to specific content and particular literary style, agree in presenting a single, great basic message: God speaks to us. The same unique God, in the multiplicity and variety of historical situations, seeks man and woman, reaches them, and speaks to them. And the message of God, different in form because of the concrete historical circumstances of revelation, constantly tends to promote a loving response in them. The writings that express this marvelous design of God are themselves permeated with God. Such

divine infusion renders them inspired and inspiring, capable, that is, of illuminating and encouraging the understanding and passion of believers. The reader perceives this and, trembling with wonder and joy, asks: what can this ineffable God who speaks to me give me? The authors of the New Testament, members of the people of Israel, know the “Scriptures” of their people and recognize them as an inspired word that comes from God. They show us how God continued speaking until he expressed his ultimate and definitive word in the sending of his Son (cf. Heb 1:1-2).

III. The Testimony of Select New Testament Texts

22. We have already noted as a characteristic of the New Testament writings that they show the relationship of their authors to God exclusively through the person of Jesus. The four gospels have a special place here. *Dei Verbum*, in fact, speaks of their “special pre-eminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our Savior” (n. 18). We take into account, therefore, the privileged role of the gospels, which is why, after an introduction that explains what they have in common, we will set out first of all the particular approach of the Synoptic Gospels and then the approach characteristic of the Gospel of John. For the other types of New Testament writings, we will select the most important ones and will consider, therefore, the Acts of the Apostles, the letters of the Apostle Paul, the letter to the Hebrews, and Revelation.

3.1 *The Four Gospels*

23. The four gospels stand out from all the other books of Sacred Scripture insofar as they directly relate “all that Jesus did and taught” (Acts 1:1), and at the same time they show how Jesus prepared the missionaries who were to spread the Word of God revealed by him. Through their presentation of the person of Jesus and his relationship with God, and their presentation of the apostles with the formation and authority granted them by Jesus, the gospels witness the specific manner of their text’s origin from God.

3.1.1 Jesus, Culmination of God's Revelation for All Peoples

The gospels manifest a real diversity among themselves in some details of the narrative and in certain theological orientations, but they also show significant convergence in their presentation of the person of Jesus and his message. Here we provide a synthesis, which underlines the principal points.

All four gospels present the person and story of Jesus as the culmination of the biblical story. Consequently, they frequently refer to the writings of the Old Testament, known especially in the Greek translation of the Septuagint but also in original Hebrew and Aramaic texts. Of great importance are the numerous connections which the gospels point out between Jesus and the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets, as people whose memory and significance are embedded in the sacred writings of the Old Testament.

The gospels attest that Jesus is the fulfillment of the revelation of the God of Israel, of that God who calls, instructs, punishes, and often reconstitutes Israel as his own people, set apart from the other nations but destined to be a blessing for all peoples. At the same time, the gospels certainly broaden the universalism of the Old Testament and make it clear that in Jesus God addresses the whole human race of all times (cf. Matt 28:20; Mark 14:9; Luke 24:47; John 4:42).

The four gospels, each in its own way, assert that Jesus is the Son of God, not only as a messianic title, but also as an expression of a relationship—unique and unprecedented—with the heavenly Father, thus transcending the salvific and revelatory role of all other human beings. This is set out in the most explicit form in the Gospel of John, both at the beginning in the Prologue (1:1-18) and in the chapters on the risen Lord, first in the encounter with Thomas (20:28) and then in the final affirmation on the inexhaustible meaning of the life and teaching of Jesus (21:25). This same message is found in the Gospel of Mark in the form of a literary inclusion: at the beginning Jesus is declared to be the Christ and the Son of God (1:1), and at the end the testimony of the Roman centurion near the crucified Jesus is cited: “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (15:39). The same content is attested by the other Synoptic Gospels in strong and explicit terms through a joyful prayer that Jesus addresses to

God his Father (Matt 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-22). Using truly unique expressions, Jesus not only announces the perfect equality and intimacy between God the Father and himself as the Son but also affirms that this relationship cannot be acknowledged except through an act of revelation: only the Son can reveal the Father, and only the Father can reveal the Son.

From a literary point of view, the gospels recount narrative episodes and didactic discourses, but, in reality, they basically transmit a story of revelation and salvation. They present the life of the incarnate Son of God, who, from the humble conditions of an ordinary life and through the cruel humiliations of his passion and death, reaches exaltation in glory. In this way, while communicating the revelation of God in his Son Jesus, the gospels implicitly indicate the provenance of their text from God.

3.1.2 The Presence and Formation of Eyewitnesses and Ministers of the Word

24. Every episode of the gospels is centered on Jesus, who is, however, always surrounded by his disciples. The term “disciples” refers to a group of Jesus’ followers whose number is not specified. Every gospel speaks specifically of “the Twelve,” a select group accompanying Jesus during his whole ministry, whose significance is of great importance. The Twelve form a community, precisely discernible from the personal names of its members. Each gospel relates that this group was chosen by Jesus (Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; John 6:70); they followed him, becoming eyewitnesses of his ministry and taking on the role of plenipotentiary emissaries (Matt 10:5-8; Mark 3:14-15; 6:7; Luke 9:1-2; John 17:18; 20:21). Their number symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30) and signifies the fullness of the people of God which must be reached through their mission to evangelize the whole world. Their ministry not only transmits the message of Jesus to all people in the future but also, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah on the coming of Emmanuel (7:14), perpetuates Christ’s presence in history according to his promise: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). The gospels,

in bearing witness to the special formation of the Twelve, manifest in a concrete way their own provenance from Jesus and from God.

3.2 The Synoptic Gospels

25. The Synoptic Gospels present the story of Jesus in a way that leaves no space between the perspective of the narrative's author and his portrayal of the person, life, and mission of Jesus. In describing Jesus' various relationships with God, the gospels implicitly indicate their own relationship with God, or their provenance from God, always through the person and the revelatory, salvific role of Jesus.

Only Luke provides an introduction to the two volumes of his work (Luke 1:1-4; cf. Acts 1:1), connecting his narrative with the previous stages of the apostolic tradition. He thus considers his work as standing within the stream of apostolic testimony about Jesus and the story of salvation, testimony that began with the first followers of Jesus ("eyewitnesses"), was proclaimed in the first apostolic preaching ("ministers of the word"), and is now continued in a new form by the Gospel of Luke. In this way, Luke explicitly points out his gospel's relationship with Jesus, revealer of God, and affirms the revelatory authority of his work.

At the center of each gospel we find the person of Jesus seen in his relationships with God, which are manifold and unique. These relationships manifest themselves in the events of Jesus' life and in his activity, but also in his role for salvation history. In an initial paragraph we will concern ourselves with the person and activity of Jesus, and in a second paragraph, with his role in the history of God with humanity.

3.2.1 Jesus and His Unique Relationship with God

26. The gospels illustrate Jesus' unique relationship with God in various ways. They present him as: (a) the Christ, the Son of God in his privileged and unique relationship with the Father; (b) one full of the Spirit of God; (c) the one who acts with the power of God; (d) one who teaches with the authority of God; (e) one whose relationship with God is definitively revealed and confirmed through his death and resurrection.

a) Jesus, Only Son of God the Father

Already in the infancy narratives of the gospels of Matthew and Luke, there is a clear reference to the divine origin of Jesus (Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35) and to his unique relationship to the Father (Matt 2:15; Luke 2:49).

All three of the Synoptic Gospels go on to recount key events in the life of Jesus in which he communicates directly with his Father; and the Father, for his part, confirms the divine origin of his Son's identity and mission.

In each Synoptic Gospel the public ministry of Jesus is preceded by his baptism and a remarkable theophany. The heavens open, the Spirit descends on Jesus, and the voice of God declares him to be God's beloved Son (Matt 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). After this inaugural event, the gospels recount that Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the desert (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13) for a confrontation with Satan (Israel's sojourn in the desert is thus evoked), and then his ministry begins in Galilee.

Another compelling theophany, the transfiguration of Jesus, happens at the end of his Galilean ministry, when he sets out on his journey toward Jerusalem, near the time of the Passover events. As at the baptism, God the Father declares, "This is my Son, the Beloved" (Matt 17:5, par.) and explicitly underlines the authority that belongs to him: "Listen to him!" Some elements of this theophany evoke the Sinai event: the mountaintop, the presence of Moses and Elijah, the dazzling transformation of the person of Jesus, and the presence of the cloud that covers them with its shadow. In this way, Jesus and his mission are connected with the revelation of God on Sinai and with the history of the salvation of Israel.

Matthew's gospel contains a unique, revelatory title for Jesus. In addition to his proper name, "Jesus," which he interprets with the phrase "he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21), Matthew also has the title "Emmanuel" (1:23), which signifies "God with us" (cf. Isa 7:14). In this way the Evangelist explicitly affirms Jesus' embodiment of the divine presence and underscores the teaching authority and the other actions of Jesus throughout his ministry. The title "Emmanuel" reappears in a certain sense in Matthew 18:20, where Jesus speaks of his presence within the

community (“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them”), and in 28:20 with the concluding promise of the risen Christ: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

b) Jesus, Full of the Spirit of God

All the Synoptic Gospels refer to the descent of the Spirit of God upon Jesus on the occasion of his baptism (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22) and reaffirm the action of the Holy Spirit in his deeds (cf. Matt 12:28; Mark 3:28-30). Luke, in particular, repeatedly mentions the Spirit that animates Jesus in his mission of teaching and healing (cf. Luke 4:1, 14, 18-21). The same Evangelist affirms that, in a moment of great emotion, Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (10:21) and said, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son” (Luke 10:21-22; cf. also Matt 11:25-27).

c) Jesus Acts with the Power of God

27. Jesus’ unique relationship to God is also manifested in exorcisms and healings. In all three Synoptics, but especially in Mark, the exorcisms characterize the mission of Jesus. The power of God’s Spirit present in Jesus is able to drive the evil spirit that seeks to destroy human beings (e.g., Mark 1:21-28). The clash with Satan that took place in the temptations at the beginning of his ministry continues during his life in the victorious combat against the evil forces that cause human suffering. The demonic powers themselves are presented as being agonizingly aware of Jesus’ identity as Son of God (e.g., Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7). The “power” that comes from Jesus is the power of healing (cf. Mark 5:30). Such stories abound in all three Synoptic Gospels. When accused by his opponents of being empowered by Satan, Jesus replies with a summary statement that links his miraculous deeds to the power of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of the Kingdom of God: “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Matt 12:28; cf. Luke 11:20).

The presence of the power of God in Jesus is disclosed in a special way in the episodes in which he manifests his authority even over the power of nature. The stories of the storm that is stilled and the walking on the water are equivalent to theophanies, in which Jesus exercises divine authority over the chaotic power of the sea and, when he walks on the waters, enunciates the divine name as his own (Matt 14:27; Mark 6:50). The disciples who witness the miracle in Matthew's account end up by confessing Jesus' identity as Son of God (Matt 14:33). The multiplication stories likewise reveal Jesus' unique power and authority (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; Matt 15:32-39; and Mark 8:1-10). These actions are linked to the divine gift of manna in the desert and to the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha. At the same time, through the words and gestures over the loaves and the abundance of the leftover fragments, the eucharistic celebration of the Christian community, where the salvific power of Jesus unfolds sacramentally, is hinted at.

d) Jesus Teaches with the Authority of God

The Synoptic Gospels affirm that Jesus teaches with unique authority. At the Transfiguration, the voice from heaven explicitly demands: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" (Mark 9:7; Matt 17:5; Luke 9:35). In the synagogue of Capernaum, the witnesses of the first teaching and first exorcism of Jesus exclaim: "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1:27). In Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus contrasts his teaching authoritatively with key points of the Law: "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times. . . . But I say to you. . . ." He also declares that he is "lord of the sabbath" (Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). The authority that he received from God extends to the forgiveness of sins (Matt 9:6; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24).

e) The Death and Resurrection of Jesus as the Final Revelation and Confirmation of His Unique Relationship with God

28. The crucifixion of Jesus, an extremely cruel and ignominious fate, seems to confirm the opinion of his adversaries, who see him as

a blasphemer (Matt 26:65; Mark 14:63). They call on the crucified one to come down from the cross and to prove his assertion that he is the Son of God (Matt 27:41-43; Mark 15:31-32). Death on the cross seems to demonstrate that his actions and claims have been rejected by God. According to the gospels, however, Jesus, as he dies, expresses his most intimate union with God the Father, whose will he accepts (Matt 26:39, 42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). And God the Father, by raising Jesus from the dead (Matt 28:6; Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6, 34), shows his complete and definitive approval of the person of Jesus in all his activities and claims. Whoever believes in the resurrection of Jesus crucified can no longer doubt his unique relationship with God the Father and the authenticity of his entire ministry.

3.2.2 Jesus and His Role in Salvation History

29. The Sacred Scriptures of the people of Israel are seen as an account of the ways God deals with this people and as the Word of God. The Synoptic Gospels demonstrate Jesus' relationship with God, also by characterizing his story as the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Moreover, Jesus' particular relationship with God is also shown in his self-manifestation at the end of time.

a) The Fulfillment of the Scriptures

It is important to note that Jesus not only perfects the teaching of Moses and the prophets with what he says, but in addition presents himself as the personal fulfillment of the Scriptures. Matthew observes in 2:15 that from childhood Jesus repeats Israel's journey "out of Egypt" (cf. Hos 11:1). Filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:15), and having read Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth, he closes the book and declares, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:16-21). Similarly, he sends word to John in prison that what the Baptist's own envoys see comprehensively fulfills the messianic prophecies of Isaiah (Matt 11:2-6, linking Isa 26:19; 29:18-19; 35:5; 61:1). The programmatic beginning of the Gospel of Mark provides, in the initial verses, a summary of Jesus' identity, not only in the first line where it speaks of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1), but also in the verses that follow which announce the

Lord himself, whose advent is prepared according to the testimony of the prophets (1:2-3, in reference to Exod 23:20; Mal 3:1; Isa 40:3). If the Evangelists present him coherently as a descendant of David, he is also said to be greater than Solomon in wisdom (Matt 12:42; Luke 11:31), greater than the temple (Matt 12:6), or greater than Jonah (Matt 12:41; Luke 11:32). In the Sermon on the Mount, he legislates with an authority which transcends that of Moses (cf. Matt 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43).

b) The Fulfillment of History in the Triumphal Return of Jesus

According to the Synoptic Gospels, the strict relationship of Jesus with God is manifested not only in the fact that the life of Jesus is the fulfillment of the history of God with Israel but also in the other fact that the whole of history is brought to its fulfillment through Jesus' return in glory. In the apocalyptic discourses (Matt 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21), he prepares his disciples for the travails of history after his death and resurrection and exhorts them to be faithful and watchful for his return. They live in an intermediate period between the fulfillment of earlier history, brought about by the work and life of Jesus, and its definitive fulfillment at the end of all time. This is the time of the communities that believe in Jesus, the time of the Church. In this intermediate period, Christians have the assurance that the risen Lord is always with them (Matt 28:20), also through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; cf. Acts 1:8). They also have the duty of announcing the Gospel of Jesus to all peoples (Matt 26:13; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:47), of making them disciples of Jesus (Matt 28:19), following Jesus in their lives. Their whole life and all this time unfolds against the backdrop of the fulfillment of history that will come about with the triumphant return of Jesus.

3.2.3 Conclusion

30. The Synoptic Gospels show Jesus' unique relationship to God in all his life and activity; they also show the unique meaning of Jesus for the fulfillment of the history of God with the people of Israel and for the definitive fulfillment of all history. It is in Jesus that God reveals himself and his plan of salvation for all humanity; it is

in Jesus that God speaks to human beings; it is through Jesus that they are brought to God and united with him; and it is through Jesus that they obtain salvation. Through their presentation of Jesus, the Word of God, the gospels themselves become the word of God. It is the nature of the Sacred Scriptures of Israel to speak authoritatively of God and to lead with assurance to God. The same trait appears in the gospels, and leads to the formation of a canon of Christian writings linked to the canon of the Hebrew Sacred Scriptures.

3.3 The Gospel of John

31. The prologue of the Gospel of John closes with a solemn affirmation: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (1:18). This presentation of the nature of Jesus (only-begotten Son, God, intimate union with the Father) and of his unique capacity to know and reveal God not only is attested at the beginning of the gospel but, being a fundamental assumption, is confirmed by the whole Johannine work. Whoever enters into a relationship with Jesus and is open to his word receives from him the revelation of God the Father. In common with the other gospels, the Fourth Gospel insists on the fulfillment of the Scriptures through the work of Jesus and thus affirms its being part of God’s salvific plan. But a characteristic of the Gospel of John is that it points out some special qualities of the Evangelist’s relationship with Jesus, in particular: (a) the contemplation of the glory of the only-begotten Son; (b) explicit eyewitness testimony; (c) the instruction of the Spirit of truth for the witnesses. These specific characteristics, which connect the Evangelist more intimately with the person of Jesus, have the effect of showing the provenance of his gospel from God himself. We will expand here on these special characteristics.

3.3.1 Contemplating the Glory of the Only-Begotten Son

The prologue says: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (1:14). Having affirmed the incarnation

of the Word and his insertion into humanity as a definitive dwelling place of the God of the covenant, the text speaks right away of a deep personal encounter with the incarnate Word. In the Johannine texts, “to contemplate” signifies not a momentary, superficial act of seeing but an intense and lasting perception, together with reflection, and a growing understanding and adherence in faith. In John 11:45, the direct object of contemplation is indicated as “what he did,” that is, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and faith in Jesus is mentioned as a consequence. In John 1:14b, the fruit of contemplation, that is, believing comprehension, is indicated as the only-begotten Son who comes from the Father (cf. 1 John 1:1; 4:14). The immediate object of contemplation, therefore, is Jesus, his person and activity, since the Word of God made himself visible to human beings during his life on earth.

The author includes himself in a group (“we”) of attentive witnesses who, having contemplated the deeds of Jesus, came to faith in him as the only-begotten Son of God the Father. The Evangelist’s writings are grounded on his being an eyewitness and on his faith in Jesus as Son of God; it follows indirectly that this written work comes from Jesus and therefore from God. We repeat that John is part of a group of believing witnesses. The first conclusion of the Fourth Gospel (20:30-31) allows us to identify this group. The Evangelist speaks explicitly of his work (“this book”) and of the “signs” narrated there and says that Jesus performed them “in the presence of his disciples.” These latter turn out to be the group of eyewitnesses to which the author of the Fourth Gospel belongs.

3.3.2 Explicit Eyewitness Testimony

32. On two occasions the Evangelist explicitly underlines that he was an eyewitness of what he writes. At the end of the gospel, we read, “This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true” (21:24). A group (“we”) presents the disciple—identified with the protagonist of the final narrative—as a trustworthy witness and as the writer of the whole work. This is the disciple whom Jesus loved (21:20), who, because of his particular closeness to Jesus, was a witness of

his activity on other occasions too (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7). This confirms how this gospel comes from Jesus and from God. Those who declare, “we know,” express their awareness of being qualified to make such a judgment. This constitutes an act of recognition, reception, and recommendation of the written work on the part of the believing community.

In another passage, the eyewitness testimony is made explicit by the outpouring of water and blood after the death of Jesus: “He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth” (19:35). The concepts of vision, testimony, truth, and belief are decisive. The eyewitness asserts the truth of the testimony with which he addresses himself to a community (“you”), exhorting it to share his faith (cf. 20:31; 1 John 1:1-3). This faith concerns not only the events that have taken place but also their meaning, which is expressed in two Old Testament citations (cf. 19:36-37). From the context, we know that the eyewitness is the Beloved Disciple who stood by the cross of Jesus and who was addressed by Jesus (19:25-27). In John 19:35, therefore, the writer highlights, with particular reference to the death of Jesus, what John 21:24 states in relation to all the things recounted in the Fourth Gospel: this was written by an author who, by direct experience and by faith, was intimately united to Jesus and to God and who communicates his testimony to a community of believers who share the same faith.

3.3.3 The Teaching of the Spirit of Truth for the Witnesses

33. The testimony of the disciple is made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit. In his farewell discourse (John 14–16), Jesus says to the disciples: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning” (15:26-27). The disciples are eyewitnesses of Jesus’ activity “from the beginning.” But the testimony of faith, that which leads to belief in Jesus as Christ and Son of God (cf. 20:31), is given by the power of the Spirit, who, proceeding from the Father and sent by Jesus, creates in the disciples

the most vibrant union with God. The world cannot receive the Spirit (14:17), but the disciples receive it for their mission in the world (17:18). Jesus specifies how the Spirit witnesses to him: he “will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14:26) and “will guide you into all the truth” (16:13). The work of the Spirit refers entirely to the activity of Jesus, and it has the task of leading to an ever deeper understanding of the truth, that is, of Jesus’ revelation of God the Father (cf. 1:17-18). Each disciple’s testimony about Jesus becomes effective only through the action of the Holy Spirit. The same holds for the Fourth Gospel, which presents itself as the written testimony of the disciple loved by Jesus.

3.4 The Acts of the Apostles

34. Not only is the gospel attributed to Luke, but also the book of the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1). Luke explicitly indicates that the source of his gospel was “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:2), suggesting, in this way, that his gospel comes from Jesus, the ultimate and supreme revealer of God the Father. He does not present the source of the book of Acts and its divine provenance in the same explicit way. It should be noted, however, that, on the one hand, the names in the list of apostles are identical in Acts 1:13 and Luke 6:14-16 (except for Judas), and, on the other, that in Acts their character as eyewitnesses (Acts 1:21-22; 10:40-41) and their task of being ministers of the word (Acts 6:2; cf. 2:42) are highlighted. In Acts, then, Luke describes the activity of those of whom he speaks in Luke 1:2, who constitute, therefore, the source for both his works.

We can presume that Luke informed himself about their activity (the theme of the book of Acts) with the same care (cf. Luke 1:3) with which, through them, he carried out his inquiry about the activities of Jesus.

The basic contribution for the divine provenance of the book of Acts is the immediate, personal relationship of these “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” with Jesus. Their relationship to Jesus is seen particularly in their discourses and actions, in the working of the Holy Spirit, and in the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.

We will now set out in concrete terms these various elements that attest the provenance of the book of Acts from Jesus and from God.

3.4.1 The Apostles' Direct, Personal Relationship with Jesus

The book of Acts recounts the proclamation of the Gospel by the apostles, especially Peter, and by Paul. At the beginning of the book, Luke presents the list of apostles, comprising Peter and the other ten (Acts 1:13). These eleven are the nucleus of the community to which the risen Lord manifests himself (cf. Luke 24:9, 33), and they constitute an essential bridge between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts (cf. Acts 1:13, 26).

The identity of the names in the list of Luke 6:14-16 and in that of Acts 1:13 draw attention to the long and intense personal relationship of each of the apostles with Jesus. This was their privilege during the ministry of Jesus, and it made them protagonists of the book of Acts. These apostles (Acts 1:2) also share conversation and meals with Jesus before his ascension (Acts 1:3-4). To them he promised “the power of the Holy Spirit,” designating them to be his witnesses “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). All of these details favor the acceptance of the narrative of Acts as coming from Jesus and from God.

Paul, the protagonist of the second part of Acts, is also characterized by his direct, personal relationship with Jesus. His encounter with the risen Lord is recounted and highlighted three times (Acts 9:1-22; 22:3-16; 26:12-18). Paul himself clearly affirms the divine origin of his gospel: “For I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12). The “we” sections of the book (Acts 16:10-18; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1–28:16) evoke the relationship of the book’s author with Paul and, through Paul, with Jesus.

3.4.2 The Discourses and Deeds of the Apostles

35. The activity of the apostles, recounted in the book of Acts, manifests their varied relationship with Jesus.

The discourses of Peter (Acts 1:15-22; 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 10:34-43) and Paul (e.g., Acts 13:16-41) are significant summaries

of the life and ministry of Jesus. They present the fundamental information about him: his Davidic descent (13:22-23), his connection with Nazareth (2:22; 4:10), his ministry beginning in Galilee (10:37-39). Special emphasis is given to his passion and death, involving the Jews (2:23; 3:13; 4:10-11) and the pagans (2:23; 4:26-27), Pilate (3:13; 4:27; 13:28) and Herod (4:27); it is also given to the suffering of the cross (5:30; 10:39; 13:29), the burial (13:29), and the resurrection by God (2:24, 32; etc.).

In the presentation of the resurrection of Jesus, the Father's activity is emphasized as opposed to human activity: "You crucified and killed [him]. . . . But God raised him up, having freed him from death" (2:23-24; cf. 3:15; etc.). God raised Jesus up to his right hand (2:33; 5:31) and glorified him (3:13). The emphasis, therefore, is on the very close relationship of Jesus with God and at the same time on the divine origin of what is narrated. The Christological titles of the Gospel of Luke are found also in the book of Acts: Christ (2:31; 3:18), Lord (2:36; 11:20), Son of God (9:20; 13:33), Savior (5:31; 13:23). In general, God is the source of these titles, through which is expressed the nature and assignment he bestowed on Jesus (cf. 2:36; 5:31; 13:33).

The miraculous deeds also link the apostles to Jesus. Jesus' miracles were signs of the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:18; 11:20; cf. Acts 2:22; 10:38). He entrusted this task to the Twelve (Luke 9:1). The book of Acts mentions in a general way "wonders and signs" (2:43; 5:12; 14:3) as works of the apostles. It also recounts individual miracles, such as healings (3:1-10; 5:14-16; 14:8-10), exorcisms (5:16; 8:7; 19:12), raising from the dead (9:36-42; 20:9-10). The apostles perform these deeds in the name of Jesus, with his power and authority (3:1-10; 9:32-35).

The activity of the apostles is totally determined by Jesus; it comes from him and leads back to him and to God the Father. Acts also highlights the continuity of the divine plan, fulfilled in Jesus Christ and then continued in the Church. In the miracles, in particular, Luke sees the divine confirmation of the apostolic mission, as happened for the mission of Moses (7:35-36) and of Jesus himself (2:22).

3.4.3 The Work of the Holy Spirit

36. The relationship of the apostles with Jesus is also demonstrated by means of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised and sent to them and in which they accomplish their works.

To them the risen Lord announces “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4; cf. Luke 24:49), baptism “with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5), “the power” of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit descends on them, and “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4), promised by the Father and poured out by Jesus now exalted at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33). In this Spirit, “Peter, standing with the Eleven” (Acts 2:14), gives with vigor the first public testimony to the work and the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:14-41).

In the brief description of the life of the Jerusalem Church, the apostolic activity is summed up in these terms: “With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (4:33; cf. 1:22; etc.), and this testimony takes place under the influence of the Spirit (4:8, 31; etc.). The ministry of Paul, who proclaims the resurrection of Jesus (13:30, 37) and is filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. 9:17; 13:2, 4, 9) is described in identical terms.

3.4.4 The Fulfillment of the Old Testament

37. The Gospel of Luke recounts how the risen Lord explained the Sacred Scriptures to his disciples, guiding them to understand that in his passion, death, and resurrection, God’s salvific plan, announced beforehand by Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (Luke 24:27, 44), was accomplished. In the book of Acts there are about thirty-seven citations from the Old Testament, most of which occur in speeches that Peter, Stephen, and Paul direct to Jewish audiences. References to divinely inspired texts, showing their fulfillment in Jesus, give the words of the Christian preachers an analogous value.

The Christological events that make up the content of the preaching as well as the concomitant facts are linked to the Scriptures. In the opening discourse of Pentecost, Peter explains the occurrence of extraordinary phenomena caused by the coming of the Spirit in light of the prophecy of Joel 3:1-5 (Acts 2:4-13, 15). At the end of

the book Paul interprets the Roman Jews' rejection of his message (Acts 28:23-25) by going back to the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10. What happens at the beginning and the end of the apostolic mission is linked to the prophetic Word of God. This kind of inclusion can suggest the idea that all that happens and is recounted in this book corresponds to the salvific plan of God.

Regarding the content of the apostolic preaching, we limit ourselves to a few examples. Peter confirms the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus (2:24) by citing Psalm 16:8-11, attributed to David (2:29-32). He uses Psalm 110:1, also attributed to David, to establish the exaltation of Jesus to God's right hand (2:33). There are also comprehensive references to all the prophets, through whom God foretold the destiny of Jesus (cf. 3:18, 24; 24:14; 26:22; 28:23). Citing Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:32-33) Paul presents the resurrection of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise made to the fathers.

The book of Acts attests in a special way how the primitive Church not only received the Hebrew Scriptures as its own inheritance but also appropriated the vocabulary and theology of inspiration, as is evident from the way it cites Old Testament texts. Thus, at both the beginning (Acts 1:16) and the end of the book (Acts 28:15), the Holy Spirit is stated to speak through the authors and the biblical texts. At the beginning, the Scriptures, declared fulfilled by Jesus, are characterized as that "which the Holy Spirit through David foretold" (1:16; cf. also 4:25), and, at the end, the words of Paul, which bring the two volumes of Luke's work to a close, cite Isaiah 6:9-10 in similar terms: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah" (28:25). This way of referring to the Holy Spirit, who speaks in the biblical language, using human authors as intermediaries, is the model taken up by the Christians, not only to describe the inspired Hebrew Scriptures, but also to characterize the apostolic preaching. Acts, in fact, presents the preaching of the Christian missionaries, in particular that of Peter (4:8) and Paul (13:9), in a way that is analogous to the prophetic discourse of the Old Testament and to the ministry of Jesus: they are verbal expressions (more in oral than in written form) that come from the fullness of the Spirit.

3.4.5 Conclusion

38. It is characteristic of the book of Acts that it recounts the activity of the “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word,” who had a multifaceted relationship with Jesus. They are, above all, witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection, which they attest on the basis of encounters with the risen Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit. They present the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the salvific plan of God, referring to the Old Testament, and they see their own activity in the same light. Everything that is recounted comes from Jesus and from God. Through this clear feature of the theme of the book of Acts, the text also comes from Jesus and from God.

3.5 The Letters of the Apostle Paul

39. Paul attests the divine provenance of the Scriptures of Israel, of his gospel, of his apostolic ministry, and of his letters.

3.5.1 Paul’s Witness to the Divine Origin of the Scriptures

Paul unambiguously recognizes the authority of the Scriptures, bears witness to their divine origin, and sees them as prophecies of the Gospel. He designates as Sacred Scripture (cf. Rom 1:2) the books received by the Jewish tradition in the Greek language. Their truth and inspiration are never called into question. As a believing Hebrew, he receives them as witnesses of the will and salvific plan of God for humanity. Along with his coreligionists, he believes in their truth, in their sanctity, and in their unity. Through them, God communicates with us, questions us, and makes his will known to us (Rom 4:23-25; 15:4; 2 Cor 9:10; 10:4, 11).

It should be added straightaway that Paul reads and accepts the Scriptures as prophecies of Christ and of our times (Rom 16:25-26); in other words, as prophecies of a salvation offered in and through Jesus Christ, and therefore as prophecies of the Gospel (Rom 1:2). They are Christologically directed and should be read as such (2 Cor 3).

As word of God and testimony in favor of the Gospel, the Scriptures confirm the unity and stability of the salvific plan of God, which has been the same from the beginning (Rom 9:6-29).

3.5.2 Paul Attests the Divine Origin of His Gospel

40. In the first chapter of his letter to the Galatians, Paul admits that, because of his zeal for the Law, he had persecuted the Church, but he confesses that God, in his infinite goodness, revealed his Son to him (Gal 1:16; cf. Eph 3:1-6). Through this revelation, Jesus of Nazareth, whom Paul had previously seen as a blasphemer, a pseudo-messiah, became the Risen One, the glorious Messiah, conqueror of death, the Son of God. In the same letter (Gal 1:12), he declares that his gospel was revealed to him, and by “gospel” we should understand the principal components of the journey and mission of Jesus, at least his salvific death and resurrection.

In Galatians 1–2 Paul goes on to announce that his gospel does not include circumcision. In other words, he declares that, according to what has been revealed to him, it is not necessary to have oneself circumcised and become a subject of the Mosaic Law to inherit the eschatological promises. For Paul, to subject Christians of non-Hebrew origin to circumcision was not a peripheral or transient question but touches the heart of the Gospel. In fact, he firmly declares that those who have had themselves circumcised—to become subject to the Mosaic Law and to obtain righteousness through it—make Christ’s death on the cross meaningless for themselves: “I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you” (Gal 5:2; cf. 5:4; 2:21). What is at stake, therefore, is the Gospel itself, a Gospel that was revealed to him and that, consequently, cannot be modified.

How does Paul show in Galatians 1–2 that his gospel, in which circumcision plays no part, is of divine origin? He begins by saying that such a rendering of the Gospel could not come from himself, since when he was a Pharisee he was fiercely opposed to it, and because, if he is now proclaiming the opposite of what he thought earlier, it is not because of intellectual volatility: all his coreligionists knew well, in fact, that he was firm in his convictions (Gal 1:13-14). Paul goes on to show that his gospel cannot come from the other apostles, not only because he visited them long after his encounter with Christ, but also because he did not hesitate to contradict Peter, the best-known of the apostles, when he effectively made circumcision a discriminating factor among Christians (Gal 2:11-14). Finally,

since his gospel was revealed to him, he too had to be obedient to what God had made known to him. That is why he can say at the beginning of the same letter to the Galatians, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!” (Gal 1:8; cf. 1:9).

Why did Paul want to emphasize the revealed nature of his gospel? Such a divine origin was, in fact, contested by the Judaizing missionaries, since circumcision was imposed by a clear divine oracle of the Mosaic law (Gen 17:10-14). Now, Genesis 17:10-14 affirms that, to obtain salvation, it is necessary to belong to the family of Abraham and, therefore, to be circumcised. In two of his letters, Galatians and Romans, Paul has to demonstrate that his gospel does not go against the Scriptures and does not contradict Genesis 17:10-14, a passage that does not admit exceptions. Paul cannot, in fact, declare that this oracle is no longer valid, since it is recognized as obligatory by all observant Jews. Unable to do without it, Paul must interpret it differently, but he cannot do so without appealing to other scriptural passages (Gen 1:6 and Ps 32:1-2 in Rom 4:3, 6), which constitute the basis on which Genesis 17:10-14 needs to be interpreted.

3.5.3 Paul's Apostolic Ministry and Its Divine Origin

41. Paul also had to insist on the divine origin of his apostolate, because some in the group of the apostles denigrated it and minimized the value of his gospel. Even if he had encountered the Risen One, he was not part of the group of those who lived with Jesus and were witnesses of his teaching, miracles, and passion. That is why he insists on the fact that he was set apart and called by the Lord to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 1:5; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1). That is also why, in the long eulogy he makes of himself in 2 Corinthians 10–13, he mentions revelations he received from the Lord (2 Cor 12:1-4). This is not a rhetorical exaggeration or a pious lie to display his own status as an apostle but a simple recognition of the truth. In his self-commendation in 2 Corinthians 10–13, Paul insists much less on the exceptional revelations of which he was the recipient and puts greater emphasis on an apostle's sufferings for the churches, because the power of God is made fully known

through his weaknesses. In other words, when he makes known the revelations received from God, Paul does so not in order to be admired by the churches but to show how the qualities of the authentic apostolate are rather labor and sufferings. His testimony, therefore, is worthy of trust.

Paul also notes in Galatians 2:7-9 that when he went to Jerusalem James, Peter, and John, the most authoritative and influential among the apostles, recognized that God had constituted him as apostle to the Gentiles. Paul, therefore, is not the only person to assert the divine origin of his vocation, since it was recognized by the ecclesiastical authorities of the time.

3.5.4 Paul Attests the Divine Origin of His Letters

42. Paul does not only declare the divine origin of his apostolate and of his gospel. The fact that his gospel was revealed to him does not automatically guarantee the accuracy and reliability of its transmission. That is why right at the beginning of his letters he recalls his call and apostolic mandate; in Romans 1:1, for example, he defines himself thus: “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.” He holds that his letters faithfully transmit his gospel and wants them to be read in all the churches (cf. Col 4:16).

Even the disciplinary directives that are not directly linked to the Gospel must be received by the faithful of the various churches as if they were a command of the Lord (1 Cor 7:17b; 14:37). Certainly Paul does not ascribe an equal authority to all of his pronouncements, as his argumentation relating to specific cases in 1 Corinthians 7 shows, but, because they often explain and justify his gospel, his arguments (cf. Rom 1–11 and Gal 1–4) present themselves somehow as a new and authoritative interpretation of the Gospel itself.

3.6 The Letter to the Hebrews

43. The author of the letter to the Hebrews does not make any claim to apostolic authority, unlike Paul, who claims to have received

the Gospel directly from Christ (Gal 1:1, 12, 16). There are, however, two passages of exceptional importance in this regard: 1:1-2, where the author gives a summary of the history of God's revelation to human beings and shows the strict connection between the two Testaments as regards divine revelation, and 2:1-4, where he presents himself as belonging to the second Christian generation, as one who received the word of God, the message of salvation, not directly from the Lord Jesus, but through the witnesses of Christ, from the disciples who listened to him.

3.6.1 The History of God's Revelation

At the beginning of his text, the author observes: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2). In this admirable opening phrase, the author outlines the whole history of the Word of God addressed to humanity. The passage is of singular importance for the theme of revelation and inspiration and merits a careful explanation.

An important fact is solemnly affirmed here: God sought to enter into a personal relationship with human beings. He himself took the initiative in this encounter: *God spoke*. The verb used does not have a direct object; the content of this word is not specified. Instead, the persons put in relationship are named: God, the fathers, the prophets, us, the Son. The Word of God is presented here not as a revelation of the truth but as a means of establishing relations between persons.

In the history of the Word of God, there are two principal stages. The repetition of the same verb, "to speak," expresses a clear continuity, and the parallelism of the two phrases highlights the similarity of the two interventions. But the differences mark out the diversity in epoch, manner, audience, and mediators.

With regard to epochs, the first, simply chronological ("in ancient times"), stands in contrast to another more complex one. The author resorts to a biblical expression, "in these last days," which vaguely indicated the future (cf. Gen 49:1) but was specified when applied to the era of the definitive divine intervention "in the lat-

ter days” (Ezek 38:16; Dan 2:28; 10:14). The author makes use of the same formula but adds a new specification: “in these days” (in which we are living). Materially, this is a minute revision, but one that manifests a radical change of perspective. In the Old Testament, God’s decisive intervention was always situated in the obscurity of the future. Here the author asserts that the final age is already present, because a new era has been inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor 10:11; 1 Pet 1:20). If “these days” are part of the final era, the last day has not yet arrived (cf. John 6:39; 12:48); it is only drawing near (Heb 10:25). But from now on, Christian existence participates in the definitive benefits promised for the latter days (6:4-5; 12:22-24, 28). God’s relationship with humanity now stands on another level; it has passed from promise to realization, from prefiguration to fulfillment. The difference is qualitative.

The way in which the Word of God is presented is not the same in the two periods of the history of salvation. In ancient times, it was characterized by multiplicity: “many times” (or more literally, “in many parts,” “in a fragmentary way”) and “in many ways.” There is richness in this multiplicity. God untiringly (cf. Jer 7:13) found ways to reach us: giving orders, making promises, punishing rebels, comforting the suffering, and using all forms of possible expressions, such as awesome theophanies, consoling visions, brief oracles or grand panoramas of history, preaching of the prophets, songs and liturgical rites, laws, stories. But multiplicity is also an indication of imperfection (cf. Heb 7:23; 10:1-2, 11-14). God is expressing himself partially. Like a good teacher, he began by stating the elementary things in the most accessible way. He spoke of inheritance and of land, he promised and achieved the liberation of his people, and he granted them temporary institutions: a royal dynasty, a hereditary priesthood. But all this was nothing but a prefiguration. In the final phase, the Word of God was given completely, in a definitive and perfect way. The dispersed riches of earlier times were reunited and brought to their culmination in the unity of the mystery of Christ.

A change in the word’s audience corresponds to the succession of time periods. The word of ancient times was addressed “to the fathers,” broadly speaking, that is, to all the generations that

received the prophetic message (cf. 3:9). The definitive word was addressed to “us.” The pronoun “us” includes the authors and those for whom the text was destined, and also the witnesses who heard Christ (cf. 2:3) and their contemporaries.

When speaking of mediators, the author uses a curious, uncommon expression: God spoke “in” the prophets, “in” the Son; normally one says, “through” (Matt 1:22; 2:15; etc.; Acts 28:25). The author may have had in mind the presence of God himself active in his messengers. It is the only meaning that suits the second expression: “in the Son.” The prophets in a broad sense, those whose interventions the Bible reports to us, are succeeded by a final messenger who is “Son.” The position chosen for his name—at the end of the phrase—focuses attention on him. Once he is named, nothing is said except in relation to him (Heb 1:2-4). God’s encounter with humans comes about only in him. God first sent “his servants the prophets” (Jer 7:25; 25:4; 35:15; 44:4). Now his messenger is no longer a mere servant; he is “the Son.” Speaking through the prophets, God let himself be known, but indirectly, through an agent; now the encounter with the Word of God is realized in the Son. No longer is it a man differing from God who speaks to us, but a divine person, whose unity with the Father is expressed with the strongest formulae that the author could find: “the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb 1:3). It was not enough for God to address himself to us by taking up our language; he came, in the person of Jesus Christ, to share our existence in a real way and to speak not only the language of words but also that of a life offered up and of bloodshed.

3.6.2 The Author’s Relationship to the Revelation of the Son

44. After treating one aspect of his teaching, the Word of God addressed to humanity in the prophets and in the Son (1:1-14), the author immediately specifies its connection with life and points out his own relationship to the Son: “Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we

escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will” (Heb 2:1-4).

Christians are invited to pay greater attention to the word they have heard. It is not enough to hear the message; it is necessary to adhere to it with all one’s heart and life. Without an earnest adherence to the Gospel, there is the risk of going off course (cf. 2:1). Distancing oneself from God can lead only to losing oneself or perishing; the one who strives to adhere to the message heard comes closer to God (cf. 7:19) and finds salvation.

Having introduced his topic (cf. 2:1), the author develops it in a long sentence (cf. 2:2-4). He bases his argument on a comparison between the angels and the Lord. The only element that is identical in the two parts is the expression “declared through.” The “word” was declared through angels; “salvation” began to be declared through the Lord.

When he refers to the “word,” the author has in mind the promulgation of the law that occurred on Sinai. The expression “salvation” comes as a surprise. Here one would have expected a term parallel to “word.” This imperfection in the parallelism is full of significance. It manifests a profound difference between the Old Testament and the New. In the old covenant, there was only a “word,” an external law that commands and punishes. In the new covenant, a true salvation is offered. What excuse is there, then, for those who reject salvation? In such people, ingratitude is added to obduracy. They do not resist a requirement; they close themselves to love.

A long discourse on the topic points out three characteristics of salvation, showing how it comes to the author and to those to whom the text is directed: the Lord’s preaching, the ministry of the first disciples, and the testimony on God’s part (cf. 2:3b-4). The first characteristic of salvation is that it began to be declared through the Lord. The author does not use a simple verb, “to begin,” but a solemn circumlocution, “to have its beginning,” a subtle allusion perhaps to Genesis 1:1. Salvation constitutes a new creation. The title “Lord” designates Christ, the Son who is the final revealer sent by God

(cf. Heb 1:2). The salvation revealed by him is the culmination of God's salvific work. The announcement made by the Lord reaches "us" (2:3; the author and the addressees of his text) through the ministry of the auricular witnesses, who are the first disciples of Jesus. God, from whom all revelation and salvation come (cf. 1:1-2), confirms the ministry of the disciples with signs and miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 5:12; Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 12:4, 11; 2 Cor 12:12).

Having outlined in synthesis the whole history of revelation (Heb 1:1-2), the author shows (2:1-4) that he, and consequently his work, is linked to the Son and to God through the ministry of those witnesses who had heard the Lord.

3.7 The Book of Revelation

45. The term "inspiration" is not present in the book of Revelation, but the reality of what the term means is found there, when there is a recognition in the text of a relationship of close, direct dependence on God. We find this situation in the prologue (1:1-3); we find it again in 1:10 and 4:2, when John, in relation to what will be the content of the book, is put in special contact with the Spirit, and when, in 10:8-11, his prophetic mission is renewed in relation to the "little scroll." It recurs finally in the closing liturgical dialogue, when the intangible sacredness of the whole message is emphasized once it has reached the status of a book (22:18-19). Through contact with these passages, we come to an initial understanding of what inspiration is as presented in the book of Revelation.

3.7.1 The Divine Origin of the Text According to the Prologue (1:1-3)

A careful reading of the prologue of the book of Revelation provides us with interesting and detailed information on the path that leads, in terms of the text of Revelation, from a purely divine plane to the concrete level of a book that can be read in the liturgical assembly.

At the very beginning of the text, we can discern a first explicit contact with the level of God: the "revelation" is "of Jesus Christ" (1:1a). But Jesus Christ is not the inventor of revelation; it is God, understood as "the Father," according to constant New Testament

usage. It can be said that revelation with its origin in the Father and bestowed on the Son, Jesus Christ, receives the imprint of its divine contact. From the level of God, we descend to the level of man. Here is where we meet Jesus Christ: all that is of God the Father is to be found again in him, the living “Word of God.” When Jesus Christ addresses himself to human beings, he will consequently appear to them as a totally trustworthy witness, capable, insofar as he is Son at a Trinitarian level, of grasping fully the essence of the Father from whom everything derives and, as the incarnate Son, capable of communicating it adequately to humanity.

In this way Revelation enters into contact with John. And this happens in a particular way: the Father, through Jesus Christ who is its bearer, expresses revelation in symbolic “signs” which are perceived, “seen” by John, and adequately understood by him through the mediation of an angel who explains them. John, in turn, expresses the revelation of which he has come into possession in his own message to the churches, and at this point the revelation becomes a written text. The contact with the Father and the incarnate Son that gave rise to the text remains there also afterward, becoming a permanent quality of it. When the written revelation is proclaimed in the liturgical assembly in the last step of its coming into being, it will take on the form of prophecy.

3.7.2 The Transformation of John Accomplished by the Spirit Regarding Christ (1:10; 4:1-2)

46. At the beginning of the first (1:4–3:22) and second parts (4:1–22:5) of his text, the author of the book of Revelation, who identifies himself literally with John, offers an interesting clarification of the dynamic of revelation, that, starting from the Father and passing through Jesus Christ, comes at last to him: a special intervention of the Holy Spirit takes place, which, by transforming him, places John in renewed contact with Jesus Christ, with the result that he knows him better.

This is true above all at the beginning of the first part of the book (1:10), with reference to the entire section. Banished to the island of Patmos, with his mind and heart in his community of far-off

Ephesus, John, “on the Lord’s day,” characteristic of the liturgical assembly, becomes aware of a touch of the Spirit which happens in a new way: “I became in the spirit on the Lord’s day.” “To become” through the Spirit and in contact with it brings about in John an interior transformation which, even if not reaching an ecstatic level, enables him to grasp and interpret the complex symbolic sign that will be presented to him right away. From this, there will come about in John a new existential, cognitive, and affective experience of the risen Jesus Christ, from whom he will then receive the task of sending a written message to the seven churches (cf. 1:10b–3:22).

This special contact with the Spirit is renewed at the beginning (4:1-2) of the second part of the book (4:1–22:5)—“At once I became in the Spirit” (4:2)—and continues unaltered to the conclusion. The new touch of the Spirit tends, like the previous one, to transform John inwardly. It is preceded by an intervention of Jesus Christ, who tells John to transfer himself from the earth to the level of heaven. Through this second “becoming in the Spirit,” John will be able to perceive the great “signs” that God will give him through Jesus Christ and express them adequately in the text. This renewing contact with the Spirit will be recalled later at certain particularly significant points in his relationship with Jesus Christ. This happens in 17:3 before the especially complex presentation of the judgment of the “great whore” (17:3–18:24), the one who, under the influence of the Demoniac, brings about the most radical opposition to the values of Jesus Christ. Then, when the great decisive “sign” of the New Jerusalem is shown, which presents the ineffable relationship of love between the Lamb Jesus Christ and the Church who has become his bride, there will be a further call to the Spirit for John (21:10), which will open him to the highest understanding of Jesus Christ. This broadening by the Spirit to perceive “something more” of Jesus Christ will pass from John to his written work and will tend to place itself in the reader-hearer.

3.7.3 Human Involvement in Enunciating the Prophetic Message (10:9-11)

47. But how does this opening in the Spirit develop in the human being? There is an interesting indication in this regard in 10:9-11.

An angel, a solemn manifestation of Christ (cf. 10:1-8), holds in his left hand a “little scroll containing a message from God, probably the still-rough content of Revelation 11:1-13, and he invites John to take it: “And he says to me: ‘Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth’” (10:9). At the first contact with the “little scroll” John is fascinated with it and experiences the inexpressible sweetness of the Word of God. But the delight of the word received will then give way to the painful toil of assimilating it. The Word of God will have to pass from the divine level to the level of human communication through an arduous elaboration from within, one requiring John’s intelligence, emotive capacity, and creative literary faculties. Once this laborious phase is over, John will be able to announce the Word of God which, no longer in a crude form, has now become, through this work of elaboration, the word of man.

3.7.4 The Integrity of the Inspired Book (22:1-19)

48. Having arrived at the end of his work, when the text composed can be called “this scroll” (22:18, 19b), the author, placing everything on the lips of John, makes a radical declaration of the intangible nature of the scroll itself. Taking his initial inspiration from various texts of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut 4:2; 13:1; 29:19), the author of the book of Revelation emphasizes its radical nature: the book, by now completed, has the very completeness of God, to which one can neither add nor subtract anything. The prolonged contact that he had with Jesus Christ through the Spirit during its formation imprinted a certain sacredness on the book’s message: something of Jesus Christ and of his Spirit, we may say, remains there within it, thus enabling the text to serve as a prophecy that enters into life with the capacity to change it.

3.7.5 Provenance from God: An Initial Summary

49. From what we have observed, some fundamental characteristics of the text of the book of Revelation emerge regarding the topic under consideration. The text has a marked divine origin, deriving directly from God the Father and Jesus Christ, upon whom God the

Father bestows it. Jesus Christ, in turn, bestows it on John, communicating its content in symbolic “signs,” which John, with the help of the angel interpreter, succeeds in perceiving. This initial, direct contact of the text with the level of the divine becomes active throughout the course of the book, both in the first and second parts of which it is composed, by the particular and adhering influence of the Spirit, who renews and opens up John inwardly, continually producing in him a qualitative advance in his knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The content of revelation does not pass automatically from the divine level, where it comes into being and develops, to the human level, where it is heard. The development that leads to the Word of God becoming also a human word requires from John, after a burst of joy at an initial contact with the word, an arduous elaboration that brings the message to an appropriately human level and makes it comprehensible. This transition does not lead to the loss of the original characteristic: there remains in the whole text, by now definitively written and in the form of a book, a quality of sacredness which reaches the divine plane. This sacredness renders the text, on the one hand, absolutely untouchable, without the possibility of additions or subtractions, while, on the other, it activates within it the energy of prophecy that makes it fitting to leave a decisive imprint on one’s life.

This complex set of characteristics, to be kept together always, allows us to see how the author of the book of Revelation senses and understands the elements of what we call today inspiration: there is an enduring intervention on the part of God the Father; there is an enduring intervention of Jesus Christ, particularly rich and well-structured; there is an intervention, also an enduring one, of the Spirit; there is an intervention of the angel interpreter; there is also, in the text’s contact with humanity, a specific intervention on John’s part. In the end, this text, the Word of God which has come into contact with humanity, will not only succeed in making its illuminating content known but also know how to radiate it in life. It will be inspired and inspiring.

It is striking that this last book of the New Testament, which has the greatest number of references to the Old Testament and can be seen as its synthesis, attests its provenance from God and

its inspired character in a most precise and well-structured way. And a new dimension springs from this contact with Christ: the Old Testament also becomes inspired and inspiring when read in Christological terms.

IV. Conclusion

50. Concluding the section on the divine origin of the biblical books (with which we illustrate the concept of inspiration), we summarize, on the one hand, what has been shown on the relationship between God and the human authors, and we highlight in particular the fact that the writings of the New Testament recognize the inspiration of the Old Testament and read it Christologically. On the other hand, we open up a new perspective and seek to complete the results obtained up to now. A brief diachronic view of the literary formation of the biblical writings is added to the synchronic consideration. And the study of individual writings will be completed with a look at the whole collection of the writings accepted into the canon. This last aspect will be treated in two parts: the few traces of a two-testament canon that are found within the New Testament will be presented, and the history of the formation of the canon and the reception of the biblical books in Israel and in the Church will be outlined.

4.1 An Overall View of the “God–Human Author” Relationship

51. It was our intention to point out in a number of biblical books the indications of the relationship between those who wrote them and God, in order to highlight how their provenance from God is attested. From this there arose a kind of biblical phenomenology of the “God–human author” relationship. Now, after a brief summary review of what has already been discussed, we underline some characteristic traits of inspiration, coming to a conclusion about the right way with which the inspired books must be received.

4.1.1 Brief Synthesis

In the writings of the Old Testament, the relationship between the various human authors and God is expressed in several ways.

In the Pentateuch, Moses appears as the person instituted by God as the sole mediator of his revelation. In this part of the Scriptures, we find the singular assertion that God himself had written the text of the Ten Commandments and had consigned it to Moses (Exod 24:12), which attests this text's direct provenance from God. Moses is then given the task of writing other words of God (Exod 24:4; 34:27), becoming ultimately the Lord's mediator for the entire Torah (cf. Deut 31:9). The prophetic books, for their part, have a variety of formulae for expressing the fact that God communicates his word to inspired messengers who must transmit it to the people. While in the Pentateuch and in the prophetic books the Word of God is received directly by mediators chosen by God, we find a different situation in the Psalms and wisdom books. In the Psalms, the suppliant listens to the voice of God, heard above all in the great events of creation and of the saving history of Israel, but also in some particular personal experiences. Analogously, in the wisdom books, the meditative study of the Law and Prophets, inspired by the fear of God, turn the various instructions into a teaching of divine wisdom.

In the New Testament, the person of Jesus, his activity, and his journey constitute the pinnacle of divine revelation. For all the authors and writings of the New Testament, every relationship with God depends on the relationship with Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels attest their divine provenance, presenting Jesus and his revelatory work. This fact is common to all four gospels, but not without particular nuances. Matthew and Mark identify themselves with the person and work of Jesus; they present, in narrative form, his activity, his passion, and his resurrection, as the supreme divine confirmation of all his words and of all his assertions on his identity. Luke, in the prologue of his gospel, explains that his narrative is based on the encounter with eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. Finally, John claims to be an eyewitness of Jesus' work from the very beginning and, instructed by the Holy Spirit and having believed in the divine sonship of Jesus, he testifies to his revelatory work.

The other writings of the New Testament attest their provenance from Jesus and God in still different ways. Through the close connection between his two works (cf. Acts 1:1-2), Luke gives us to understand that, in the Acts of the Apostles, he is recounting the

post-paschal activity of those eyewitnesses and ministers of the word (cf. Luke 1:3) on whom he depends for the presentation of Jesus' activity in his gospel. Paul attests that he received from God the Father the revelation of his Son (Gal 1:15-16) and that he had seen the risen Lord (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8), and he asserts the divine origin of his gospel. The author of the letter to the Hebrews depends on witnesses who heard the proclamation of the Lord for knowledge of the salvation revealed by God. Finally, the author of the book of Revelation describes in a subtle and varied manner how he received the revelation that is found definitively and unalterably in his book: from God the Father through Jesus Christ, in signs perceived with the help of an angel interpreter.

We find in the biblical writings, then, a wide spectrum of testimony about their divine provenance, and thus we can speak of a rich phenomenology of the relationship between God and the human author. In the Old Testament, the relationship with God is seen in various ways. In the New Testament, however, the relationship with God is always mediated by the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom God has spoken his final and definitive Word (cf. Heb 1:1-2). In the introduction, we mentioned the limitation of not being able to distinguish clearly between revelation and inspiration, between communication of the contents and divine assistance in the work of writing. The divine communication and the believing acceptance of the contents, which is then accompanied by the divine assistance to write it down, are fundamental. The case of the Ten Commandments, written by God himself and delivered to Moses (Exod 24:12), is wholly exceptional, and the case of the book of Revelation, in which the process is explained in detail from the divine communication to the act of writing, is also special.

4.1.2 Some Characteristic Qualities of Inspiration

52. On the basis of what has been explained succinctly above, we now indicate briefly some characteristic qualities of inspiration that can help clarify the notion of inspiration of the biblical books.

In our enquiry on the indications of the divine provenance of the various writings, we established as fundamental the living relationship

with God in the Old Testament and with God through his son in the New Testament. This relationship manifests itself in various forms. For the Old Testament, we recall the form described by the Pentateuch for the unique relationship of Moses with God; the form which expresses itself in the prophetic formulae; the form of the experience of God, which is the basis of the Psalms; the form of the fear of God, which is characteristic of the wisdom books. Within this living relationship, the authors receive and recognize what they transmit in their words and in their writings. In the New Testament, the personal relationship with Jesus manifests itself in the form of discipleship, the nucleus of which is faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God (cf. Mark 1:1; John 20:31). The relationship with Jesus can be immediate (Gospel of John; Paul) or mediated (Gospel of Luke; Letter to the Hebrews). This relationship, which is fundamental to the communication of the Word of God, appears in a particularly coherent and rich way in the Gospel of John: the author has contemplated the glory of the only-begotten Son who comes from the Father (1:14); he is an eyewitness of Jesus' journey (19:35; 21:24); he gives his testimony, instructed by the Spirit of truth (15:26-27). Here may also be seen the Trinitarian character of the relationship with God, fundamental for an inspired author of the New Testament.

According to the testimony of the biblical writings, inspiration presents itself as a special relationship with God (or with Jesus), whereby he grants to a human author to relate—through his Spirit—that which he wishes to communicate to human beings. In this way, what *Dei Verbum* asserts (n. 11) is confirmed: the books are written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; God is their author, because he employs chosen people, acting in and through them; these, however, write as true authors.

The characteristics we have observed in our study appear complementary: (a) the gift of a personal relationship with God (unconditional faith in God, fear of God, faith in Jesus Christ Son of God) is fundamental; (b) in this relationship, the author embraces the various ways in which God reveals himself (creation, history, presence of Jesus of Nazareth); and (c) in the plan of God's revelation, which culminates in the sending of his Son Jesus, both the personal relationship with God and the manner of revelation undergo some

variations, according to the phases and circumstances of revelation. From this, one concludes that inspiration is analogously the same for all the authors of the biblical books (as indicated in *Dei Verbum*, n. 11) but with various facets owing to the plan of divine revelation.

4.1.3 The Right Way to Receive the Inspired Books

53. In our study of the inspiration of the biblical writings, we have seen God's tireless concern to address himself to his people, and we have also considered the Spirit in which these books were written.

God's solicitude should be received with a deep gratitude, manifested in a keen interest and great attention, to hear and to understand what God wants to communicate to us. The Spirit in which the books were written, however, should be the Spirit in which we listen to them. True disciples of Jesus, profoundly moved by faith in their Lord, wrote the books of the New Testament. These books are meant to be heard by true disciples of Jesus (cf. Matt 28:19), filled with living faith in him (cf. John 20:31). It is with the risen Jesus, according to the teaching that Jesus gave his disciples (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47) and from his perspective, that we are called to read the writings of the Old Testament. For the scientific study of the biblical writings too, conducted not in a neutral way but with a truly theological approach, it is essential to take account of inspiration. Indeed, the criterion of an authentic reading is indicated by *Dei Verbum* when it affirms that "Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same Spirit in which it was written" (n. 12). Modern exegetical methods cannot take the place of faith, but, when applied within the framework of faith, they can be very fruitful for the theological understanding of the texts.

4.2 The Writings of the New Testament Attest the Inspiration of the Old Testament and Interpret It Christologically

54. In the study of the New Testament writings, we have always found that they refer to the Sacred Scriptures of the Jewish tradition. Here, in conclusion, we offer some examples in which the

relationship to texts of the Old Testament is made explicit. We will conclude commenting on two passages of the New Testament that not only cite the Old Testament, but clearly affirm its inspiration.

4.2.1 Some Examples

Matthew cites the prophets in a typical way. In fact, when he speaks of the fulfillment of the promises or the prophecies, he does not attribute them to a prophet (writing: “As the prophet says/said”) but, explicitly or implicitly, ascribes them to God himself by using the theological passive: “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord *through the prophet*” (Matt 1:22; 2:15; 2:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4); the prophet is only the instrument of God. By presenting what came about with Jesus as the fulfillment of the ancient promise, he gives it a Christological interpretation.

The Gospel of Luke adds that this interpretation originates with Jesus himself, who describes his ministry using the oracles of Isaiah (Luke 4:18-19) or the prophetic figures of Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:25-27); with all the authority his resurrection gives him, he shows finally how all the Scriptures speak of him, his sufferings and his glory (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47).

In John, Jesus himself affirms that the Scriptures bear witness to him; he does this arguing with his interlocutors, who scrutinize these Scriptures to obtain eternal life (John 5:39).

Paul, as has already been abundantly demonstrated, unhesitatingly recognizes the authority of the Scriptures, attests their divine origin, and sees them as prophecies of the Gospel.

4.2.2 The Testimony of 2 Timothy 3:15-16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21

55. In these two letters (2 Tim and 2 Pet), we find the only explicit attestations of the inspired nature of the Old Testament Scriptures. Paul reminds Timothy of his formation in the faith, saying: “From childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:15-16). The Sacred Scriptures of

the Old Testament, read with faith in Christ Jesus, formed the basis of Timothy's religious teaching (cf. Acts 16:1-3; 2 Tim 1:5) and served to strengthen his faith in Christ. By characterizing all these Scriptures as "inspired," Paul is saying that the Spirit of God is their author.

Peter bases his apostolic message (which proclaims "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"; 2 Pet 1:16) on his own eye-witness and auricular testimony and on the word of the prophets. He mentions (1:16-18) his own presence on the holy mountain of the Transfiguration, when, along with other witnesses ("we"; 1:18), he heard the voice of God the Father: "This is my Son, my Beloved" (1:17). Reference is then made to the very secure word of the prophets (1:19), of which he says, "First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (1:20-21). He speaks of all the prophecies that are found in Scripture and attributes them to the influence of the Holy Spirit in the prophets. It is the same God whose voice Peter heard on the mountain of the Transfiguration who spoke through the prophets. From this same God, through these two mediations, the apostolic message about Christ comes.

The fact—common to 2 Timothy and 2 Peter—that the authors speak of the "Scriptures," while drawing attention to their own apostolic work, is important for the relationship between the Old Testament and the apostolic testimony. Paul first mentions his teaching and exemplary life (2 Tim 3:10-11) and then the role of the Scriptures (3:16-17). Peter presents himself as an eyewitness of the Transfiguration (2 Pet 1:16-18) and then makes reference to the ancient prophets (1:19-21). Both texts show that, for Christians, the immediate context for the reading and interpretation of the inspired Scriptures (of the Old Testament) is the apostolic testimony. From this one deduces that also this latter should be understood as inspired.

4.3 The Process of the Literary Formation of the Biblical Writings and Inspiration

56. A brief diachronic survey of the literary formation of the biblical writings shows that the canon of Scripture was established

gradually, stage by stage, over the course of history. Regarding the Old Testament, these steps may be schematically presented as follows:

- the writing down of oral traditions, of prophetic words, of law collections
- the establishment of collections of written traditions, which gradually acquire authority and are recognized as expressions of divine revelation; this applies to the Torah
- a connection between the various collections: Torah, Prophets, and Wisdom writings

The oldest traditions, however, have been the object of continual rereadings and multiple reinterpretations. The same phenomenon occurs even within certain literary collections: thus, in the Torah, the more recent law collections present a development and interpretation of the pre-exilic laws; or again, in the book of Isaiah we find traces of successive developments and of a literary work of unification.

Finally, the latest writings present an actualization of the ancient texts; the book of Sirach, for example, identifies the Torah with Wisdom.

The study of the New Testament traditions has shown how these are based on the written traditions of Judaism in order to announce the Gospel of Christ. We can recall, in this regard, that the Luke-Acts diptych refers frequently to the Torah, the prophetic literature, and the Psalms to show how Jesus “fulfilled” the Scriptures of Israel (Luke 24:25-27, 44).

To understand the notion of the inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures, then, we must take into consideration this movement within the Scriptures themselves. Inspiration concerns each particular text, as well as the whole canon, which links Old Testament and New Testament traditions together. The ancient traditions of Israel, handed on in writing, have in fact been reread, commented on, and finally interpreted in the light of the mystery of Christ, who gives them their *full*, definitive meaning.

It is by following certain “trails” or “lines” within Scripture that the reader can bring out the way in which the theological themes are broadened and developed. The canonical reading of the Bible

allows us to highlight the progress of revelation by means of a logic, both diachronic and synchronic.

We give a single example. The theology of creation, announced from the beginning of the book of Genesis, is developed in the prophetic literature; chapter 43 of the book of Isaiah, in fact, connects salvation and creation, understanding the salvation of Israel as a prolongation of creation, while chapters 65–66 interpret the hoped-for rebirth of Israel as a new creation (Isa 65:17; 66:22). This theology is then further developed in the Psalms and wisdom literature.

57. In the New Testament, one can point out, on the one hand, a “relationship of fulfillment” with the Old Testament traditions and, on the other hand, a diachronic movement of development and reinterpretation of the traditions analogous to that specified for the Old Testament.

To illustrate the relationship of fulfillment between the New Testament writings and traditions of the Old Testament, we can cite the Gospel of John, which, in its prologue, presents Christ as the creative Word, and also the Pauline letters, which call to mind the cosmic significance of Christ’s coming (cf. 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:12–20), and even the book of Revelation, which describes the victory of Christ as the eschatological renewal of creation (Rev 21).

The diachronic study of the books of the New Testament shows that they assimilated ancient, sometimes preliterate, traditions, which reflect the life and the liturgical expressions of the primitive Christian community: the First Letter to the Corinthians, for example, cites an ancient profession of faith in 15:3–5. On the other hand, the books included in the canon of the New Testament reflect a progression and an evolution in the theological and institutional development of the first communities; thus, the letters to Timothy or to Titus attest ministerial functions and procedures of discernment that are more developed than those in the first letters written by Paul.

This brief diachronic survey must be linked to a perspective of synchronic reading: insofar as the canon of Scripture is framed between the book of Genesis and the book of Revelation, the reader of the Bible is encouraged to understand it as a whole, as a single account that unfolds from creation up to the new creation inaugurated by Christ.

The inspiration of Sacred Scripture refers, therefore, to each of the texts that constitute it, as well as to the canon as a whole. To affirm that a biblical book is inspired means to recognize that it constitutes a specific and privileged vehicle of God's revelation to humankind and that its human authors were impelled by the Spirit to express truths of faith in a historically located text and received as normative by believing communities.

To assert that Scripture, as a whole, is inspired, is equivalent to recognizing that it constitutes a canon, that is, a collection of writings that are normative for the faith and received in the Church. The Bible as such is the place of the revelation of an unsurpassable truth, identified in a person—Jesus Christ—who, by his words and deeds, “fulfills” and “perfects” the traditions of the Old Testament by revealing the Father fully.

4.4 Toward a Two-Testament Canon

58. The two letters 2 Timothy and 2 Peter play important roles in the first outline of a Christian canon of Scripture. They hint at the closure of a body of Pauline and Petrine letters, impede any later addition to these letters, and prepare for the closure of the canon. The text of 2 Peter in particular points toward a two-testament canon and an ecclesial reception of the Pauline letters, an important factor in the reception of these writings in the Church. The majority of biblical exegetes consider the two letters as “pseudepigraphical” works (attributed to the apostles but actually produced by later authors). This does not jeopardize their inspired character and does not diminish their theological significance.

4.4.1 The Closure of the Collections of the Pauline and Petrine Letters

Both letters look back to the past and highlight the imminent end of the lives of the two authors. They make frequent use of “remembering” and exhort the readers to remember and apply the teaching that the apostles communicated to them in the past (cf. 2 Tim 1:6, 13; 2:2, 8, 14; 3:14; 2 Pet 1:12, 15; 3:1-2). Insofar as

the two letters insistently signal the death of the authors, they serve effectively as a conclusion for the collection of the respective letters.

In 2 Timothy, Paul's death is presented as imminent: the apostle, abandoned by his helpers and having lost his case at the imperial court (cf. 4:16-18), is ready to receive the crown of martyrdom: "As for me, I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day" (4:6-8). Similarly, 2 Peter indicates that the Lord has revealed the proximity of the apostle's death: "I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things" (1:13-15; cf. 3:1).

Both of these letters thus appear to be the last letters of their respective authors, their testaments, which bring to a close what they intended to communicate.

4.4.2 Toward a Two-Testament Canon

59. In 2 Peter 3:2, Peter indicates the purpose of his two letters: "that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles." Although the text speaks of words spoken by the prophets, there is no doubt that the author is thinking of the prophetic Scriptures (cf. 1:20). The term "commandment of the Lord and Savior" does not designate a specific commandment of the Lord but has the same meaning as in the preceding passage, in which "the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" is indicated as "the way of righteousness" and "the holy commandment that was passed on to them" (2:20-21). The term "commandment" (in the singular), coined in analogy to Torah, has an almost technical significance, and in 3:2, linked to a double genitive, it indicates the teaching of Christ transmitted by the apostles, that is, the Gospel as the new plan of salvation.

Second Peter 3:2 highlights the prophets, the Lord, the apostles. In this way the canon of the two Testaments is delineated: the first is determined by the prophets and the second by the Lord and Savior Jesus, attested by the apostles. Both Testaments are intimately connected through their witness to faith in Christ (cf. 2 Pet 1:16-21; 3:1-2), the Old Testament (the prophets) through a Christological reading, and the New Testament through the testimony of the apostles, expressed in their letters (especially those of Peter and Paul), but also in the gospels, based on “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:2; cf. John 1:14).

Second Peter 3:15-16 is also important for the conception of the two-testament canon and its inspired character. Peter, having explained the delay of the *parousia* (3:3-14), affirms his agreement with Paul: “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.” Affirmed here is the existence of a collection of Pauline letters which the people whom Peter addresses have received. The assertion that Paul wrote “according to the wisdom given to him” presents him as an inspired writer. The false interpretations of difficult Pauline passages are equated with those “of the other scriptures”; in this way, the Pauline texts and the letter of Peter, confirmed by them, are placed alongside the “scriptures” which, like prophetic texts, are inspired by God (cf. 1:20-21).

4.5 The Reception of the Biblical Books and the Formation of the Canon

60. The books which today make up our Sacred Scriptures do not authenticate themselves as “canonical.” Their authority, on account of their inspiration, must be recognized and accepted by the community, whether it be the synagogue or the Church. It is right, then, to consider the historical process of this recognition.

Every literature has its classic books. A classic comes from the cultural world of a specific people, but at the same time it broadens the language of that society and imposes itself as a model for future

writers. A book becomes a classic not by decree of some authority but because it is recognized as such by the more cultivated members of the people. Many religions too have, so to speak, their classics. In this case, the writings chosen are those that reflect the beliefs of the adherents of those religions, who find there the sources of their religious practices. This happened in the ancient Near East, in Mesopotamia, and even in Egypt. The same phenomenon occurred for the Jews, who, with a special awareness of being the chosen people of God, identified themselves substantially with their religious tradition. From among the various writings conserved in their archives, the scribes selected those that contained sacred laws, the narrative of their national history, the prophetic oracles, and the collection of wisdom sayings in which the Jewish people could mirror themselves and recognize the origins of their faith. The same happened among Christians of the first centuries, with the apostolic writings now contained in the New Testament.

4.5.1 The Pre-Exilic Period

Scholars consider it possible that such a selection of written and oral traditions, among them the prophetic sayings and many Psalms, had already begun before the Exile. Indeed Jeremiah 18:18 says: “For instruction shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.” The reform of Josiah had as its basis the book of the Covenant (Deuteronomy perhaps), rediscovered in the temple (2 Kgs 23:2).

4.5.2 The Post-Exilic Period

It is on the return from the Exile, under Persian domination, that we can speak of the beginnings of the formation of a tripartite canon consisting of Law, Prophets, and Writings (mainly of a wisdom nature). Those who had returned from Babylon needed to rediscover their identity as the people of the Covenant. It was necessary, therefore, to codify laws, requested also by the Persian overlords. The collection of historical records reconnected them with pre-exilic Judah; the prophetic books served to explain the reasons

for the deportation, while the Psalms were indispensable for worship in the reconstructed temple. And because it was believed that from the reign of Artaxerxes (465–423 BC) prophecy had ceased and the spirit had passed to the sages (cf. Josephus Flavius, *Contr. Ap.* 1.8.41; *Ant.* 13:311-13), various wisdom books began to be produced by erudite scribes. These people took upon themselves the task of collecting those books which, on account of their antiquity, religious veneration, and authority, could provide a precise identity for the returning exiles, as well as for their new overlords. Political and social motives, therefore, are not to be excluded from the initial formation of the canon. We can then consider the governorship of Nehemiah as the *terminus a quo* for the formation of the canon. In fact, 2 Maccabees 2:13-15 tells us that Nehemiah founded a library, gathering together all the books about the kings and the prophets and the writings of David, as well as the letters of kings about votive offerings. Moreover, as at the time of Josiah, the scribe Ezra read the book of the law of Moses to the people with authority (Neh 8).

The post-exilic scribes did not limit themselves to collecting the books endowed with religious authority. They updated the laws and historical narratives, assembled prophetic oracles, and added passages of interpretive comment and with various materials composed a single book (for example, the book of Isaiah and the Twelve Prophets). Moreover, they composed new psalms and gave shape to wisdom books. They unified everything under the names of Moses, lawgiver and greatest prophet; David, the psalmist; and Solomon, the wise ruler. Such a complex literary *corpus* turned out very useful for supporting the faith also in the face of the cultural challenges of the Persian and Hellenistic eras. At the same time they began to establish the text of the more ancient books, and thus the canon and the text developed together.

4.5.3 The Maccabean Period

A new problem arose when Antiochus IV had all the sacred books of the Jews destroyed. A reorganization became necessary, therefore, and this brings us to the *terminus ad quem* of the Old Testament era. Already in the first decades of the second century BC,

Sirach classified the sacred books as Law, Prophets, and other later writings (prologue). In Sirach 44–50, he recapitulates the history of Israel from the beginning down to his own times, and in 48:1-11, he explicitly mentions the prophet Elijah; in 48:20-25, Isaiah; and in 49:7-10, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Prophets. About fifty years later, 1 Maccabees 1:56-57 tells us that during the persecution of Antiochus, the Seleucids burned the books of the law and the book of the Covenant, but 2 Maccabees 2:14 tells us that Judas Maccabeus collected the books saved from the persecution.

In the first century of the Christian era, Josephus Flavius mentions that there are twenty-two books acknowledged as sacred by the Jews (*Contr. Ap.* 1.37–43), books containing laws, narrative traditions, hymns, and counsels. That number is explained by the fact that many books which in our editions of the Bible are separate (e.g., the Twelve Prophets) count as a single book. The number 22 can indicate completeness, because it corresponds to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Today, the tendency is to date the closure of the rabbinic canon to the second century AD, or even later, either for reasons internal to Judaism, or as a reaction to the Christian acceptance of the books of the New Testament as Sacred Scripture. The distinction that used to be made between a Palestinian canon of twenty-two books and a larger one in the Diaspora no longer finds favor today, especially after the discovery of Qumran.

4.5.4 The Old Testament Canon in the Fathers

Among the Fathers of the Church too we find some divergence between those who accepted a shorter canon, perhaps to be able to engage in dialogue with the Jews, and those who included also the deuterocanonical books (written in Greek) among those received by the Church. At the Council of Hippo in 393, at which Augustine, then a simple priest, was present, the bishops of Africa, by establishing the criterion of the public reading in the majority of churches or in the principal churches, provided the basis for the reception of the deuterocanonical books, which was definitively affirmed in the medieval era. In the Catholic Church it was the Council of Trent that decided to approve the longer canon against the reformers who

had returned to the shorter one. The majority of Orthodox Churches do not differ from the Catholic Church, but some divergence exists among the ancient Eastern Churches.

4.5.5 The Formation of the New Testament Canon

61. Moving on to the formation of the books of the New Testament, we note the fact that the content of these books was received before it was put down in writing, since those who believed accepted the preaching of Christ and the apostles before the composition of our sacred books. One need only think of the prologue of Luke, where he affirms that his gospel does not intend to do anything other than to provide through its account of the story of Jesus a “solid foundation” for the teachings which Theophilus has received. Although many may have been occasional writings, they expressed an inner need of the Christian communities to add a *didaché* (written teaching) to the *kerygma* (proclamation). Read initially for the assemblies to which they were directed, these writings were gradually transmitted to other churches because of their apostolic authority. The acceptance of these documents—because they spoke with the authority of Jesus and of the apostles—should not, however, be identified with their reception as “Scripture” on a par with the Old Testament. We have mentioned the intimations in 2 Peter 3:2, 15-16, but we must wait until the end of the second century for this conviction of their equality to be generalized and for the books comprising the “Old Testament” and those making up the “New Testament” to be put on the same level.

During the first century after Christ, the “volumen” (which had the form of a scroll) gave way to the “codex” (consisting of bound pages, as is usual for books today); this contributed a great deal to the production of small literary collections that could be contained in a single book, first and foremost the gospels and the letters of Paul. Indications of the constitution of a *corpus johanneum* and of the “Catholic epistles” come later.

The need to define the limits of the collection of authoritative writings arose when, at the beginning of the second century, the Gnostics, to spread their doctrines, began to compose works in the

same literary genres as the great Church (gospels, acts, letters, and apocalypses). At this time the need for definite criteria to distinguish the orthodox texts from the heterodox was felt. Some extreme Jewish-Christian groups, such as the Ebionites, wanted the *damnatio memoriae* of Paul, while the Montanists attributed excessive importance to charismatic gifts. The author who had a decisive influence in keeping alive the doctrine of Paul was Luke, with his Acts of the Apostles, which in large part describes the activity of this apostle and the success of his mission. Marcion also contributed in his own way to the process of the reception of New Testament texts with his choice of Paul and Luke as the only “canonical” books, because he brought about a reaction that served to clarify which writings were already venerated by Christians. Criteria for this discernment were gradually established, among which were public and universal reading, apostolicity understood as the authentic tradition of an apostle, and especially the *regula fidei* (Irenaeus), that is, that the text does not contradict the apostolic tradition transmitted by the bishops in all the churches. With respect to this *catholicitas* Marcion’s position was inadequate, since he limited the apostolic tradition to the Pauline tradition alone and overlooked the Petrine, Johannine, and Jewish-Christian traditions.

From the end of the second century onward, lists of New Testament books begin to appear. The four gospels, Acts, and thirteen Pauline epistles were universally accepted, while there was some hesitation regarding Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles, and also the book of Revelation. In some lists, the first letter of Clement, the Shepherd of Hermas, and some other writings were also added. These texts, however, were not taken up into the canon, since they were not read universally. On the basis of a general consensus of the churches, expressed in numerous declarations of the Magisterium and attested in important pronouncements of various local synods, the Council of Hippo (at the end of the fourth century) fixed the Canon of the New Testament, which was then confirmed by the dogmatic definition of the Council of Trent.

Unlike the Old Testament canon, the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are held to be canonical by Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants. The reception of these books on the part of the believing

community expresses the recognition of their divine inspiration and their character as sacred and normative books.

For the Catholic Church, as stated already, the definitive, official recognition of both the “long” canon of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven writings of the New Testament occurred in the Council of Trent (*D-S* 1501–3). The definition had been made necessary by the reformers’ exclusion of the deuterocanonical books from the traditional canon.