

# The Divine and Human in the Bible<sup>1</sup>

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There is probably no problem more prominently before the minds of Bible students of today than the one which concerns the relation between the divine and human elements in the Bible. Recent discussion of the authenticity, authorship, integrity, structure of the several Biblical books, has called men's attention, as possibly it has never before been called, to the human element in the Bible. Even those who were accustomed to look upon their Bible as simply divine, never once thinking of the human agents through whom the divine Spirit spoke, have had their eyes opened to the fact that the Scriptures are human writings, written by men, and bearing the traces of their human origin on their very face. In many minds the questions have become quite pressing: How are the two factors, the divine and the human, to be conceived as related to each other in the act of inspiration? And, how are the two consequent elements in the product, the divine and human, to be conceived to be related to each other in the Scriptures?

It would be a mistake to suppose such questions as these of little practical importance. It is true enough that Christian men are more concerned with the effects of inspiration than with its nature or mode. But men will not rest in their belief in effects which are not congruous with their conception of the nature and mode of inspiration. Inadequate or positively false conceptions of the nature and mode of inspiration are being continually suggested, and wherever they are in any degree accepted, they bring forth their natural fruit in a modified view of the effects of inspiration. Men are continually striving to be rid of the effects which are ascribed to inspiration in the Scriptures and the formularies of the Church, on the plea that inspiration is not to be so conceived as to require these effects. The question of how inspiration is to be conceived having been thus raised, it becomes of very serious importance to go at least so far into it as to exhibit the untenableness of those theories which, when accepted, wholly overthrow the Biblical conception of the effects of inspiration. It is a matter, then, of importance, and not merely of curious interest, to ask, how are the two factors, the divine and human, to be conceived to be related to each other in the act of inspiration? And how are the two consequent elements in the Bible, the divine and human, to be conceived to be related to each other in the product of inspiration?

**1. In the first place, we may be sure that they are not properly conceived when one factor or element is so exaggeratingly emphasized as to exclude the other altogether.**

At one time there arose in the Church, under the impulse of zeal to assert and safeguard the divinity of Scripture, a tendency toward so emphasizing the divine element as to exclude the human. The human writers of Scripture were conceived as mere implements in the hands of the Holy Ghost, by which (rather than through whom) he wrote the Scriptures. Men were not content to call the human authors of Scripture merely the penmen, the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit, but represented them as simply his pens. Inspiration, in this view, was conceived as a simple act of dictation; and it was denied that the human writers contributed any quality to the product, unless, indeed, it might be their hand-writing. This, properly so-called, mechanical theory of inspiration was taught by a number of seventeenth century divines, in all Protestant communions alike--by Quenstedt, Calov, Hollaz, among the Lutherans; by Heidegger and Buxtorf, among the Reformed; by Richard Hooker, among the Anglicans; and by John White among the Puritans. The obvious marks of human authorship in the Biblical books, however, prevented it from becoming dominant, in its extreme form. Recognition of these marks of human authorship--as for example, differences in vocabulary, style, and the like--was recognition of a human element in the Bible; and involved so far the substitution of a theory of co-authorship by God and man for the Scriptures, in the place of the strict theory of the sole divine authorship. In this form alone has the theory

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of dictation persisted in the Church; and in this form it no longer belongs to the class of theories under discussion. Probably no one today so emphasizes the divine element in Scripture as to exclude the human altogether.

The opposite fault, however, is exceedingly common today. Nothing, indeed, is more common than such theories of the origin and nature of the Scriptures as exclude the divine factor and element altogether, and make them purely human in both origin and character. Historically, this mode of thought is an outgrowth of Rationalism; but it takes every form which is required by a change of philosophical basis. A Hegelian, like Dr. Whiton, adapts himself to it as readily as a Deist; a mystic like R. H. Horton as readily as a vulgar Rationalist. The modes of statement given to it are very various, but they all agree in holding the Bible to be a purely human book. They differ only as to whether there has been any divine preparation for the book at all, or if this be allowed, whether this divine preparation included a revelation which men have recorded in this book, or whether it was only gracious or indeed only providential. The book market is flooded at present with treatises teaching this hopelessly one-sided theory. Dr. Washington Gladden's *Who Wrote the Bible?* is a very crude instance in point. To him God had the same sort of care over the production of the Bible that he has over the growth of an old apple tree. Dr. John DeWitt's recent book on *What Is Inspiration?* is another crude instance. According to him the prophet was left to express himself in human language "as well as he could." A slightly higher conception is taken by T. George Rooke in his *Inspiration and Other Lectures*; and a higher one still by a recent German writer, Leonard Staehlin, who thinks that God specifically prepared the Biblical writers for their task, but left them, when prepared, to execute their task in a manner so "free" as to be without continued divine guidance. Throughout all these modifications the germinal conception persists that it was man and man alone who made the Bible; and that it is, therefore, a purely human book, although it may contain a human report of divine deeds and words.

**2. We may be equally sure that the relation of the divine and human in inspiration and in the Bible are not properly conceived when they are thought of, as elements in the Bible, as lying over against each other, dividing the Bible between them; or, as factors in inspiration, as striving against and excluding each other, so that where one enters the other is pushed out.**

This hopelessly crude conception seems to have become extraordinarily common of recent years. It is this point of view which underlies the remark, now heard very frequently, that the human element in the Bible is coming to be recognized as larger than we had supposed--with the implication that, therefore, the divine element must be acknowledged to be smaller than we had supposed. Even so thoughtful a writer as Dr. Sanday falls into this mode of speech: "The tendency of the last 50 or 100 years of investigation," he tells us, "is to make it appear that this human element is larger than had been supposed."<sup>1</sup> So, too, Prof. Kirkpatrick says: "In the origin of Scripture there has been a large human element, larger than there was at one time supposed."<sup>2</sup> The underlying conception is that what is human cannot also be divine, and that wherever the human enters there the divine disappears. Thus Dr. Sanday speaks of his thesis as an apparent contention "for an encroachment of the human element upon the divine," and Dr. G. T. Ladd even speaks of the chief difficulty in the matter being the determination of "the exact place where the divine meets the human and is limited by it."<sup>3</sup>

On such a conception it is easy to see that every discovery of a human trait in Scripture is a disproving of the divinity of Scripture. If, then, it be discovered that the whole fabric of the Bible is human--as assuredly is true--men who start with this conception in mind must end with denying of the whole fabric of the Bible that it is divine. As a preliminary stage we shall expect to meet with efforts to go through the Bible and anxiously to separate the divine and human elements. And if these elements are really so related to one another that when one enters the other is pushed out, this task will not seem a hopeless one. We may be warned, as Dr. Sanday does warn us, that it is "a mistake to attempt to draw a hard and fast line between the two elements." Men will feel that on this conception of their relation to each other, it is a greater mistake not to make such an attempt. How shall we consent to leave confused such very diverse elements? We need not be surprised, therefore, that

men like Horton and Gess have made the attempt. Nor need we at least, who perceive the folly of the underlying conception of the mechanical relation of the two elements to each other, feel surprised over the destructive nature of their results. They do not fail to find the human element entering almost everywhere, and therefore the divine element almost nowhere.

**3. Justice is done to neither factor of inspiration and to neither element in the Bible, the human or the divine, by any other conception of the mode of inspiration except that of concursus, or by any other conception of the Bible except that which conceives of it as a divine-human book, in which every word is at once divine and human.**

The philosophical basis of this conception is the Christian idea of God as immanent as well as transcendent in the modes of his activity. Its idea of the mode of the divine activity in inspiration is in analogy with the divine modes of activity in other spheres--in providence, and in grace wherein we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God who is working in us both the willing and the doing according to his own good pleasure. The Biblical basis of it is found in the constant Scriptural representation of the divine and human co-authorship of the Biblical commandments and enunciations of truth; as well as in the constant Scriptural ascription of Bible passages to both the divine and the human authors, and in the constant Scriptural recognition of Scripture as both divine and human in quality and character.

The fundamental principle of this conception is that the whole of Scripture is the product of divine activities which enter it, however, not by superseding the activities of the human authors, but confluent with them; so that the Scriptures are the joint product of divine and human activities, both of which penetrate them at every point, working harmoniously together to the production of a writing which is not divine here and human there, but at once divine and human in every part, every word and every particular. According to this conception, therefore, the whole Bible is recognized as human, the free product of human effort, in every part and word. And at the same time, the whole Bible is recognized as divine, the Word of God, his utterances, of which he is in the truest sense the Author.

The human and divine factors in inspiration are conceived of as flowing confluent and harmoniously to the production of a common product. And the two elements are conceived of in the Scriptures as the inseparable constituents of one single and uncompounded product. Of every word of Scripture it is to be affirmed, in turn, that it is God's word and that it is man's word. All the qualities of divinity and of humanity are to be sought and may be found in every portion and element of the Scripture. While, on the other hand, no quality inconsistent with either divinity or humanity can be found in any portion or element of Scripture.

On this conception, therefore, for the first time full justice is done to both elements of Scripture. Neither is denied because the other is recognized. And neither is limited to certain portions of Scripture that place may be made for the other, nor is either allowed to encroach upon the other. As full justice is done to the human element as is done by those who deny that there is any divine element in the Bible; for of every word in the Bible, it is asserted that it has been conceived in a human mind and written by a human hand. As full justice is done to the divine element as is done by those who deny that there is any human element in the Bible; for of every word in the Bible it is asserted that it is inspired by God, and has been written under the direct and immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit. And full justice being done to both elements in the Bible, full justice is done also to human needs. "The Bible," says Dr. Westcott, "is authoritative, for it is the Word of God; it is intelligible, for it is the word of man." Because it is the word of man in every part and element, it comes home to our hearts. Because it is the word of God in every part and element, it is our constant law and guide.

1 *The Oracles of God*, p. 161.

2 *The Divine Library of the Old Testament*, p. 53.

3 *What Is the Bible?* p.437.