

Sunday, January 10, 2016—Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 15 Divine Dictation: The Mechanism of Inspiration? Part 2

Introduction

- Two weeks ago during Lesson 14 we began looking at the topic of whether or not Divine Dictation is an appropriate descriptor for how *Plenary Verbal Inspiration* i.e., the inspiration of every word, was accomplished.
- The following four verses from the book of Numbers (also see Lesson 13) were used as the jumping off point to begin this discussion.
 - Numbers 22:38—And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? **the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.**
 - Numbers 23:5— **And the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth,** and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak.
 - Numbers 23:12—And he answered and said, **Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth?**
 - Numbers 23:16—And the LORD met Balaam, **and put a word in his mouth,** and said, Go again unto Balak, and say thus.
- These verses in Numbers seem to imply the notion of dictation; God placed His word into the mouth of Balaam thereby causing Balaam to utter forth only those words that God gave him to speak.
- The notion of Mechanical or Divine Dictation as a descriptor for how *Plenary Verbal Inspiration* was accomplished has fallen on hard times in the past 150 years or so but this was not always the case. In this lesson we want to continue our consideration of whether or not dictation is an appropriate Scriptural descriptor to explain how inspiration was accomplished.
- In order to accomplish this task, I outlined the following three points for our consideration in Lesson 14: first, survey what modern theologians have said regarding the notion of dictation; second, consider historic articulations of inspiration before the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859; last, and most importantly, we will consider the Bible's testimony concerning itself.
- In Lesson 14 we accomplished our first objective by surveying what modern theologians have said about the notion of dictation in their Systematic Theology books. Time, however, would not allow us to conclude our consideration of the historical articulations of inspiration before the publication of *On the Origin of the Species* in 1859. Please recall that I had broken point two up into the following time periods:
 - The Pre-Reformation Fathers
 - The Reformers
 - Post-Reformation Theologians

- During Lesson 14 we only had time to consider the writings of the Pre-Reformation Fathers. In doing so, we saw that the words “dictate”, “dictation”, or “*dictare*” in Latin have a long history of being associated with the inspiration of God’s word. By way of review please recall the following abbreviated sampling.
 - Justin Martyr (c. 160 AD)—“. . . the energy of the Divine Spirit, so that the divine plectrum itself could descend from heaven **and use those righteous men as an instrument like a harp or lyre. Thereby, the Divine Spirit could reveal to us the knowledge of things divine and heavenly.**” (cataloged in Bercot, 601-602)
 - Hippolytus (c. 200 AD)—“They were similar to instruments of music. For they had the Word always in union with them, **like a plectrum (the small implement by which a lyre was plucked). When moved by Him, the prophets spoke what God willed.** For they did not speak of their own power. Let there be no mistake about that. Nor did they speak the things which pleased themselves.” (cataloged in Bercot, 602)
 - Eusebius quoting Caius (c. 215 AD)—“For this reason, (the heretics) have boldly laid their hands upon the divine Scriptures, alleging that they have corrected them. . . and as to the great audacity implied in this offense, it is not likely that even they themselves can be ignorant. **For either they do not believe that the divine Scriptures were dictated by the Holy Spirit (and are thus infidels),** or else they think that they themselves are wiser than the Holy Spirit (which makes them demoniacs).” (cataloged by Bercot, 602-603)
 - Augustine of Hippo (c. 354-430 AD)—“When they write what He has taught and said, it should not be asserted that He did not write it, **since the members only put down what they had come to know at the dictation (*dictis*) of the Head. Therefore, whatever He wanted us to read concerning His words and deeds, He commanded His disciples, His hands to write.** Hence, one cannot but receive what he reads in the Gospels, though written by the disciples, as though it were written by the very hand of the Lord himself.” (quoted by Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 217)
- Robert D. Preus is the author of Chapter 12, “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church Through Luther” found in the book *Inerrancy* edited by Norman L. Geisler. According to Preus, Augustine used the terms ‘inspire’ and ‘dictate’ interchangeably in a large variety of contexts. (Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 364)
- There is ample evidence that the Pre-Reformation Fathers, from very early in church history and stretching through the Medieval Period, conceived of dictation as being the primary means by which inspiration was accomplished.
- We will now turn our attention to finishing our consideration of historic articulations of inspiration by looking at our final two time periods: 1) the Reformers and 2) Post-Reformation Theologians.

Historic Articulations of Inspiration

Testimony of the Reformers

- The arrival of the Reformation may have changed a lot of things, but an explanation of how inspiration was accomplished was not one of them. Explicit as well as implicit examples of dictation being used as a descriptor for inspiration abound in the writings of the Reformers.
 - Martin Luther (1483-1546)—“He is called a prophet who has received his understanding directly from God without further intervention, **into whose mouth the Holy Ghost has given the words**. For He (the Spirit) is the source, and they have no other authority than God. . . Here (2 Sam. 23:2, “The Spirit of the Lord spake to me, and His word was in my tongue”) it becomes too marvelous and soars too high for me. . .” (Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 223)
 - “The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, **written and (I might say) lettered and formed in letters**, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God veiled in human nature.” (quoted in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 377)
 - “**The very order of the words found in Scripture are intentionally arranged by the Holy Spirit. Thus, not merely the phrases and expression in Scripture are divine but their very words and their arrangements.**” (quoted in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 377-378)
 - “**The prophets do not set forth statements that they have spun up in their own mind. What they have heard from God Himself. . . they proclaim and set forth.**” (quoted in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 378)
- While Martin Luther did not explicitly use the word dictation, the concept is present in his thinking when he uttered statements like: “The very order of the words found in Scripture are intentionally arranged by the Holy Spirit. Thus, not merely the phrases and expression in Scripture are divine but their very words and their arrangements.”
 - John Calvin (1509-1564)—“He commanded also that the prophecies be committed to writing and be accounted part of His Word. To these at the same time histories were added, also the labour of the prophets, **but composed under the Holy Spirit’s dictation** . . . Yet they were not to do this except from the Lord, that is, with Christ’s Spirit going **before them and in a sense dictating their words**. . . **They were sure and genuine penmen of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God**. . .” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* IV.viii.8f;cf.I.vi.2)
 - “In order to uphold the authority of Scripture, he (Paul) declares it to be divinely inspired: for if it be so, it is beyond all controversy that man should receive it with reverence . . . Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him first of all lay down as a settled point this—**that the law and the prophecies are not teaching (*doctrinam*) delivered by the will of man, but dictated (*dictatum*) by the Holy Ghost**. . . Moses and the prophets did not utter at random what we have from their hand, but, **since they spoke by divine impulse, they confidently and fearlessly testified as was actually the case, that it was the mouth of the Lord that spoke**. . . We owe to the Scripture the same reverence which we owe to God, because it proceeded from Him alone.” ([*Calvin, Commentary on II Timothy*](#))

- It should be noted that John Calvin as a principle disciple of Augustine, followed him in using the terms dictation and inspiration interchangeably. Modern theologians have spilled much ink trying to convince modern readers that Calvin did not mean what he clearly appears to be teaching.

Testimony of Post-Reformation Theologians

- Johnathan Edwards (1703-1758)—“**God had designed the meaning which the penman never thought of, which he makes appear these ways: by his own interpretation, and by his directing the penman to such a phrase and manner of speaking, that has a much more exact agreement and consonancy with the thing remotely pointed to, than with the thing meant by the penman.**” (quoted in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 405)
- Moses, then, was so intimately conversant with God and so continually under the divine conduct, it cannot be thought that when he wrote the history of the creation and the fall of man, and the history of the church from the creation, **that he should not be under the divine direction in such an affair. Doubtless he wrote by God’s direction**, as we are informed that he wrote the law and the history of the Israelitish church.” (quoted in Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 405)
- “Ministers are not to make those things that seem right to their own reason a rule in their interpreting a revelation, but the revelation is to be the rule of its own interpretation; i.e., the way that they must interpret Scripture is not to compare **the dictates of the Spirit of God** in his revelation with what their own reason says, and then to force such an interpretation as shall be agreeable to those dictates, but they must **interpret the dictates of the Spirit of God by comparing them with other dictates of Scripture.** (Minkema & Bailey, *Reason, Revelation and Preaching: An Unpublished Ordination Sermon by Jonathan Edwards*, 27.)
- Noah Webster (1785-1843)—in his famous Dictionary published in 1828, Webster defined the verb “dictate” as: 1) To tell with authority; to deliver, as an order, command, or direction; as, what God has dictated, it is our duty to believe; 2) To order or instruct what is to be said or written; as, a general dictates orders to his troops; 3) **To suggest; to admonish; to direct by impulse on the mind. We say, the spirit of God dictated the messages of the prophets to Israel.** Conscience often dictates to men the rules by which they are to govern their conduct.
- In seeking to define the word “dictate,” Webster attached to the process whereby the spirit of God delivered “the messages of the prophets to Israel” to the English definition. This very fact speaks to widespread use of the word in this fashion before the controversies of the latter half of the 19th century.
 - Louis Gaussen (1840)—uses the term “dictation” at least 23 times in the first four chapters of his classic book *Theopneustia (The Divine Inspiration of the Bible)* to describe the process by which inspiration was accomplished. Please consider the following sampling:
 - “Well, then, so it is with the Bible. It is not, as some will have it, a book which God employed men, whom he had previously enlightened, to write under his

auspices. **No—it is a book which he dictated to them; it is the word of God; the Spirit of the Lord spake by its authors, and His words were upon their tongues.**” (Guassen, 49)

- “Is it possible that a book at once so sublime and so simple can be the word of man? was asked of the philosophers of the last century by one who was himself too celebrated a philosopher. And all its pages have replied, No—it is impossible; for every where, traversing so many ages, and whichever it be of God—employed writers that hold the pen, king or shepherd, scribe or fisherman, priest or publican, you every where perceive that one same Author, at a thousand years’ interval, **and that one same eternal Spirit, has conceived and dictated all.**” (Guassen, 57)
 - “It ought already to be fully acknowledged, that *all that part of Scriptures* at least called PROPHECY, whatever it be, **has been completely dictated by God; so that the words as well as the thought have been given by him.**” Guassen, 67)
 - “**These psalms were to such a degree all dictated by the Holy Ghost**, that the Jews, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself, called them by the name of THE LAW; all their utterances had the force of law; their smallest words were from God. . . The whole Old Testament then is, in a scriptural sense of the expression, a WRITTEN PROPHECY. **It is plenary inspired therefore by God. . .**” (Guassen, 71)
 - “His wish (Paul’s) is, that every one of them, if he have really received the Holy Ghost, should employ the gifts he has received in acknowledging that the things that he wrote unto them were the commandments of the Lord; **and so fully convinced is he that what he writes is dictated by inspiration of God, that, after having dictated ORDERS to the churches. . .**” (Guassen, 81)
 - “All these sacred books, without exception are the word of the Lord. ALL SCRIPTURE says St. Paul, is **INSPIRED BY GOD. . .** in the apostle’s idea, all without exception, in each and all of the books of the Scriptures, **is dictated by the Spirit of God.**” (Guassen, 127)
 - “And just as we believe, because it tells us so, that Jesus Christ is God, and that He became man; **so also we believe that the Holy Ghost is God, and that He dictated the whole of the Scriptures.**” (Guassen, 139)
 - “**If it was God himself that dictated the letter of the sacred oracles**, that is a fact past recall; and no more can the copies made of them, than the translations given to us of them, undo that first act.” (Guassen, 165)
- So we see from these quotes that Guassen used the terms “plenary” and “dictation” interchangeably when referring to inspiration. In addition to using the term “dictation,” Guassen employs the musical instrument imagery utilized by the early church as well as frequently noting the numerous passages in the Old Testament where God placed his words upon the tongue of the prophet as illustrations for how inspiration was accomplished.

- Lastly, regarding Gausson, he has no problem with using the terminology “dictation” while at the same time making allowances for the variety in personality and literary style exhibited by the human authors (interested parties are encouraged to read the whole of Chapter 1 Part V on the “Individuality of Sacred Writers”).
 - “The individuality of the sacred writers, so profoundly stamped on the books they have respectively written, seems to many impossible to be reconciled with a plenary inspiration. No one, say they, can read the Scriptures without being struck with the differences in language, conception, and style, discernible in their authors; so that even were the titles of the several books to give us no intimation that we were passing from one author to the another, still we should almost instantly discover from the change of their character, that we no longer do with the same writer, but that a new personage had taken the pen. Who could read the writings of Isaiah and Ezekiel, of Amos and Hosea, of Zephaniah and Habakkuk, of Jeremiah, and Daniel and proceed to the study of Paul and Peter, or of John, without observing, with respect to each of them, how much his view of the truth, his reasoning, and his language, have been influenced by his bias, his condition in life, his genius, his education, his recollections—all circumstances, in short that have acted upon his outer and inner man?” (Gausson, 38)
- Charles Hodge (1872)—“**The church has never held what has been stigmatized as the mechanical theory of inspiration. The sacred writers were not machines.** Their self-consciousness was not suspended; nor were their intellectual powers superseded. Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. It was men, not machines; not unconscious instruments, but living, thinking, willing minds, whom the Spirit used as His organs. . . The sacred writers impressed their peculiarities on their several productions as plainly as though they were the subjects of no extraordinary influence.” (Hodge, 156-157)
- B.B. Warfield & A.A. Hodge (1881)—coauthored an article for the April, 1881 issue of *The Presbyterian Review* titled “[Inspiration](#)” in which they stated the following, in part, regarding inspiration.
 - “The human agency, both in the histories out of which the Scriptures sprang, and in their immediate composition and inscription, is everywhere apparent, and gives substance and form to the entire collection of writings. It is not merely in the matter of verbal expression or literary composition that the personal idiosyncrasies of each author are freely manifested by the untrammelled play of all his faculties, but the very substance of what they write is evidently for the most part the product of their own mental and spiritual activities. This is true **except in that comparatively small element of the whole body of sacred writing, in which the human authors simply report the word of God objectively communicated, or as in some of the prophecies they wrote by Divine dictation.** As the general characteristic of all their work, each writer was put to that special part of the general work for which he alone was adapted by his original endowments, education, special information, and providential position. Each drew from the stores of his own original information, from the contributions of other men, and from all other natural sources. Each sought knowledge, like all other authors, from the use of his own natural faculties of thought and feeling, of intuition and of logical inference, of memory and imagination, and of religious experience. Each gave evidence of his own special

In rejecting both extremes—Scripture as a purely divine or as a purely human book—Warfield does not opt for the solution of its being partly divine and partly human. The Bible is not divided between two factors that are mutually exclusive, so that the one limits the other and the entrance of the one spells the exit of the other. No, the evidence that shows that Scriptures both as the Word of God and the word of man leads to the conclusion that the Bible is simultaneously the divine utterance of God and the product of man's effort Warfield writes:

The human and divine factors in inspiration are conceived as flowing confluent and harmoniously to the production of a common product. Over every word of Scriptures is it to be affirmed, in turn, that it is God's word and that it is man's word. All the qualities and divinity and humanity are to be sought and 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.

The concept, in which the Bible is regarded as both a human product in every part and every word and a divine product to the smallest detail, Warfield calls *concursum*. Both the divine and the human elements form the inseparable constituents of one simple uncompounded product in which the human coloration and variety, as well as the divine perfection and infallibility, are acknowledged. Thus Warfield holds that, according to the Word of God and the doctrine of the church;

By special, supernatural, extraordinary, influence of the Holy Ghost, the sacred writers have been guided in their writing in such a way, as while their humanity was not superseded, it was yet so dominated that their words became at the same time the words of God, and thus, in every case and all alike, absolutely infallible.

Warfield emphasizes that the concept of *concursum* is not unique to the relationship of the divine and the human factors with regard to the origin and nature of Scripture. He points out that the same relationship obtained with regard to the act of faith as both a work of God and an activity of man.

It must be evident by now that Warfield holds to the plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures as the Word of God, and that by virtue of that inspiration they are fully true, fully authoritative, fully infallible, and fully inerrant." (Geisler, *Inerrancy*, 426-428)

- There can be no doubt that understanding of inspiration had changed since the mid-19th century.

Conclusion

- The careers of Charles Hodge, A.A. Hodge, and B.B Warfield transpired during a time of great doctrinal controversy especially as it related to the origin and authority of the Bible. Even the Wikipedia entry for Warfield acknowledges this point when it states, "Much of Warfield's work centered upon the Bible's "inspiration" by God — that while the authors of the Bible were men, the ultimate author was God himself. The growing influence of modernist theology denied that the Bible was inspired, and alternative theories of the origin of the Christian faith were being explored." ([Wikipedia](#))

- During the thirty years between the publication of Gausson's *Divine Inspiration* in 1840 and Charles Hodges' *Systematical Theology* in 1871 the theological landscape had changed drastically. The intervening thirty years saw the publication of *On the Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin, the growth and influence of German Higher Criticism, and the resulting theological liberalism of the Modernists. In response to the controversy, these men and their contemporaries altered many Protestant doctrines in an attempt to answer their critics. The doctrine of inspiration is one such example.
- It has only been in the last 150 years or so that the notion of Divine Dictation has fallen out of favor among professional theologians. For the majority of the history of the dispensation of grace, Christian thinkers, theologians, and philosophers had no problem with viewing dictation as the means by which inspiration was accomplished.
- The final arbiter in this debate, as with all theological debates, should be "what saith the Scriptures?" To this we will turn our attention in the next lesson.

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