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The Christological Dimension of Biblical Inspiration according to Gospel Testimonies

Chrystologiczny wymiar natchnienia biblijnego według świadcstwa Ewangelii

Abstract. The Gospels prove their divine origin by presenting Jesus and His work of revelation as taking place among His eyewitnesses: the apostles and disciples. They also inform us that the apostles' and disciples' *inspiration* to proclaim the divine revelation received from Jesus *comes from Jesus Himself—the Messiah and Son of God*. The mystery of Christ's inspiring his followers is explained in two aspects. The first aspect concerns forming the apostles and disciples—in a personal relationship—to accept and understand the words and deeds revealed to them that ultimately come from the Father. This personal relationship with the Messiah and Son of God, experienced in a living and informed faith in his Person, is the most profound factor in this “inspiration,” making the Lord's apostles and disciples capable of communicating, in speech and in writing, the message of Jesus Christ, which is in fact “the Word of God” and “the Word from God.” In the synoptic Gospels, a personal relationship with Jesus takes the form of a bond between the student and the Teacher in which the most important thing is faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (see Mark 1:1; John 20:31). One's relationship with Jesus can be immediate (Gospel of John) or mediated (Gospel of Luke). The immediate relationship, fundamental in communicating “the Word from God,” appears in a particularly strongly articulated and rich way in the Gospel of John, where the author, along with other disciples, contemplates the glory of the only-begotten Son who comes from the Father (John 1:14 – plural: “we have seen”) and is thus an eyewitness to Jesus's teachings and to the events of His life from the very beginning to the end (John 19:35; 21:24). The second aspect of Jesus's inspiration concerns preparing the apostles (“the Twelve”) and other disciples to proclaim the words revealed to them “from God” to the world. Having believed in the divine sonship of Jesus, the apostles and disciples bear witness to his work of revealing “the words of God” because they are supported by Him: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me

through their word” (John 17:17–20). It is through this “sanctification in truth” that the apostle bears witness to “the words of God” as someone who has been inspired, in the first place, by Jesus Himself, the Son of God, in whom he and his community of disciples (plural in John 1:14) have believed, and who has ultimately been instructed by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth (John 15:26–27; 20:22).

Streszczenie. Ewangelie poświadczają swoje pochodzenie od Boga w ten sposób, że ukazują Jezusa i Jego dzieło objawienia jako dokonujące się w gronie naocznych świadków: apostołów i uczniów. Dają także poznać, że natchnienie apostołów i uczniów do głoszenia otrzymanego przez Jezusa objawienia Bożego *pochodzi od tegoż Jezusa – Mesjasza i Syna Bożego*. Tajemnica Chrystusowego natchnienia apostołów i uczniów jest przybliżona w dwu aspektach. Pierwszym z nich jest kształtowanie ich – wewnątrz osobowej relacji – do przyjęcia i rozumienia objawionych im słów i czynów, które ostatecznie pochodzą od Ojca. Związek osobisty z Mesjaszem i Synem Bożym, przeżywany w wierze żywej i świadomej tożsamości jego Osoby, stanowi najgłębszy faktor tego „natchnienia”, które czyni apostołów i uczniów Pańskich zdolnymi do komunikowania, ustnie i na piśmie, orędzia Jezusa Chrystusa, które jest w istocie „słowem Boga”, „słowem od Boga”. W Ewangeliiach synoptycznych osobista relacja z Jezusem przyjmuje formę więzi uczeń – Nauczyciel, w której najważniejsza jest wiara w Jezusa Chrystusa jako Syna Bożego (por. Mk 1,1; J 20,31). Relacja z Jezusem może być bezpośrednia (*Ewangelia Jana*) lub pośrednia (*Ewangelia Łukasza*). Relacja bezpośrednia, fundamentalna dla komunikowania „słów od Boga”, pojawia się jako szczególnie mocno wyartykułowana i bogata w *Ewangelii według św. Jana*: autor wraz z innymi uczniami kontemlował chwałę Jednorodzonego Syna, który pochodzi od Ojca (J 1,14 – liczba mnoga: „ogłądaliśmy”); jest naocznym świadkiem nauczania i wydarzeń z życia Jezusa od samego początku do końca (J 19,35; 21,24). Drugi aspekt Jezusowego natchnienia to przygotowywanie apostołów („Dwunastu”) i innych uczniów do głoszenia objawionych im słów „od Boga” światu. Uwierzywszy w synostwo Boże Jezusa, apostołowie i uczniowie dają świadectwo o dokonanym przez Niego dziele objawienia „słów Boga”, ponieważ są przez Niego wspierani: „Uświęć ich w prawdzie. Słowo Twoje jest prawdą. Jak Ty Mnie posłałeś na świat, tak i Ja ich na świat posłałem. A za nich Ja poświęcam w ofierze samego siebie, aby i oni byli uświęceni w prawdzie. Nie tylko za nimi proszę, ale i za tymi, którzy dzięki ich słowu będą wierzyć we Mnie” (J 17,17–20). To dzięki temu „uświęceniu w prawdzie” apostoł składa świadectwo o „słowach Boga” jako natchniony: w pierwszym rzędzie przez samego Jezusa – Syna Bożego, w którego uwierzył wraz ze wspólnotą uczniów (liczba mnoga w J 1,14), a ostatecznie pouczony przez Ducha Świętego, Ducha Prawdy (J 15,26–27; 20,22).

Keywords: revelation, inspiration, Christological dimension, Gospels.

Słowa kluczowe: objawienie, natchnienie, wymiar chrystologiczny, Ewangelie.

Classic definitions of biblical inspiration associate this charism with the operation of the Holy Spirit. It was He who inspired specific individuals to commit to writing the things—and only the things—that He Himself revealed to them as they were writing, and it was also He who watched over them so that they would make no error in recording the truths revealed to them (see Second Vatican Council 1965, sec. 11). The main source of this understanding of inspiration can be traced back to two texts of the New Testament that speak of such activity of the Holy Spirit. The first of these texts notes that the operation of the Holy Spirit may have different aspects, as indicated by the verb used in that context:

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man,
but men spoke from God [ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι]
as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit [ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι].
(2 Peter 1:21)

The use of the verb *feromai* points in a basic sense to the action of keeping from falling, as explained by Thayer in his Greek Lexicon: “2 Peter 1:21; φέρομαι ἐπὶ τί (R. V. press on), Hebrews 6:1. c. according to a less frequent use to bear up, i.e. uphold (keep from falling): φέρων τά πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, of God (the Son) the preserver of the universe, Hebrews 1:3.” Thus, it conveys the idea of supporting the human authors and keeping them from error and fatigue in the face of adversity. Other commentators, beginning with Leonardo Lessius, see this verb as expressing the idea of “movement,” whereby the grace of the Holy Spirit moves the will of the human author (see Dubovský and Sonnet 2013, 9).

The second New Testament text speaks more clearly of the action of “breathing out,” which is associated with the Holy Spirit and has traditionally been identified with “inspiration”:

All Scripture is breathed out by God [πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος]
and profitable for teaching,
for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,
that the man of God may be complete,
equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

In fact, the participle consisting of the noun *theos* and the adjective *pneustos* contains a reference to the verb *pneuō*, which was used to describe the

action of the wind that blows (see Matthew 7:25,27; Luke 12:55; John 6:18; Revelation 7:1). In John 3:8, that verb is used metaphorically in reference to the Holy Spirit.

In summary, the first text speaks of the action of the Spirit upon the men who wrote the prophecies: they were supported and moved to speak and write by the Holy Spirit (*inspired authors*). The second text emphasizes the most important characteristic of the books of the Bible themselves, which stems from God's action that resembles the action of the wind, the latter being the symbol of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, namely, that each of them "breathes God" (*inspired Scriptures*).

The Second Vatican Council's constitution *Dei Verbum* (sec. 6) does not provide a detailed definition of this relationship between men and God. In the footnotes (secs. 18–20), it only points to the traditional, Thomistic explanation that uses the concept of supreme and primary cause. And as regards inspiration, according to the Council's constitution, it is only explicitly mentioned in the two books of the New Testament from which the passages cited above are taken (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21).

Among the broad literature on the subject of inspiration (seen mainly through the lens of the above two texts), it is worth referring to those works in which the authors have searched for pictorial inspiration and inspiration that draws from contemporary literary theory (Alonso Schökel 1965; Citrini 1982; 1988, 1457–1472). To gain a complete view of this concept of inspiration, one may also point to the ecclesial references of the texts in question (Rahner 1967). A broader, more detailed and chronologically ordered discussion of inspiration, and in particular of its post-conciliar interpretations, can be found in *Natchnienie. Prawda. Zbawienie* (Witczyk 2020, 21–30).

Invoking the teachings of the Council and of Pope Benedict XVI on revelation and inspiration, that is, on the relationship between God (the Revealed One and the Inspirer) and the human authors of the books of the Bible, the Pontifical Biblical Commission examines that relationship in more detail. The relationship is interpreted as one process of communication that is described using several modes in the Old Testament: one appropriate for the Pentateuch, another for the historical books, yet another for the prophetic books, the Psalms, and the sapiential books. In the New Testament, the Christological-pneumatological mode was also identified, its most prominent manifestations being found in the texts of the Gospels. In that respect, the Pontifical Biblical Commission points to the special role that the incarnated Son of God, Jesus Christ, plays in

that process of communication by revealing the Father and inspiringly conveying His words to the disciples. Since this is an innovative approach to the mystery of biblical inspiration, it gives rise to many questions and, in particular, requires a detailed analysis of the texts of all four Gospels so that the inspirational role of the Teacher of Nazareth and the risen Lord can be discerned and so that its essence can then be defined. First, however, the relationship between revelation and inspiration needs to be examined.

1. Revelation and Inspiration as Two Steps in the Process of Communication between God and Men

Church documents differentiate between “revelation” and “inspiration” as two divine actions. By analyzing revelation—which is attested to rather broadly in the books—and inspiration *together*, the Pontifical Biblical Commission attempts to derive important truths of the faith with regard to the latter. The Commission emphasizes that the concept of inspiration as such is hardly ever referred to explicitly in Sacred Scripture and is not explained using other terms, either. Furthermore, it is noted that “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” (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 7).

For the above reasons, the Pontifical Biblical Commission places the broadly-defined process of divine revelation and the act of inspiration of the authors of the books of the Old and New Testaments within the broader process of communication between God and men, describing it by using the phrase “divine origin of the biblical texts.” In its analysis, the Commission relies on those biblical texts that speak explicitly of the two supernatural facts, that is:

- 1) revelation, which means that the texts come from God; and
- 2) inspiration, which means that the texts show how they were communicated to specific individuals so that they could be conveyed to others (the people of the Covenant; “all nations,” see Matthew 28:19). What is more, they explain how and by whom these individuals were *expressis verbis* inspired to convey the message to others, and even how they accomplished that task.

The different models of the divine provenance of key parts of the Bible listed above make it possible to “demonstrate more concretely how inspiration presents itself as a relationship between God, inspirer and author, and human beings, true authors chosen by God” (Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 10). A characteristic feature of the writings of the New Testament is that they portray their authors’ relationship with God through Jesus. Among these writings, the four Gospels occupy a central place. The constitution *Dei Verbum* says that “among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our savior” (Second Vatican Council 1965, sec. 18).

The personal mediation of Jesus of Nazareth in the relationship between the authors of the Gospels and God is the primary dimension of not only the revelation but also the inspiration of these books. To differentiate it from the role of the Holy Spirit, one could describe that dimension as the Christological dimension of inspiration.

2. The Christological Dimension of Inspiration according to the Gospels

The four canonical Gospels were revealed and inspired through the only-begotten Son of God who became man. Jesus Christ conveyed to His disciples the words coming from the Father: “For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me” (John 17:8). Furthermore, He accomplished works of which the Father was the cause: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel” (John 5:19–20). These words clearly demonstrate that the books of the New Testament come from God by way of the unique, perfect, and complete mediation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which has been recorded by the apostles and their disciples. In the case of the evangelists, as in the case of all other authors of the New Testament, their every relationship with God depends on their relationship with Jesus, both in terms of revelation and in terms of inspiration.

To gain a detailed view of the Christological dimension of inspiration in the Gospels, it is necessary to analyze the most important testimonies on that

subject contained in the Gospels themselves (*autotestimonianza dei testi sulla loro provenienza da Dio*). The aim is to distinguish and differentiate—to the extent possible—between Christ’s revelatory activity and the activity that inspired the apostles and disciples to attest to the mysteries, words, and actions of God (the Father) that were revealed to them. As we know, their witness was initially an oral account, which then became preserved in the form of tradition and, finally, set down in writing. Thus, we need to seek answers to a number of questions: Firstly, what are the signs of Jesus Christ’s inspirational effect on the authors of the Gospels? Secondly, to what extent did He have that effect as Jesus of Nazareth and to what extent as the beloved Lord? And finally, what is the relationship between these two phases of Christ’s inspirational activity?

2.1. The Inspirational Role of the Incarnate Son of God and Messiah: Jesus of Nazareth

Each of the four Gospels, in its characteristic way, bears witness to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that He called the disciples to be with Him, see His actions, and hear His words. Therefore, it is important to examine how the person of the Son of God could be a source of inspiration to the witnesses who recounted what He revealed, and then to the Evangelists. The next step is to analyze the texts that speak of the disciples as eyewitnesses to His revelatory activity and of their reactions to His inspiring words and actions.

The phrase “Son of God” plays a double role in the canonical Gospels. The truth about Jesus as the *only-begotten* Son of the Father is attested to in a distinctive manner throughout the Gospel of John. In the synoptic Gospels, it is mainly a messianic title, indicating that the Teacher of Nazareth is the King sent by God, anointed with the Holy Spirit.¹ Nevertheless, it is also used to refer to His unique and unprecedented relationship with the heavenly Father.² Remaining in

¹ “The last scene of the Gospel of Matthew addresses and confirms all the statements that the Gospel has made about Jesus, the Son of God. The different Old Testament meanings are brought together in Jesus: a heavenly being, Israel—beloved son, Messiah, the righteous one sustained by God. All this comes together in the Christological term *Son of God*” (Paciorek 2007, 39).

² “John’s Christology does not overturn the theocentrism of the fourth Gospel, but strongly accentuates and emphasizes it (cf. Jn. 14:1). [...] In His face, one can see the face

this relationship throughout His earthly life and after His resurrection, Jesus is superior in His role to all human beings who had conveyed God's words: Moses, David, and the prophets.

2.1.1. Jesus Christ as the Only-Begotten Son of God in the Work of Revelation and Inspiration

The prologue already reveals the divine–human character of the relationship between the incarnate Son of God (the Logos) and the Father (John 1:1–2, 14, 18). Above all, however, several verses in the prologue emphasize His role in the inspiring communication of the revelation about the person of the Father and His glory and truth:

All things were made [ἐγένετο] through him [the Word],
and without him was not any thing made [ἐγένετο]
that was made [ὃ γέγονεν]. (John 1:3)

The verb ἐγένετο (perfect: γέγονεν) refers to all events in salvation history—including the work of creation—through which God's inner Logos is revealed (Linke 2017, 33). Its meaning is often incorrectly narrowed because of a misunderstanding of the expression “in the beginning” (John 1:1a), which is wrongly interpreted as a reference to the moment of the creation of the world rather than to God's eternity (Mędala 2010, 257).

Another verse speaks of the revelation of God's glory in the incarnate Son of God:

and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14cd)

The verb ἐθεασάμεθα (“we have seen”) points to the kind of knowledge that is gained by way of sensory experience, thus referring to the sense of sight and to a vision that leads to contemplation and faith. What was perceptible to sight was the body of Jesus Christ. The inspiring “surprise is that those close to Him did not see the body but the glory” (Mędala 2010, 275). The “seeing” that turns

of the Father. In this manner, God reveals Himself in the fullest manner in his Son Jesus Christ” (Wróbel 2007, 61).

into contemplation full of faith is a consequence of the Word's coming in flesh. It is the body of Jesus Christ, filled with divine glory, that brings the inspiration to profess faith in Him in the form of a hymn (John 1:1–18). Jesus's humanity also plays a similar role—inspiring those around Him to have faith in His Godhood and to bear witness to Him—when he performs the miracle in Cana (John 2:11) and when he raises Lazarus (John 11:40). Finally, Jesus Himself says the following to the Father and to the disciples in the Upper Room, referring to the inspiring role of His humanity in revealing or even transferring God's glory to His disciples:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them [δέδωκα αὐτοῖς],
that they may be one even as we are one. (John 17:22)

The revelation of the truth—portrayed figuratively by the giving of the law to Moses—plays a similar inspirational role on the part of Jesus Christ:

For the law was given through Moses;
grace and truth came [ἐγένετο] through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

The gift of the truth referred to in this passage, paralleled by the gift of the law brought by God through Moses, clearly pertains to all of Jesus's teachings, to all His words that ultimately come from the Father: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32); “your word is truth” (John 17:17). Revelation takes place and will continue to last, that is, to be available (after Jesus's departure from this world to sit by His Father) thanks to the word of God (the Father) (see John 17:17; cf. 6:14). The word of God (the Father) in which the truth comes to the fore is, in essence, a testimony to the divine revelation that took place in Christ, and the Gospel is a record of it, made by the disciples as the recipients of that revelation and testimony (Zumstein 2017, 179).

Taking a synthetic view of the role of the incarnate Son of God, the author of the prologue describes His action with a verb that indicates exegetical activity:

No one has ever seen God; the only God,
who is at the Father's side, he has made him known [ἐξηγήσατο]. (John 1:18)

Not only does He reveal the person, the actions, and the words of the Father, but also, as an interpreter, He explains these words to the disciples, guiding them to a deeper understanding, which in turn inspires or even empowers them to bear witness to the Father and His only-begotten Son. The evangelistic narrative that follows the prologue is clearly an effect of the revelatory and inspirational activity of the incarnate Son of God that has its impact on the disciples, that is, the author of the prologue and the evangelist (Barrett 1972, 170). Clearly, this is a reference to the activity of the only-begotten Son of God in the period from the incarnation to the ascension (Moloney 1998, 63–71). The participle *ho ōn* in John 1:18 is the subject of the verb *eksēgēsato* (in the aorist), which points to Jesus Christ's public and earthly ministry (cf. John 6:46; 7:20 with the participle *ho ōn*, and the sentences with *egō eimi* in John 6:35; 8:12; 14:6).

Jesus plays the role of the Revealer—that is, the one who reveals the Father and His words (see John 17:8) and, at the same time, inspires others to know Him, accept His words, bear witness to Him, and, ultimately, proclaim the four Gospels in the form of written and edited tradition—throughout His earthly life with the disciples. This can be seen most clearly in the chapters devoted to the risen Lord: first in the encounter with Thomas (John 20:28), and then in the final conclusion about the inexhaustible meaning of Jesus's life and teaching (21:25). The meeting with Jesus inspires the incredulous Thomas to give his witness, the essential creed of the apostolic Church: “My Lord and my God” [ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου]. According to Brown (1970), this is the “supreme christological pronouncement of the Fourth Gospel” (1047). The risen Jesus grants Thomas's demand by revealing Himself to him and thus inspiring his profession: a testimony that is, in a sense, the final fulfillment of the purpose for which the fourth Gospel was written.

This inspirational role of the words and actions of the earthly and risen Jesus Christ—inspiring the evangelist to have faith in Him as the Messiah and Son of God and then to write the Gospel—is what John speaks of in the first conclusion to his work:

Now Jesus did many other signs
 in the presence of the disciples,
 which are not written in this book
 [ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ];
 but these are written [ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται] so that you may believe
 that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,
 and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)

The Gospel was written so that those who believe without having seen Him can go further in their faith, discovering in Him the Revealer of the words and actions of the Father (Moloney 1998, 542). The source of revelation and the person who encourages the disciples to bear witness to it, write it down, and edit it in the form of a book, and thus the source of their inspiration, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The entire prologue (John 1:1c,14,18) and conclusion (John 20:28,30–31) emphasize the fact that the Gospel is a proclamation of Christ's Godhead, which is revealed to the disciples and becomes a source of inspiration for them (Keener 2003, 426).

2.1.2. Jesus Christ as the Messiah Filled with the Spirit and the Son of God in the Work of Revelation and Inspiration

In the synoptic Gospels, the authors focus their attention entirely on Jesus Christ and His ministry and on His role in the dialogue between God and man. They begin by underlining Jesus's unique rank as the Son of God (Matthew 2:15; Luke 2:49; John 3:13–17 par; Matthew 17:5 par). Then, they portray Him with equal strength as being filled with the Holy Spirit and as the Anointed One (Matthew 3:16 par; Luke 4:1,14,18–21; 10:21). According to the testimony of these Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth gives signs by the power of God Himself (Mark 1:21–28; 5:30; Matthew 12:28; cf. Luke 11:20) and teaches the people with the authority that belongs to God (Mark 1:27; Matthew 5:21–48; 12:8 par). A crucial moment for the revelation of Jesus's oneness with the Father—at the deepest level of the will—is His passion and death, during which He prays with the following words: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. [...] ‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done’” (Matthew 26:39,42; cf. Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Jesus's resurrection, in turn, is portrayed as the work of God the Father, to whom He had prayed in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross: “He is not here, for he has risen [ἠγέρθη, a verb in the aorist indicative passive, also known as the *passivum divinum*], as he said” (Matthew 28:6; cf. Mark 16:6; Luke 24:6,34) (Mielcarek, 2017, 101–102).

Such a strong relationship between Jesus and God—emphasized many times by the authors of the synoptic Gospels—demonstrates that the Teacher of Nazareth, the crucified and resurrected Christ, was the direct source of revelation and inspiration for them. Therefore, they often invoke the Old Testament prophecies and apply them to Jesus's life and ministry, which is particularly evident in the Gospel of Matthew (1:22; 8:17; 11:2–6), where Jesus fulfills the promises of the

Father (Żywica 2003; Homerski 1977). In Luke's text, Jesus reaffirms that Himself (4:16–21) and, in addition, points to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in Him and His teaching (Mielcarek 1994). This has a profound effect on the listeners:

And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth [τοις λόγοις τῆς χάριτος τοῖς ἐκπορευομένοις ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ]. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown." (Luke 4:22–24)

Jesus compares Himself to a prophet, and His teaching to inspired prophecies, for it carries in itself "the words of glory" from God. This grace, "inscribed" by Jesus Himself in His teaching, filled the first listeners in the synagogue with awe, and above all, inspired the author of the testimony to remember it, pass it on in living oral tradition, and ultimately set it down in writing and incorporate it in the Gospel.

In the Gospel of Mark, the same message about the revelatory and inspirational role of Jesus of Nazareth is expressed by the literary inclusion that encompasses the entire text. At the beginning, it is stated that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God ("The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," Mark 1:1), and at the end, Mark cites the testimony of the Roman centurion about the crucified Jesus: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39). Before that, however, he explains what inspired the centurion to make that confession. It was what Jesus Himself had said:

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice,
 "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means,
 "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ...
 And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.
 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.
 And when the centurion, who stood facing him,
 saw that in this way he breathed his last,
 he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:34,37–39)

The same testimony about Jesus as the Son of God, inspired by His actions and words, appears in other synoptic Gospels. Of particular interest are the

words of the prayer said by Jesus Himself as he was sending the 72 disciples to spread His teachings. In that prayer, He addresses God as His Father in strong and explicit terms, thanking Him for His work of revelation and inspiration:

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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 and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see [μακάριοι οἱ ὄφθαλμοὶ οἱ βλέποντες]! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see [ἃ ὑμεῖς βλέπετε], and did not see it, and to hear what you hear [ἃ ἀκούετε], and did not hear it.” (Luke 10:21–24; cf. Matthew 11:25–27)

Using unique expressions, Jesus not only reveals to His disciples the perfect intimacy between God the Father (“my Father,” verse 22) and Himself as the only-begotten Son, but also states that this bond cannot be known other than through an act of revelation in which He alone plays the key role. He speaks of Himself as the Son and points to Himself as “the mediator of exclusive revelation” (Tuckett 2000, 86). At the same time, by using the phrase “chooses to reveal” (verse 22), he alludes to the inspirational power of this revelation, which presupposes the action of both the Son and the Holy Spirit (Just 1997, 440). This is because the verb βούλομαι (instead of the usual θέλω) is used in the New Testament with reference to the Father (Luke 22:42), the Son (Luke 10:22), and the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11) (see Bauer et al. 1979, 2 b).

Filled with the Holy Spirit and inspired by Him (“he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit,” verse 21; cf. Luke 2:25–27), Jesus makes it so that His disciples and eyewitnesses are compared to prophets inspired by the Spirit, but find themselves in a more privileged position than “many prophets” (verse 24) of the Old Testament. This is because He visibly and audibly communicates the words and

actions of the Father to them. Referring to God's mysteries being hidden "from the wise and understanding," Jesus alludes to His statement in Luke 8:10, where He says explicitly to the disciples: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand'" (see Just 1997, 440). From Jesus, they receive inspiration—which is compared to a blessing ("blessed are the eyes," verse 23)—to proclaim the deeds that they have seen and the truths that they have heard from Him with regard to the very person of the Father and His actions as well as to the person of the Son. The inspiration granted to them reaches a maximum level of dynamism and intensity:³ "The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16).

2.2. The Disciples as the Recipients of Christ's Revelation and Inspiration

While all the episodes that comprise the Gospels focus on Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, He is always surrounded by His disciples. The term "disciples" refers to an undetermined number of people who followed Jesus, but each of the Gospels also distinguishes a special group among them, known as "the Twelve." The members of this group have been chosen by Him and accompany Him at all times in His revelatory work. The importance of the Twelve is strongly emphasized by Jesus Himself and by the evangelists: they are a community that is precisely defined by listing the names of all its members. Each Gospel notes that the members of that group were selected by Jesus (see Matthew 10:1–4; Mark 3:13–19; Luke 6:12–16; John 6:70) and that they followed Him, thus becoming eyewitnesses to His work of revelation.

Mark 3:13 emphasizes that "they came to him" (ἀπῆλθον πρὸς αὐτόν): those appointed walk away from the other disciples and from the crowd, and they *come* to the One who has chosen them Himself, guided by His love for them (προσκαλεῖται οὐς ἤθελεν αὐτός, cf. Mark 3:7–12). This passage is fundamental to the distinction between the Twelve and the vaguely defined group of disciples. Both the mediopassive voice of the verb προσκαλεῖται and the pleonastic pronoun αὐτός emphasize Jesus's authority and power to make the choice, which reflect or even actualize God's supreme authority and power that is necessary for effective appointment—as already mentioned in the Old Testament (see

³ See Pontifical Biblical Commission 2014, sec. 23.

Deuteronomy 7:6–8; Isaiah 41:8–10; see also Isaiah 45:4, where being chosen also means receiving a new name; Marcus 2008, 266).

The use of the verb ἤθελεν in combination with the pronoun αὐτός indicates that the choice was made by Jesus Himself, that it was driven by His love for them, and that it was to do with the most important fact: “so that they might be with him” (ἵνα ᾧσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ, Mark 3:14). The passage that describes the purpose of the appointment (literally: “making,” ἐποίησεν) of the Twelve is an evident paraphrase of the formula of the Covenant (cf. Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 30:20). It establishes the apostles (individual pillars) of the people of the new Covenant and commands them to proclaim the Gospel by Christ’s inspiration: “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). During Christ’s earthly ministry, it would have been difficult to reconcile “being with” Him and “being sent” to proclaim the Gospel. However, after His resurrection, it becomes possible: one can “be with” Jesus and “be sent” by Him to share the Good News. In this manner, Mark gives an important testimony about Christ’s inspiration of the apostles in the work of proclaiming the Gospel: only by being united in a personal bond with Jesus as their Lord can they proclaim it effectively and salvifically (Marcus 2008, 267).

Only the disciples who belong to the circle of the Twelve always accompany Him and are the addressees and witnesses of His teaching and works at all major stages of His ministry in Galilee, on the way to Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem (Malina 2013, 230; Meier 1997, 643). They receive cautions and explanations that are reserved for them only (Mark 4:10; 9:35; 10:32–34), and above all, they are charged to proclaim the teachings revealed to them by Jesus: “And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 10:7; cf. Mark 3:14–15; 6:7; Luke 9:1–2; John 17:18; 20:21). Furthermore, their number (“the Twelve”) symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30) and denotes the fullness of God’s people—anticipated in the Old Testament and in intertestamental Judaism—that must be attained through their mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all the world (Meier 2007, 128–147). It is Jesus Himself, the Son of Man, who makes them aware of the grand purpose of their mission, which is the source of the inspiration and imperative to proclaim the Gospel that He has given to them: “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28) (see Collins 2007, 217).

Their ministry is not limited to conveying Jesus's message on the basis of His inspiration from the pre-Passover period. Rather, He continues to inspire them by fulfilling the prophecy about Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14) after His resurrection, as he Had promised:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16–20)

The Eleven are given a specific task: "make disciples of all nations, [...] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." The teaching with which the risen Jesus charges them is none other than the teaching of the earthly Jesus (Bornkamm 1964, 187; Frankemölle 1997, 2.551; Sand 1996, 602; Luz 2005, 633). The evangelist Matthew does not mention the activity of the Paraclete as the one who would inspire the apostles in their proclamation of the Gospel after Jesus's departure from this world. Instead, he emphasizes the inspiring role of Jesus Himself that continues after His resurrection. Matthew makes a very strong and almost exclusive connection between the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel at all times and Jesus's own teaching and inspiration that acts upon the apostles: He not only was, but also—through His inspiring action in the apostles—continues to be the "only teacher" of His Church, a Church that is born in the sacrament of baptism. The presence of the risen Jesus with the apostles is inspiring for their teaching, making it inspired and investing it with a divine character (Luz 2005, 633). This understanding of Matthew 28:20, in which the risen Jesus charges the apostles to teach observance of His "commandments," leads to a very important conclusion about the Gospel of Matthew itself: "It contains the commandments of Jesus that are to be proclaimed to all nations as the 'gospel of the kingdom.' With his understanding of missionary preaching the evangelist makes his book indispensable. One might speak of a 'self-canonization' *in nuce*" (Luz 2005, 634).⁴

⁴ Luz (2005) concludes his interpretation of Matthew 28:20 as follows: "Matthew's conclusion is one of the many New Testament texts that portend the formation of the Christian canon" (634). See also Kupp 1996, 201–219; Mather 1977, 103–115.

Conclusions

The Gospels prove their divine origin by presenting Jesus and His work of revelation as taking place among His eyewitnesses: the apostles and other disciples of the Lord. Furthermore, they portray Jesus's work of inspiring his followers, ministers of the word, in two aspects.

The first aspect concerns forming the disciples—in a personal relationship—to accept and understand the words and deeds revealed to them that ultimately come from the Father. As noted by the Pontifical Biblical Commission (2014), Jesus's central message about God the Father and His boundless love for the world revealed in his Son “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” (sec. 9). While “one can always speak in a formal and correct way about God and his love” (sec. 9), only in living faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God and in His love could the apostles have received and understood the gift of divine revelation (“the words of the Father” revealed to them by Jesus) so that they could then proclaim it to all nations.

The second aspect of Jesus's inspiration concerns preparing the disciples to proclaim the words revealed to them “from God” by way of the grace of faith, which consists in putting their trust and love in Him. The apostles' faith and trust in Jesus and their love for Him inspired them to bear witness to His person and His works and teachings. The inspired “word of the apostles” can be a foundation of faith for all Christians for the sole reason that by coming from the most intimate union with Jesus, it is the word of Jesus: the only-begotten Son of God and Messiah. In the words of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (2014), “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’” (sec. 8). Jesus Himself states this in His prayer directed to God the Father: “For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me” (John 17:8). What truly matters in this respect is not communicating the words spoken by Jesus with literal accuracy but proclaiming their content, that is the Gospel, as the Good News about Him—the incarnate Son of God and the holy Messenger (Messiah) anointed by the Spirit.

According to the Pontifical Biblical Commission (2014), “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” (sec. 8).

In the synoptic Gospels, as evidenced by our analysis of the texts referenced in this article, a personal relationship with Jesus takes the form of a bond between the student and the Teacher in which the most important thing is faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (see Mark 1:1; John 20:31). One’s relationship with Jesus can be immediate (Gospel of John) or mediated (Gospel of Luke). The immediate relationship, fundamental in communicating “the Word from God,” appears in a particularly strongly articulated and rich way in the Gospel of John, where the author contemplates the glory of the only-begotten Son who comes from the Father (John 1:14) and is thus an eyewitness to Jesus’s journey as teacher and to the events of His life from the very beginning to the end (John 19:35; 21:24). Having believed in the divine sonship of Jesus, he bears witness to his work of revealing “the words of God.” This faith is the main foundation of inspiration. It is through it that the apostle bears witness as someone who has been inspired, in the first place, by Jesus Himself, the Son of God, in whom he and his community of disciples (plural in John 1:14) have believed, and who has ultimately been instructed by the Spirit of Truth (John 15:26–27).

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