

VERBAL INSPIRATION

Dr. Allan A. MacRae

Sometimes Christians fear the term "Verbal Inspiration," through misunderstanding of what it means. They think it commits them to a theory of mechanical dictation.

This attitude is unfortunate for two reasons. First, there is nothing so terrible in the idea of dictation. Second, that is not what is meant by verbal inspiration at all.

It is actually rather childish to throw scorn upon the idea of dictation. If a man can dictate to a stenographer, why could not God dictate if He chose? There is nothing so far-fetched in the idea of mechanical dictation. Yet it is extremely important to recognize that this is not what the Scripture claims nor what the term "verbal inspiration" means.

Although parts of the Bible present the very words which God spoke, as He revealed an idea to an individual, much of it consists of words which He drew out of the mind of the human writer. Nowhere is it suggested that the writers were amanuenses. They wrote what they had observed and what they thought. The Holy Spirit led them along, in order that their writings should present the thoughts He wished presented, and He prevented them from including in the Bible thoughts or implications which are erroneous. The process of producing the Scripture was rather complex, involving many elements, but the result is a book whose words express the very mind of God.

The Biblical idea of inspiration has no relation to the thrill which a man receives when a new idea occurs to him. Christians do not believe that the Bible is made up of thoughts which brilliant human beings have worked out. They consider it a book containing truths that God has revealed. It is unfortunate that our common word "inspiration" suggests a whole series of ideas which are very different from the Biblical idea of inspiration.

When people say they do not believe in inspiration of words but in inspiration of ideas, they are confusing inspiration with revelation. God revealed ideas to men.