

MECHANICAL INSPIRATION¹

Dr. Ulrik Vilhelm Koren

Translated by G. O. Lillegard

Nothing has been revealed to us concerning the manner in which the fact of inspiration is realized. The various errors in this matter stem from the desire many otherwise pious teachers have had to explain *how* the Holy Spirit carried out this work. But we cannot understand that any more than we can understand the two natures in the Savior's one Person, or even just the union of the soul and body in our own person. But it should not surprise us that we do not understand how God operates in inspiration. We do not even understand how God operates with the forces of nature, e. g., electricity, x-ray and similar forces which men have known anything about only in recent times, and whose nature nobody understands. Consider also how St. Paul speaks about the high revelations granted to him in 2 Corinthians 12.

To want to explain and understand the union of the divine and the human in the Bible has given rise to various errors. On the one hand, the emphasis has been laid so much on the divine that the human is entirely set aside. From that has come the so-called mechanical explanation, by which the holy writers have been made into pens without will. This explanation has no ground in Scripture, except in the places where Scripture itself testifies to it. It contradicts many passages in the New Testament, in John, Luke, Paul, Peter. Nor is there such a complete agreement in all kinds of details, e. g., in the Gospels, as we would have to expect, if they were written from dictation by men who were mere writing machines. See also the beginning of Luke's Gospel and 1 John 1.

The mechanical explanation has, so far as I know, never been used to any extent by teachers of the Lutheran Church, although there are in some of them expressions of which we cannot approve (e. g., Quenstedt in his *Dogmatics*). On the other hand, this speculation about inspiration has produced the far more dangerous error, which makes the words of Holy Scripture independent of the Holy Spirit and therefore exposes them to be mistreated by men wise in their own conceit. They lay so much stress on the human side of Scripture that its divine side is denied, for they draw the conclusion that, since Scripture is written by men, and since men can err, therefore Scripture can also err. This wrong conclusion rests on this that "men" are named without explaining more fully that these men were also the agents or tools of the Holy Spirit.

¹ This translation by G. O. Lillegard was printed in the Clergy Bulletin (Volume 18:10). It is part of a larger article called "The Inspiration of Holy Scripture" and was previously printed in Norwegian in Koren's *Samlede Skrifter*, Vol. II, pp. 294ff.