



Research Paper

The Divine Inspiration and Uniqueness of the Old Testament among Ancient Near Eastern Texts

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ABSTRACT: *The Holy Bible is incomparable to all other books in the world. It conveys God's message to peoples in different ages. It is divided into the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is very important, if one is going to understand the New Testament and Christianity. It is a witness to Jesus Christ, and points forward to him. Furthermore, It is a unique Ancient Near Eastern text. However, comparative studies of Ancient Near Eastern texts and the Old Testament text always demonstrate that it is closely paralleled to them. Thus, some scholars assert that the Old Testament is not different from other Ancient Near Eastern texts because of the similarities between them. Other scholars who emphasize the differences do so to confirm the inspiration and uniqueness of the Old Testament. In this paper, a comparative approach will be adopted to argue that even though the Old Testament is the product of inspiration like some Ancient Near Eastern texts and evolved through the same process of inspiration as some Ancient Near Eastern texts, it has a superior quality of inspiration, which makes it a unique Ancient Near Eastern text. The work will be limited to the comparison of the claims to divine inspiration in the Book of Covenant and the law code of Hammurabi. It is discovered that though human authors were involved in the composition of the Old Testament, the Old Testament is the true and very words of Yahweh. It can never be considered as words of humans. Its words carry God's authority.*

KEY WORDS: Divine Inspiration, Uniqueness, the Old Testament, the Book of the Covenant, the law code of Hammurabi

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament is an inspired and unique Ancient Near Eastern text. God has spoken, in the past through it, to the Old Testament people. He still speaks, through it, to the contemporary people. It points forward to the coming and events of Jesus Christ. Many scholars have engaged in comparative studies of the forms of expression, contexts, grammar, and contents of the Old Testament and those of other Ancient Near Eastern texts to argue for the uniqueness of the Old Testament among Ancient Near Eastern texts. For instance, John H. Walton engaged in a comparative study of the contents, forms, and functions of the Old Testament and those of other Ancient Near Eastern texts to explicate that the Old Testament is so different from them. He points out that the similarities between them are largely superficial, and the differences are substantive (Walton 1990:90). Peter Enns compares several portions of the Old Testament with corresponding Ancient Near Eastern texts to reconstruct the evangelical doctrine of scripture. In his comparison, he argues that the Old Testament and the New Testament are unique, and that their uniqueness is not seen in the marks of the ancient settings they bear, rather, it is seen in the belief that scripture is the only book in which God speaks incarnately. It is ultimately from God, and it is God's gift to the church. It is God's word (Enns 2005:15, 168).

In this article, the focus of comparison will be on the claims to divine inspiration found in some Ancient Near Eastern texts. These claims will be examined and serve as the basis for the explication of the concept of inspiration in Ancient Near Eastern context. The thesis is that even though the Old Testament is the product of inspiration like some Ancient Near Eastern texts and evolved through the same process of inspiration, it has a superior quality of inspiration, which makes it a unique Ancient Near Eastern text. The work will be limited to the comparison of the claims to divine inspiration in the Book of Covenant and the law code of Hammurabi.

II. CLAIMS TO DIVINE INSPIRATION

There appear claims to divine inspiration in some portions of Ancient Near Eastern texts like the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant. By this, we understand that ancient peoples believed in the divine

inspiration of some Ancient Near Eastern texts. They believed that deities are always involved in the composition of these texts. Thus, these texts are deities' works and not merely human products.

2.1 In the Law Code of Hammurabi

The inspiration for the laws in the law code of Hammurabi is attributed to Anu, Enlil, Marduk, and Shamash. This fact can be found in the prologue and epilogue of the law code of Hammurabi (P1 I: 1-49). Hammurabi like most kings in the Ancient Near East received divine sanction to compose a law code. Marduk was the deity that commanded Hammurabi to compose the law code of Hammurabi. As stated in P1 I: 1-49, Anu and Enlil determined and exalted Marduk to be the king of all gods. So Marduk as the king of all gods urged Hammurabi 'to direct the people of the land to adopt correct behaviour and to make the land speak with justice and truth, and improve the welfare of the people' (P22 V: 14-25). Marduk was thus recognized as the king of the gods in Babylon, with the title Bel, 'lord' (Wolfram 1983:182). He was also recognized as the storm god. His commandment to Hammurabi served as an inspiration to Hammurabi in his compilation of the law code. Marduk's commandment can be said to agree with the purpose to which Anu and Enlil chose and appointed Hammurabi.

In addition to Marduk's commandment, the prologue, and epilogue of the law code of Hammurabi highlight that Hammurabi depended on Shamash in the composition of the law code. Shamash is the sun god and is recognized as the upholder of truth and justice in the Babylonian community. He was called the almighty judge in heaven and earth, in the matter of justice. In the stele, he is represented as giving the laws to the king (Hooke 1962:18). Shamash was mentioned by name nine times in the prologue and the epilogue. In the prologue, Hammurabi was expected 'to rise like Shamash over the mass of humanity, illuminating the land; to improve the welfare of my people' (P1 I: 1-49). Hammurabi called himself a prudent king, 'who listens obediently to Shamash' (P7 II: 22-31). Therefore, he was obedient to Shamash. In the epilogue, Hammurabi further prayed that 'by the command of Shamash, the almighty judge in heaven and earth let my justice shine over the land! (E10 XLVII: 84-xlviii: 2). He was thus 'the king of righteousness, to whom Shamash has entrusted the truth' (E17 XLVIII: 95-XLIX: 1). Thus, Hammurabi obeyed the instruction of Marduk to compile the law code and depended on Shamash in the compilation. By implication, Shamash was viewed as his guide and model in the compilation of the law code of Hammurabi.

Despite Shamash's guide and assistance in the compilation of the law code, Hammurabi was likewise involved. He was regarded as the lawgiver. Moreover, in the law code, he referred to the laws as 'my words'. For instance, Hammurabi says 'I am Hammurabi the king of righteousness, to whom Shamash has entrusted the truth. My words are special. My deeds cannot be surpassed. It is only to the senseless they are meaningless; to the wise, they are a cause for praise' (E17 XLVIII: 95-XLIX: 1). The 'words' Hammurabi was referring to here could mean 'the words of the code', 'the words of righteousness', 'the commandments in the law code' or 'the law code itself'. This is a common tradition in the Ancient Near East where the laws are usually referred to as 'the words of the lawgiver' (cf. The Hittite Law 55) (Westbrook 2003:13). This implies that Hammurabi's involvement includes the inscription of the laws on stone, the establishment of the law code and the enforcement of people to accept and abide by the laws in the code.

2.2 In the Book of the Covenant

Like any other Ancient Near Eastern peoples, the Old Testament Israelites viewed the Book of the Covenant, which consists of the apodictic and casuistic laws, as having been inspired by Yahweh, their God. While the apodictic laws focus on what should be the relationship between God and the Israelites, the casuistic laws focus on the various relationships that should exist among the Israelites.

Both types of laws present Yahweh as being involved in their composition. In the apodictic laws, Yahweh is portrayed as the first-person speaker of the laws. He speaks in direct speech and the people are addressed in the second person, as in Exodus 20:22-23, 'And the LORD said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold'. Thus, the human writers of the Book of the Covenant present the apodictic laws as God's direct words. God is portrayed as speaking directly his expectations to the Old Testament Israelites.

In the casuistic laws, the people are addressed in the third person. However, its introduction in Exodus 21:1 portrays Yahweh as the lawgiver. It says 'now these are the rules that you shall set before them'. The human writers of the Book of the Covenant present Yahweh as the speaker and Moses as the addressee or the mediator. This sets the casuistic laws up as the words of Yahweh, and not the words of the human writers. At one instance, Yahweh speaks in the first person in the casuistic laws. There Yahweh speaks in the first person instead of the third person, thus, 'but if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee' (Exod 21:13). This suggests that Yahweh himself would direct any person who kills someone unintentionally to a place of asylum.

As regards the composition of the Book of the Covenant, Moses's name was mentioned as the human agent used in its composition. According to the critical scholars, the E-writers who edited the Book of the Covenant and included it in the Sinai narrative were responsible for associating the Book of the Covenant with Moses. The reason is that Moses had previously penned down some apodictic laws in the Book of the Covenant. Thus, Moses is portrayed as writing down all the laws in the Book of the Covenant as Yahweh inspired him. Exodus 24:4 says 'and Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD And he took it and read the laws in the hearing of the people, who accepted the laws and saying, 'all that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient' (Exod 24:7). The laws in the Book of the Covenant are thus recognized as expressions of the will of Yahweh in a legal context. Consequently, they are regarded as the words of Yahweh, and not that of Moses.

2.3 Comparisons

From the foregoing discussion, both similarities and differences are evident in the claims to divine inspiration in the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant. Both texts have claims that deities and human agents were involved in their composition. While Anu, Enlil, Marduk, and Shamash were involved in inspiring and directing Hammurabi in the composition of the law code of Hammurabi, only Yahweh was involved in inspiring and directing Moses in the composition of the Book of the Covenant. Thus, the law code of Hammurabi speaks of many gods and the Book of the Covenant speaks of only one God. Besides, while the law code of Hammurabi was composed by Hammurabi, the Book of the Covenant was mediated by Moses.

The recipients of both the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant accepted the laws as being inspired by deities and regarded them as the deities' work. Thus, they regarded the law code to be authoritative because of their connections with the deities. They pledged to be obedient to the laws in the law codes.

III. DIVINE INSPIRATION IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CONTEXT

In this section, the concept of inspiration in the light of the claims to divine inspiration in the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant will be explicated. Besides, the description will involve generally three aspects, namely, the process of inspiration, the quality of inspiration and the product of inspiration. The process of inspiration will include a series of steps or actions involved in the composition of the texts. It will focus on the way the deities and the human agents were involved in the composition of the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant. The quality of inspiration will include the characteristics of inspiration of the texts. It will be concerned with the level of deities' influence and humans' influence on the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant. The product of inspiration will focus on the texts themselves. The emphasis will be on the peoples' attitudes towards the texts.

3.1 The Process of Inspiration

When we speak of the divine inspiration of ancient law codes, it must be understood in Ancient Near Eastern context. From the foregoing, it is evident that the process of inspiration begins with the claims to divine inspiration found in both the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant. The claims to divine inspiration are not only found in the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant but in other Ancient Near Eastern law codes. These claims are most often found in the prologues and epilogues of the law codes. The compilers usually claimed that they received the laws from deities, who loved and expected justice from their peoples. Thus, the laws are presented as descending directly from the deities.

By implication, the initiative to write the law codes was the deities' alone. Therefore, the law codes do not owe their origin to human initiative. Their source solely lies in deities (Warfield 1948:132–139). The deities take the initiative, choosing and preparing the human authors as their instruments in the composition of the law codes (Pache 1969:47–52). For instance, Anu and Enlil chose and appointed Hammurabi to establish and maintain justice in Babylonia. Marduk instructed Hammurabi to compose the law code. Shamash directed him in its composition. For the Book of the Covenant, Yahweh chose the Old Testament Israelites so that they would live justly in the land of Canaan. He instructed Moses to compose the casuistic laws, which will serve as a guide for the people when they arrive at the Promised Land.

The process of inspiration does not stop with divine involvement, it continues with human involvement. According to Dockery, the human authors employed the linguistic resources available to them as they wrote to specific people with particular needs at particular times. Therefore, they were not lifted from their culture or removed from their contexts (Dockery 1991:57). They are recognized to determine the historical, linguistic and theological contexts, forms (genre and structure), and contents of these law codes under the direction of the deities. These contexts sometimes account for similarities in the contents and similarities in the forms of Ancient Near Eastern law codes. Besides, the claims to inspiration in the texts suggest that each text is inspired by different deities. Thus, each text is the work of such deity. For instance, Yahweh is considered the inspiration of the Book of the Covenant. It is counted as Yahweh's work. This, therefore, accounts for the differences

especially in the theology found in the two law codes. It can then be concluded that the processes of inspiration in both the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant are the same.

3.2 The Quality of Inspiration

In explaining the quality of inspiration of the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant, the level of influence of the deities and that of the human authors in the two texts will be explained. In explaining this, the focus will first be on different models concerning divine influence in the promulgation of laws. In the case of the law code of Hammurabi, we have the model of indirect divine influence (Wright 2009:290). This model is closely linked with the illumination and partial theories of inspiration. Therefore, the model encourages the equal influence of both the divine and Hammurabi in the composition of the law code of Hammurabi. It equates divine involvement with human involvement and bolsters both divine influence and human powers in the composition of the law code of Hammurabi (Lewis 1985:54).

The model emphasizes the combination of divine and human elements in the description of inspiration. It attempts to maintain both the divine and human elements in the law code of Hammurabi. It stresses divine influence and Hammurabi's creativity in the composition of the law code of Hammurabi. However, Hammurabi's involvement is stressed above the deities' involvement. Thus, the law code of Hammurabi evolved as a result of the cooperative effort of the deities and Hammurabi (Lewis 1985:54). This implies that Hammurabi was indirectly influenced in the composition of the law code of Hammurabi. The deities were in the background giving a direction that was left to Hammurabi's initiative to fulfil (Wright 2009:290).

Hammurabi as the king was both the high priest and judge of Babylonia. This is because the position of kingship carried a sacral meaning that is, it is identical with that of a high priest and a judge in the Ancient Near East. As the king, Hammurabi was the author and the lawgiver. He had been chosen and inspired by the deities to carry out a superhuman charge. He was left alone in the choice of words after he was inspired to compile the law code. For this reason, he regarded the laws as his words. For instance, in the law code of Hammurabi 195, Hammurabi was saying, because of the crime of sons striking their fathers, this is my words to you my subjects, as I was instructed by the deities to maintain justice in Babylonia, 'when a son has struck his father, they must cut off his hand'. This is true of all the laws in the law code of Hammurabi. the law code of Hammurabi can then be considered partially inspired. This implies that the ideas in the law code of Hammurabi came from the deities but Hammurabi expressed the wordings, as he liked.

In the case of the Book of the Covenant, we have the model of direct influence in the promulgation of law (Wright 2009:290–291). This model is closely linked with verbal/plenary and dynamic theories of inspiration. It attempts to maintain both the divine influence and the human element in its composition. However, the divine influence, as presented in the Book of the Covenant itself, is taken more seriously in its composition. The divine involvement and human involvement are not equal (Lewis 1985:57–58). Yahweh inspired and directed the human authors and editors in the composition of the laws and the determination of the contexts, grammar, genre, and structure of the Book of the Covenant. This implies that both the divine influence and direction and human creativity are stressed in the composition of the Book of the Covenant. However, the divine influence is more stressed above human involvement. In the Book of the Covenant, Yahweh is portrayed as the primary author and the human authors as the mediators. Furthermore, the model stresses the belief that Yahweh inspired the Book of the Covenant. However, his control over the human authors was such that their freedom and personalities were allowed to operate their vocabularies, styles, and personal peculiarities of their culture and time (Dilday 1982:75).

Yahweh, as the King, is portrayed as giving the instruction to compose the laws. In the composition, he was not in the background giving a command rather he was actively involved in the writing of the laws. This is because Yahweh is recognized as the King of the whole earth in Israelite theology. He is undoubtedly the mightiest and most majestic King to the Israelites. He is portrayed as their King who is always doing the work of a human king in their midst. Therefore, Yahweh is recognized as the inspiration, lawgiver, and author of the laws, and the human authors and editors as the mediators of the laws. Thus, both the apodictic and casuistic laws are recognized as Yahweh's words. Thus, the words of the Book of the Covenant are regarded as those of Yahweh, the only Israelite King. The laws express Yahweh's propositions and directives or attitudes to his people. For instance, in Exodus 21:15, Yahweh is portrayed as saying to the Israelites on Mount Sinai, this is my proposition for you, 'when a man strikes his father or his mother', and my directive, 'he must surely be put to death'. Therefore, Yahweh's attitude toward the offense of disrespecting one's parent is different from that of the law code of Hammurabi 195.

The qualities of inspiration in the law code of Hammurabi and the Book of the Covenant are not the same. While the law code of Hammurabi is recognized as the words of Hammurabi (human), the Book of the Covenant is recognized as the words of Yahweh (divine). What could have accounted for this difference are the different theological concepts in Israel and Babylonia. The two nations have different concepts of kingship. Meanwhile, there are some points where their concepts intercept. Generally, in the Ancient Near East, according

to Lemche, the kings are usually understood to be righteous and just judges. They are considered the high judges, the ones who would administer law and righteousness among their peoples. The kings were usually chosen and appointed to administer justice as the deities' representative. Thus, justice was a divine business given to the king from the deities and effectuated by the kings their representatives on earth (Lemche 2013:209–216). Now, focussing on the difference, Yahweh remains the king of the Old Testament Israelites, while Hammurabi was the king of the Babylonians. In the case of the law code of Hammurabi, the words of the law code are considered his words. Thus, he had an absolute right to pardon in any case. He was also above the laws.

In the case of the Book of the Covenant, the laws were not promulgated by any human king. Rather, they were given by Yahweh. Yahweh, the God, and King of Israel was the lawgiver, the sole legislator. He alone has the absolute right to pardon, and all the human kings were under the laws. This is the reason why the Old Testament nowhere refers to legislation on the part of the human king (Boecker 1980:41). Therefore, justice was solely Yahweh's business. He is expected to give and make justice himself. The differences in theologies, thus, indicate the uniqueness of the Book of the Covenant among Ancient Near Eastern law codes. These differences also reflect the Israelites' rejection of Ancient Near Eastern theology.

As for the remaining genres of the Old Testament, the quality of inspiration is the same as that of both the apodictic and casuistic laws. The quality of inspiration is the same throughout, some parts are not more inspired than others are (Dockery 1991:71). The whole of the Old Testament is regarded as the words of Yahweh. Thus, all of the Old Testament is equally inspired by God.

3.3 The Product of Inspiration

Ancient Near Eastern law codes, as products of inspiration, are kings' words, which is authoritative. While the law code of Hammurabi is Hammurabi's words, the Book of the Covenant is Yahweh's words. Both texts are considered products of inspiration. They are divinely determined products of inspired human authors. They are divine-human documents. The people believed that the two texts are vested with divine authority. Therefore, peoples must understand the purpose of the laws, revere the laws and used the laws in their daily activities.

The attitudes of the Babylonians and the Israelites towards the law codes are mentioned in the texts. The peoples accepted the law codes as carrying the deities' authority despite the human involvement in their promulgation. The human elements in the process of their inspiration do not negate them to be considered the products of inspiration. Consequently, the peoples agreed to read, interpret, obey and teach the laws in these texts. Any failure to do these will attract curses and destruction on them. The laws must be published and taught to younger generations and other peoples outside their nations. For instance, though Hammurabi considered the law code of Hammurabi his words, yet the people published the law code of Hammurabi in many places because they considered it a product of inspiration. There are several other fragments of clay-tablets containing portions of the law code of Hammurabi's laws that have been discovered. These fragments belong to various periods and include four Old Babylonian, three Middle Assyrian, two other Neo-Assyrian, and three Neo-Babylonian tablets (Driver and Miles 1952:29).

Despite the human elements in the Book of the Covenant, the Israelites still accepted its words as Yahweh's words. They believed that its words are binding on them. There is evidence that the Israelites continued to read and interpret the Book of the Covenant and other laws as authoritative documents. Some portions of the Book of the Covenant were later revised and expanded in the Deuteronomic Law (Deut 12-26). Joshua built an altar in Mount Ebal to Yahweh based on the instruction in the Book of the Covenant (Josh 8:30 cf. Exod 20:24). Zerubbabel also built the altar of Yahweh as it is written in the Book of the Covenant (Ezra 3:2 cf. Exod 20:24). Jeremiah declared judgment on the Israelites for disobeying the law in Exodus 21:2. The people refused to proclaim liberty for the slaves after six years, and as a result, Yahweh brought judgment on them (Jer 34:8ff.). Besides, the actions of the people during Nehemiah's time were based on the law of Sabbath in Exodus 23:10-12. The people agreed not to buy on the Sabbath and to forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt (Neh 10:31). All these examples thus demonstrate that the Israelites regarded the Book of the Covenant as carrying Yahweh's authority.

IV. INSPIRATION AND UNIQUENESS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The term 'inspiration' is derived from the Latin verb *inspiro* that means 'to breathe on' or 'to breathe into' and the Latin noun *inspiratio* meaning 'God-breath' (Carroll 1980:15). The terms appear many times in the Vulgate Latin Bible (cf. Gen 2:7; 2 Sam 22:16; Job 32:8; Ps 17:16; Acts 17:25; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). In history, the term acquired a technical sense with reference to the biblical authors or the biblical books (Warfield 1948:131). The term 'inspiration' has been defined and described in many ways by different scholars. For centuries, these scholars have battled with how best the inspiration of the Bible should be described.

Benjamin B. Warfield defines inspiration as 'a supernatural influence exerted on the sacred writers by the Spirit of God, by virtue of which their writings are given Divine trustworthiness'. According to Warfield, human

authors are finite in their understandings and capacities, and that they need the revelation of God if they are to understand the supernatural. So, revelation presupposes the doctrine of inspiration (Warfield 1948:131).

René Pache defines inspiration as ‘the determining influence exercised by the Holy Spirit on the writers of the Old and New Testaments in order that they might proclaim and set down in an exact and authentic way the message as received from God’. Pache emphasizes that the divine influence so guided these writers to the extent of their use of words that they were kept from all error and omission. They wrote under the influence of the Holy Spirit, so much so that the events or facts they recorded became accounts as willed by God (Pache 1969:45).

David S. Dockery describes inspiration as meaning ‘that through the superintending influence of God’s Spirit on the writers of Holy Scripture, the account and interpretation of God’s revelation have been recorded as God intended so that the Bible is actually the Word of God’ (Dockery 67). This indicates that the Bible has a dual-sided authorship. Thus, it is a divine-human document. It is a human witness to divine revelation, God’s witness to himself (Dockery 1991:55–56). Inspiration preserved or recorded what God had revealed so that the resulting document carried the same authority and effect as if God himself were speaking directly (Dockery 1991:67).

Donald G. Bloesch defines inspiration as ‘the divine election and superintendence of particular writers and writing in order to ensure a trustworthy and potent witness to the truth’. The purpose of the inspiration of human authors thus is to serve God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. God elected and guided the writers so as to reveal Jesus Christ through the Bible (Bloesch 2006:119–120). Bloesch emphasizes that inspiration does not guarantee that the Bible is inerrant in the sense of being exempt from human misconceptions and limitations. However, in terms of what the Bible purports to show us and teach us, it does not deceive. Thus the authority of the Bible does not rest finally on the inspired record but on God who is speaking to us through this record (Bloesch 2006:121–125).

Francis M. Mpindu describes biblical inspiration as meaning that ‘the Bible is co-authored. Human authors used sources, expressed their personalities in their literary styles, and God, by his Spirit, guided that entire process so that the ultimate product, the text, reflected what God wanted to be written (Mpindu 2003:281–282). In their description of inspiration, all these writers focus it on the process, quality and product of inspiration.

However, from the foregoing discussion, I define inspiration as the process by which Yahweh directly influenced the human authors to record his message to the Old Testament Israelites in their historical, cultural, theological, linguistic and literary contexts. This indicates that the Old Testament is co-authored, where Yahweh is the primary author, and the human authors, the secondary. As in the case of the Book of the Covenant, Yahweh is recognized as the inspiration of the words in the Book of the Covenant because he is the Israelite King. He was not in the background in its composition rather he was actively involved. He chose to reveal himself, his characters and activities through it, so that the Old Testament people may be in a relationship with him.

The human authors of the Old Testament, like the human authors of the Book of the Covenant, received the words from Yahweh and determined the contexts (historical, linguistic and theological), forms (genres and structures), and contents to use in encoding the words of Yahweh. They wrote to reflect God’s dealings with them. They rejected any theology, practice or perspective that contradicted that of God’s revelation to them. For instance, the author of the Book of the Covenant rejected the concepts of deities, kingship and humans that were prevalent in the Ancient Near East. They reconstructed the casuistic laws of the Book of the Covenant based on God’s revelation to them. Furthermore, the human authors of the Old Testament adopted the genres most common in their times, just as the human mediators of the Book of the Covenant did in their composition of the casuistic laws of the Book of the Covenant. The processes of the remaining genres of the Old Testament (that is, narrative, history, proverbs, psalms, prophecy and the like) are not the same with that of the casuistic laws. Nevertheless, these genres are also related to their corresponding Ancient Near Eastern genres.

In the discussion of the divine inspiration of the Old Testament, close attention should be paid to the relationships that exist between the Old Testament text and Ancient Near Eastern texts, as it has been done to the relationship between the Book of the Covenant and the law code of Hammurabi. The inspiration of the Old Testament can best be understood in the context of the Ancient Near East. The Old Testament text has a theological significance emerging from an ancient context. For this reason, the assistance of comparative study might sometimes be needed in the description of the inspiration of the Old Testament.

Furthermore, attention should be paid to the level of involvement between the divine and the human authors. In the Old Testament inspiration, the divine influence is more stressed above the human involvement. Moreover, the divine influence on human authors was such that their freedom and personalities were allowed to operate their vocabularies, styles, and personalities of their culture and time (Dilday 1982:75). In spite of this, the divine element of the Old Testament, which was central in its composition, is not by any how vitiated less effective (Osborne 1991:274). All genres of the Old Testament thus have the same quality of inspiration. Every

book of the Old Testament is equally inspired. The whole of the Old Testament is inspired in all its parts. The whole of the Old Testament is the very and true words of Yahweh.

The Old Testament is considered the product of inspiration. It is essential for salvation. It is authoritative for doctrine and practice. The original recipients of the books of the Old Testament accepted Yahweh's words in the Old Testament as being authoritative. They regarded all the words as having been inspired by Yahweh himself and focusing on the supremacy of Yahweh over other gods. They considered the words to be Yahweh's work overlooking the human involvement in its composition. They were committed to obeying, teaching and publishing the words of the Old Testament that reveal truths about Yahweh in terms of how they should relate to him and to one another as in the case of the Book of the Covenant.

For instance, the original recipients of the Book of the Covenant considered it authoritative and were committed to obeying the laws in it. They read, interpreted and published the Book of the Covenant for the consumption of the next generations. Henceforth, the Old Testament Israelites continued to hold the Book of the Covenant in high esteem. Joshua referred to it as the Book of the Law of Moses and admonished all people to always read and obey it (Josh 1:8; 8:30). Nehemiah likewise referred to the Book of the Covenant as the words of Yahweh spoken to the Israelites. The laws in the Book of the Covenant he called right ordinances, true laws, good statutes and commandments (Neh 20:22). The prophets generally are considered interpreters of laws. They based their teachings on the book of Law, which includes the Book of the Covenant. For instance, Jeremiah declares judgement on anyone who will not obey the law in Exodus 21:2, that is, anyone who will not proclaim liberty to the Israelite slaves at the end of six years (Jer 34:8ff.). Ezekiel accuses the Israelites for breaking the law of Exodus 22:21-22, because of which, Yahweh brought his judgement on them (Eze 22:29). Zechariah emphasizes the law of Exodus 22:21-24, that is, he encourages the Israelites not to oppress the widows and the orphans (Zech 7:10).

In my description of the Old Testament as the product of inspiration, the term 'authoritative' will be used in the same sense that the Ancient Israelites used it for the Old Testament books. For instance, the Old Testament Israelites counted both the Book of the Covenant and the Decalogue to be binding on them. They considered them to carry Yahweh's authority. Thus, to them, the books of the Old Testament are unique and not on a par with other literature produced through normal and natural human activities. This indicates that Yahweh is the authority of the words of the Old Testament and all its words are binding on the recipients. The Old Testament carries Yahweh's authority.

The term 'authority' in the secular sense can mean 'who's is in charge?', 'exerting control on people or situation' or 'the place where one can find out the correct answer to key questions' (N. T. Wright 1991:2, 4). When we talk about the authority of the Old Testament, we do not mean that the Old Testament is in charge, controlling people or situation or the place where one can find out the final solutions to key problems of life. Rather, it means the authority invested in the Old Testament by Yahweh. In the Old Testament itself, all authority lies with Yahweh, its inspiration (N. T. Wright 1991:4). The authority of the Old Testament is therefore the authority of Yahweh, who is revealed in the Old Testament. Thus, Yahweh exercises his authority through the words of the Old Testament and through its revelations. According to Wright, this authority can be exercised through human agents whom God has anointed and equipped to retell the words and the revelation in the Old Testament (N. T. Wright 1991:8-10). Therefore, the authority of the Old Testament rests finally on Yahweh who exercises it through his human agents. Through this authority, Yahweh can fulfil his purposes for the existence of the Old Testament.

In the explanation of the doctrine of the Old Testament, it should not be equated with Yahweh. Rather, the Old Testament should be considered as pointing beyond itself to Yahweh and pointing others to Yahweh. It points to Yahweh who cannot lie or contradict himself. Hence, Yahweh should be recognized to be inerrant, infallible, consistent and trustworthy. When we also speak of the authority of the Old Testament, it means that Yahweh vested his authority on the Old Testament. This makes the authority of the Old Testament to be higher than the authority of any other ancient kinds of literature. What we know about Yahweh in the Old Testament is authoritative to bring us into a relationship with him. The Old Testament is therefore worthy of full trust and belief.

The concept of divine inspiration of the Old Testament can best be summarized as follows:

The Old Testament has a dual-sided authorship. Yahweh and human agents were involved in the composition of it. The initiative to write the Old Testament was Yahweh's alone. Thus, the Old Testament does not owe its origin to human initiative. The human elements in the writing involve the determination of the historical, literary, theological and linguistic contexts of each genre contained in the Old Testament. They also involve literary dependence as in the case of casuistic laws of the Book of the Covenant, use of oral tradition as in the case of historical narrative texts, interpretations of event theologically as in the case of historical narrative texts, receiving direct words from Yahweh as in the case of prophetic literature, and others. However, the involvement of Yahweh supersedes that of human agents.

The process of inspiration is different with each genre, but each genre is closely related to the corresponding genre of Ancient Near Eastern literature. The divine and human elements should be maintained in the process of inspiration. Yahweh guided the human authors in their composition of the Old Testament. The human authors likewise creatively engaged in the composition. The quality of inspiration is the same throughout. All genres of the Old Testament are equally inspired. The Old Testament is the product of its environment. It is considered the words of Yahweh, the Israelite King. It is Yahweh's message encoded in Ancient Near Eastern context. The words of the Old Testament are binding on the Old Testament Israelites, thus, authoritative. The words reveal something about Yahweh, and they are essential for salvation.

The way the Old Testament is considered the product of inspiration so is the whole of the Bible. As we have claim to inspiration in the Book of the Covenant, there are many other claims in both the Old and New Testaments. Apart from these claims, the evangelical Christians have attributed inspiration to the whole of the Bible. Consequent to this, various theories of inspiration of the Bible have been formulated by scholars. These theories are often formulated in the contexts of the proponents, and not in Ancient Near Eastern context. Therefore, the contemporary concept of inspiration can be described as a contextual inspiration.

V. CONCLUSION

Even though human authors were involved in the composition of the Old Testament, the Old Testament is the true and very words of Yahweh. Unlike other Ancient Near Eastern texts, the Old Testament can never be considered as words of human kings or prophets. The words carry Yahweh's authority and not a delegated authority of kings or prophets. Besides, unlike other Ancient Near Eastern texts where human involvement is more stressed, the divine influence is more stressed above the human involvement in the Old Testament. It can then be concluded that even though most of the Ancient Near Eastern texts are the products of inspiration like the Old Testament, evolved through the same process of inspiration as that of the Old Testament, but their quality of the inspiration is lesser than that of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is different from them. It carries Yahweh's authority. It is the very and true word of Yahweh. It is an inspired and unique Ancient Near Eastern text.

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