Inspiration: Towards a Christian Interpretation of Biblical Inspiration anchors its study of inspiration firmly in the Scriptures and examines the inspired nature of the Bible and its inspiring impact. Gerald O'Collins begins by examining classical views of inspiration expounded by Karl Barth and Raymond Collins. He takes up the inspired origin of the Old Testament, where earlier books helped to inspire later books, before moving to the New Testament, which throughout shows the inspiring impact of the inherited Scriptures—both in direct citations and in many echoes. The work then investigates the Bible's inspiring influence on Christian worship, preaching, teaching, the visual arts, literature, and life. After a chapter that clarifies the interrelationship between divine revelation, tradition, and inspiration, two chapters expound ten characteristics of biblical inspiration, with special emphasis on the inspiring quality of the Bible. O'Collins explains a major consequence of inspiration, biblical truth, and the grounds on which the Church 'canonized' the Scriptures. After examining three approaches to biblical interpretation (the authorial intention, the role of readers, and the primacy of the text itself), the book ends by setting out ten principles for engaging theologically with the Scriptures. An epilogue highlights two achievements of the book. By carefully distinguishing inspiration from divine revelation and biblical truth, it can deliver readers from false problems. This work also underlines the inspiring effects of the Scriptures as part of the Holy Spirit's work of inspiration.
Preface

Oh Book! Infinite sweetness! Let my heart
Suck every letter and a honey gain
Precious for any grief in any part;
To clear the breast, to mollify the pain.

George Herbert

Within this ample volume lies
The mystery of mysteries.
Happiest they of human race
To whom their God has given grace
To read, to fear, to hope, to pray,
To lift the latch, to force the way.

Sir Walter Scott

Christians everywhere look to the Bible as the book which is essential for creating and sustaining their identity. Christianity and Christian life are unthinkable without this volume which binds together the Scriptures of the Old Testament and the New Testament. In various ways, all Christians expect the Bible to guide them in what they believe and do and in how they pray together or alone. They draw from this book the basic narrative for explaining who they are and what they are about in the world. They accept the Bible as centrally authoritative for their faith and practice.

Christian believers attribute such importance to the Bible because they hold that in some real sense God was uniquely involved in producing, over many centuries, the particular books that make it up. Since they speak of the Holy Spirit inspiring its writing, they call it ‘Holy Scripture’, ‘the Sacred Scriptures’, ‘the Word of God’, or ‘the Word of the Lord’.

All of this makes it surprising how, for decades now, scholarly works have marginalized or simply neglected the question of biblical inspiration. Before the Second World War, as we shall see in Chapter 1, Karl Barth dedicated many pages of his Church Dogmatics to this question.
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