

Another Kind of Inspiration:  
Shared Attention and the Religious Text  
By Adam Green

Abstract: A religious text can be inspired in virtue of its ability to foster a religious experience, so says Samuel Taylor Coleridge and developmental psychology as well. Although contemporary discussions of the inspiration of Scripture focus on the truth of propositions, the involvement of redactors, or the influence of genre on intended meaning, Coleridge had a different focus. His biblical hermeneutic stressed imaginative identification with the human elements in biblical narratives and the role of interpretive traditions in approaching a text. For Coleridge, having identified with the human puts one in a position to re-experience the supernatural agent or events witnessed to in Scripture. As this paper shows, developmental psychology shows us how to give a spin to Coleridge's thought to reveal an interesting insight, that it is possible to have a religious experience mediated by Scripture and to make sense of the notion of textual inspiration by reference to such experiences.

When one discusses the inspiration of religious texts, one typically is concerned with whether or not one can trust that some propositions contained in holy writ are true and with how one may or may not be justified in thinking those propositions true. One may also be concerned with whether or not the presence of redactors, a distant historical context, or the literary features of the text ought to affect one's reliance on Scripture as a source of true propositions. In the Christian tradition, the topic of inspiration is bound up with the question of whether a personal God underwrote the truth of some or all of the propositions expressed by the Bible and whether we can come to know these propositions through some kind of historical argument, through testimony, or through an inkling to believe implanted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

In this paper, I want to focus attention on a sense in which a religious text can be inspired which does not primarily have to do with the truth of propositions it expresses but rather the conditions necessary to have a religious experience, in particular, an

encounter with a divine person. I will argue that the sort of textual inspiration at issue is of a substantive variety that can be used to build bridges between many persons who would strongly disagree over matters of propositional inspiration. In conducting my investigation, I shall be operating in the Christian tradition though parallel points might be made in a variety of traditions. I shall be taking my initial cue from the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his response to the advent of higher criticism (in which Coleridge also participated).<sup>1</sup>

## I

In his theory of hermeneutics, Coleridge exemplifies a deep understanding for a kind of religious experience that has little currency in contemporary religious epistemology, namely experiences of God mediated by Scripture. At first glance, such experiences seem undeniably subjective in some pejorative sense of that term. William Alston, for example, thought religious experiences mediated by any physical object to be of limited utility.<sup>2</sup> Physical objects don't have divine properties, and one might worry that the evidential connection between the state of a physical object and the divine would be too loose to be of much epistemic use.

Coleridge, however, took experiences of God through the Scriptures seriously due to the enabling power of imagination to re-create the events depicted in the Scriptures, at least when read in an appropriate way. At first glance, Coleridge's appeal to imagination appears only to reinforce the fear that an ignominious subjectivity would infect the experiences Coleridge has in mind. Imagining a thing does not make it so or even make it

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<sup>1</sup> I do not intend to make any contribution to Coleridge scholarship in this essay, but rather I take what I hope to be an accurate portrayal of Coleridge's thought and use it as a foil for what follows.

<sup>2</sup> Find your copy of *Perceiving God* and put a quotation in.

likely to be so. To understand what Coleridge had in mind, it is helpful to pay attention to what Coleridge took his hermeneutics to be a corrective to.

In his *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge criticizes what he sees as a naïve conservative approach to hermeneutics under the heading of “the pretended right of every individual competent and incompetent, to interpret Scripture in a sense of his own, in opposition to the judgment of the Church, without knowledge of the original or of the languages, the history, the customs, opinions, and controversies of the age and country in which they were written”.<sup>3</sup> Coleridge, it is safe to say, takes a dim view of treating Scripture as a repository of true propositions compiled for easy reference. As the above quotation intimates, tradition and scholarship must play a mediating role for one to approach Scripture appropriately.

For Coleridge, it is unwise to step outside the hermeneutical line of succession to which one is heir, but this is not merely a way of avoiding errors due to personal ignorance. Rather, a tradition of interpretation within a religious context becomes a tradition of (re-)experiencing the original events through imaginative identification. What one identifies with is the human part of the divine-human interactions that are the subject of the religious text. The danger that Coleridge foresees for the naïve exegete is that they will not know how to approach the text so as to gain this religious experience and let it shape them. Rather, they will treat the Scriptures as a set of truths to be memorized and in so doing foist their own perspective on the text instead of adopting the one the text makes available to them.

To quote a passage from Coleridge’s *The Confessions of an Inquiring Mind*,

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<sup>3</sup> Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Aids to Reflection*. Ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge. Stanford and Swords, 1847. 230n.

“Why should I not believe the Scriptures throughout dictated, in word and thought, by an infallible Intelligence?...Why should I not?—Because the doctrine evacuates of all sense and efficacy the sure and constant tradition, that all the several books bound up together in our precious family Bible were composed in different and widely distant ages, under the greatest diversity of circumstances, and degrees of light and information, and yet that the composers, whether as uttering or as recording what was uttered and what was done, were all actuated by a pure and holy Spirit, one and the same—(for is there any spirit pure and holy, and yet not proceeding from God—and yet not proceeding in and with the Holy Spirit?)—one Spirit, working diversely, now awakening strength, and now glorifying itself in weakness, now giving power and direction to knowledge, and now taking away the sting from error!”<sup>4</sup>

In the words of Coleridge scholar Jerome McGann, Coleridge argued that “the Scriptures are not an unmediated and fixed biblical text but an evolved and continuously evolving set of records which include the Church’s later glosses on and interpretations of the earlier documents”.<sup>5</sup> For Coleridge, it is not correct to see the Scriptures as a static set of texts dictated for the rote devotion of all thereafter. Rather, God’s word is a continuing speaking, an invitation to experience and a history of experience rather than a list of truths. Coleridge viewed Scripture as “a living and processive organism”<sup>6</sup> whose truth is brought into the present time not by the specific wording of the text but by “an imaginative grasp” of an experience to which the tradition acts as caretaker.<sup>7</sup>

Encountering Scripture in this imaginative way guided by a history of interpretation is supposed to put the believer in a position not primarily to access an exhaustive set of determinant propositions which just are the meaning of the text but rather to situate a believer so as that they can enter into a religious experience guided by

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<sup>4</sup> Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*. Ed. Henry Nelson Coleridge. E. Moxon, 1863. 63-64.

<sup>5</sup> McGann, Jerome. *The Beauty of Inflections*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. 149.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

thoroughly human words, both those of the original document and those which elaborate a tradition of approaching that document. It is the humanity of the words of the human authors and interpreters that allow one to identify with the text, and imaginative identification with the humanity in the text puts one in a position to experience the supernatural.

In this paper, we will not be interested in using this experience Coleridge describes to discredit a conservative hermeneutic, as Coleridge himself seemed to be interested in, but rather we shall be concerned with the epistemic credentials of one way of explicating the experience he describes. We will be concerned with the epistemic credentials of thinking of Scripture as a set of coordinates for an experience of the divine. If one imaginatively identifies with the human elements of a religious text, one is put in a position that facilitates an experience of the divine.

In order to pursue the credentials of this experience, I will turn to the intersection of philosophy and developmental psychology.

## II

Shared attention occurs when one is engaged in an act of attending to something and, in doing so, one is cooperating with another who is engaged in a parallel act of attending.<sup>8</sup> As such, shared attention involves coordinated “attention-focusing”<sup>9</sup> where

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<sup>8</sup> A similar description of shared attention one sometimes sees is “acting in concert with responsive partners,” but this description seems to allow for satisfaction by actions such as participating in an organized military strike. It does not capture the fact that in shared attention the attending is what is shared. Vasudevi Reddy. “Before the ‘Third Element’: Understanding Attention to Self.” *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds*. Ed. Naomi Elia et al. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.85-109. 89.

<sup>9</sup> Brinck, Ingar, “Attention and the Evolution of Intentional Communication.” *Pragmatics & Cognition* 9:2 (2001), 259-277. 262.

the coordination is present in the qualitative feel of the experience. Shared attention can be dyadic or triadic. In dyadic shared attention, both participants focus attention on the other, and in triadic shared attention, both participants focus on an independent object.

The following three stage example of a ten-month old and its mother interacting illustrates the phenomena. First, the child looks the mother in the eye. Second, the child turns and points to a bright object. Third, the child looks back at the mother to see that she has followed the direction of the point. If the mother has cooperated with the pointing of the child, then the child and the mother had dyadic shared attention at stage one, and triadic shared attention at stage two. At stage three, the child checks to make sure that stage two has been successful because the child's point signals an intention that the adult cooperate with the child.

As Ingrid Brinck points out, the phenomenon in question is more than "mutual object-focusing" because "the subjects will have to attend to each other as capable of attending in a goal-intended way, that is, in a way that is not controlled by the object of attention." If a zebra follows the startled gaze of the zebra beside it to see a lion in the distance, that does not qualify by itself as shared attention because the joint behaviour is not an instance of cooperative attending. In the pointing example, the awareness of the bright object is evidenced by the point, and the mother attends to the bright object because the child manifests a desire for the parent to attend to the bright object to which the child was attending. If the child tries to check the gaze of the mother in stage three only to find that the mother has silently left the room, the child's experience of attending

to the object in stage two will seem to have been a different experience than it initially appeared to be.<sup>10</sup> The cooperation of the other in attending is a phenomenal constituent of the experience itself.

R. Peter Hobson argues from his research with autistic children that the shared attention impairment in the autistic is rooted in an inability to enter into intersubjective engagement through recognizing the expression of attitudes in bodily cues.<sup>11</sup> Borrowing from Wittgenstein, Hobson characterizes the activity which makes intersubjective engagement possible as a kind of perception.

“...perception is relational, and to perceive a smile as a smile...is to respond with feeling, in such a way that through the smile one apprehends the emotional state of the other...”<sup>12</sup>

On Hobson’s model, attitudes “are manifest in bodily expressions, orientations, and actions.”<sup>13</sup> The idea is that, unless one has a related impairment like autism, one can naturally perceive some mental states by perceiving the physical expressions of those states.<sup>14</sup> The perception of mental states makes one available to share attention with the other. The infant involved in dyadic shared attention can literally see that the other is responding cooperatively to one’s attention, perhaps through the combination of the

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<sup>10</sup> For an extended discussion of this feature of shared attention, see Campbell, John, “Joint Attention and Common Knowledge.” *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds*. Eds. Naomi Elia et al. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005. 287-297.

<sup>11</sup> Hobson, R. Peter, “What Puts the Jointness Into Joint Attention?” *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds*. Eds. Naomi Elia et al. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005. 185-204. 189ff. See also, Hobson, R. Peter. *The Cradle of Thought: Exploring the Origins of Thinking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Hobson, 2005. 190.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 186.

<sup>14</sup> For a defense of this claim, see my “Perceiving Persons”, “Mirror Neurons and Tuning in the Other”, and “Autism, Input, and Perceiving the Other”. The position developed in these papers is foreshadowed in my “Mirror Neurons, Simulation, and Goldman,” *History and Philosophy of Psychology*, forthcoming.

other's gaze and the pattern of affect displayed by oneself and the other person. In triadic shared attention, generally a dyadic stage of mental state perception allows an infant to perceive the intention of the other to cooperate with one in attending to some other thing or to ask someone else to cooperate with them. Consequently, when the infant attends to the third thing, the infant is aware of herself as engaging in a cooperative enterprise, and the discovery that there was no cooperation will reveal that some of the success conditions of one's attentional state failed to hold. Thus, the experience will be revealed to have misrepresented reality even though the same sensory information may be coming to the infant by way of the third object.

The abilities that one acquires as shared attention develops can come to be employed in many situations that deviate in various ways from the developmental scenario. In particular, one can have cases that use mediators to achieve cooperative attending without dyadic shared attention or cases that borrow the structure of shared attention scenarios to coordinate attention despite the existence of a temporal gap between the relevant actions and actors. For example, if Rachael Ray is on television and asks me to attend to the golden brown crust of her zucchini bake, I can cooperate with her wish in a way that is different from merely following her gaze to what she happens to be looking at. I am cooperating with her attempt to direct my attention. The abilities that enable joint attention are at work, even though, strictly speaking, they are operating in an artificial extension of their natural environment. I still use the pattern of Rachael's visible behaviour to coordinate my attention with her directing of my attention, but Rachel and I

don't enter into a dyadic state. I come to attend to something in a cooperative mode, but the triadic state that comes about when I attend to the zucchini bake has components spread out over time, Rachel and the zucchini bake at time  $t_1$  and myself and the television at  $t_2$ . Furthermore, the cooperation involved in this process is relatively asymmetrical. Rachael may intend to direct the attention of a class of people into which I fall, but she is not aware of me in particular.

One can remove some of the features that the Rachael Ray case shares with the developmental context of shared attention without completely losing a family resemblance. For example, if, instead of watching the cooking show, one uses a written transcript of the show, one will still experience the transcript as depicting someone who is trying to direct the attention of a class of people into who one might fall. One's attention is directed to the zucchini bake even though one is not exercising the ability to read the pattern of visible behaviour one observes in another. If one were cooking a zucchini bake as one read, one might very well attend to the crust of the bake and note that Ms. Ray must be asking her audience to attend to something like the color of *that* crust. The mediation of the written word might, however, render one's ability to make use of Rachael's directions more dependent on background knowledge and the help of others. Consulting cooking aficionados, regular watchers of the show, or persons with definite views on where golden brown lies on the color spectrum may well reveal that one's attempts to imaginatively grasp the cooking event depicted in the text have gone awry.

Now that we are familiar with shared attention and some of its close cousins, I turn to its application. I will be concerned to show that shared attention abilities may be used to good effect in the explication of various kinds of religious experience that are mediated by Scripture.

### III

A thought experiment will provide the segue into my defense of the applicability of shared attention to religious experiences mediated by Scripture.

Bob and Stan walk into a modern art museum. On a podium in the middle of a gallery, Bob and Stan see what they initially take to be a very life-like statue but which is actually a person posing as a statue. Just below the statue-person is a sign that claims that the statue is alive. Bob and Stan both read the sign saying that the statue is alive. Bob interprets this statement as flowery, metaphorical speech and is not open to the possibility that the statue is really a person. Stan, on the other hand, is open to the possibility that the sign means the statue is really a person, which empowers Stan to experience the statue-person differently than Bob. The same object appears to both Bob and Stan. Bob, however, is not prepared to see an agency as present in the statue-person. Stan has a sense experience of the statue-person nearly identical to that of Bob, but Stan is enabled to see the person in his sense experience.

Notice that Stan can share attention with the statue-person. Expecting to find a person, Stan can walk directly into the statue-person's line of sight and say, "I read the sign, and I think you are doing a wonderful job of pretending to be a statue." If the statue-

person believes that Stan is representing himself correctly, then this is a case of dyadic shared attention. If, however, Bob walked into the line of sight of the statue and said, “Hey, when you get off, you want to go get a cup of coffee,” then, even if the statue-person falsely believed that Bob had discovered the truth about the performance, the case could not be one of shared attention because Bob does not perceive a person when he looks at the statue-person. Bob is not in a position to see the agency at work within the statue-person.

The statue-person can be used to illustrate Coleridge’s notion of a Scripture-mediated experience of God and its importance in the following way. The sign, written from the perspective of an observer, looking in at the statue puts one in a position to experience an agency within the statue-person that one might not be ready to encounter otherwise. The sign is written from a cognitive standpoint similar to one’s own, the looker-on, and it invites one to direct one’s attention to be open to the presence of an agent in one’s environment. Similarly, for Coleridge, imaginatively identifying with the human elements in Scripture puts one in a position to join them. The authors of Scripture depict themselves and the characters featured in their stories as attending to and interacting with a particular kind of agent. Much like the statue-person case but unlike the Rachael Ray case, this agent is depicted by the written text as being the sort of being that is present and aware of one. Unlike the statue-person case, the divine is depicted in Scripture as not just being present and aware of one but as desiring that a class of persons

of which the reader is a member attend to itself. In other words, whatever other functions Scripture is supposed to fill, it attempts to facilitate shared attention with the divine.

One way of spinning Coleridge's insight, then, is that allowing oneself to resonate with the human elements of Scripture puts one in a position to have a direct experience of God.<sup>15</sup> Imaginative identification is to be construed as a method of investigation or exploration but not as an ability that is supposed to generate the religious experience itself. Thus, one could think of the resulting religious experiences as mediated by Scripture in a robust sense while also holding that the experience is objective in an Alstonian sense. By way of example, the position of a soccer referee on the field may be reliably correlated with her ability to correctly judge when an offensive player is offsides. The referee's standing in that particular position is not evidence that a player is or is not offsides, but standing in the right observational position reliably correlates with whether or not the referee will be able to acquire quality sensory evidence or not.

Having made a first pass at correlating the discussion of shared attention and the religious experiences mediated by Scripture, I turn in the next section to the topic of whether Scripture could play a role in mediating not only the directing of one's attention to the divine but the dyadic encounter with the divine itself.

#### IV

In his constructive critical review of William Alston's *Perceiving God*, Robert Audi brings up a type of mystical experience, which he characterizes as "seeing (or

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<sup>15</sup> I do not wish to contest the idea that one could explicate Coleridge's position in other ways. I am not interested in defending Coleridge so much as the thought I think he may have been trying to express.

otherwise perceiving) God in things—in nature, art, and in people.”<sup>16</sup> Audi feels that this variety of mystical experience, which he calls “layered perception,” is conspicuously absent from Alston’s categories of mystical experience.

To illustrate the sort of experience he has in mind, Audi uses the perception of another human person through hearing their voice.

“We can hear a person by hearing typing sounds, and thereby hear the person indirectly; but when I hear the voice of, say, Norman when he is speaking to me in person, I take myself to be hearing him directly, not merely to be hearing his voice as something functionally dependent on other sounds or indeed on anything else. This seems to be a case of direct perception, but is in a way layered: I perceive him in his voice, perhaps because the voice expresses his beliefs and thereby his character.”<sup>17</sup>

Audi sees a parallel between layered perceptions of God and the intersubjective perception of human persons. The possibility of layered perceptions of God opens up the possibility that Scripture might be able to mediate experiences of God in more than one way. In the last section, we explored the possibility that Scriptures could mediate religious experiences by way of making one receptive to having an experience of God. That mediating role, however, would not thereby make the resulting experience an experience of God *in* or *through* Scripture. For that very reason, the first mediating role is in some ways a less epistemically worrisome posit. The theist might well be concerned that an experience of God in or through some medium would obfuscate the view. What,

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<sup>16</sup> Audi, Robert. “Perceptual Experience, Doxastic Practice, and the Rationality of Religious Commitment.” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 20 (1995), 1-18. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

after all, would the evidential connection be between the state of a physical object and the divine?

Recall that the development of shared attention is made possible by a kind of pattern perception. The pattern of one's facial expressions, hand movements, gross body movements, sounds, etc can indicate the mental state that a person is and, indeed, that there is a person there at all. A failure to see a pattern of human behaviour as the manifestation of a mental state is one of the signature impairments of autism. The question is whether it makes sense to think that an experience of the divine can operate in a manner akin to the pattern perception at work in the way humans relate to each other.<sup>18</sup>

One way of pumping intuitions in this matter available to the Christian tradition lies in the incarnation. It seems plausible that the moneychangers were in no doubt as to Jesus' mental state when He drove them from the temple. Nor is it ambiguous what type of emotion was being displayed when Jesus weeps over Jerusalem on His descent into Jerusalem. Jesus looks people in the eye. People point things out to Him. In other words, Jesus' shares attention with people, and people take themselves to be able to relate to Jesus' in a similar manner to that which they use with others.

Whatever metaphysical quandaries lie in wait for the theist within the doctrine of the incarnation, it would seem the Christian should not have a problem with the idea that human beings did not have trouble figuring out how to share attention with a human person who was also God. Moreover, it would be odd to think one had to say that the

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<sup>18</sup> I argue for a shared attention account of mystical experience that in many ways follows up on Audi's line of thought in my "Reading the Mind of God (Without Hebrew Lessons)" *Religious Studies*, forthcoming.

behaviour of Jesus was never indicative of His divine nature, and it would be equally odd to think that, any time Jesus' behaviour was indicative of His divine nature, that behaviour was not recognizable as purposeful behaviour. Certainly, people often may not have understood why Jesus did what He did, but much violence would be done to the Biblical narratives even as literature if one were to unilaterally deny that Jesus' human body could serve as a medium through which one could identify some of a divine person's mental states, such as what He attends to or whom He is loving.

A next step that can be taken to motivate the idea that one can have layered perceptions of God through Scripture is to point out that one can have layered perceptions of other human persons through mediums that aren't their bodies. That is, a pattern of sensory information that does not include direct input from the body of another can be counterfactually sensitive to the presence of a mental state in contradistinction to that mental state's absence, and one can be attuned to this pattern so as to become intuitively aware of the mental state of the other as a direct result of processing that sensory information.

For example, if Julie hears a particular door slam thunderously, Julie immediately comes to know a few things as a direct result of hearing that door slam. She knows her teenage daughter Sylvia is home. She knows that Sylvia is upset. What kind of upset state Sylvia is in may be underdetermined by the slamming door, but an upset face may be ambiguous in the same way. A track record of relevant experiences may be necessary to arrive at this intuitive awareness of what Sylvia must be feeling, but the same can be said

for expert perception generally. One can easily imagine Julie hearing the door slam without becoming aware of Sylvia as being upset, but one can just as easily imagine Julie missing bodily indicators of Sylvia's distemper without Julie being any the wiser.

At this point, one might draw attention to the following disanalogy between Sylvia's slamming of doors and a layered perception of God through the Scriptures. There appears to be a spatiotemporal gap between, say, the sacrifice of Isaac and my reading about it that one does not find in Sylvia's slamming of the door. Sylvia's being upset is present and presently manifesting itself in a slamming. One has to distinguish, of course, whether a temporal gap is evidentially relevant, which it may not be. If Julie is watching a home video and, in the background of the video, she hears a slammed door, Julie may be able to make good epistemic use of this recording even if she is not aware of Sylvia's present mental state.

At this point, it is interesting to remember that Coleridge thought both that God's word is a continuing speaking and that this speaking is conveyed through both a set of texts and through the tradition to which those texts belong. In other words, one might think that the medium that is relevant to a layered perception of God through Scripture is not the text in isolation but the situated text. I approach the text as a text purported to be God's continuing communication to a group of people that includes me by a being who is presently aware of me and desirous of using the patterns of His interactions with human beings in the past unto a present relational end with me. Approaching Scripture not just as a text but as a text with a present relational purpose removes the disanalogy.

I hope to have gone some length in this section towards defending the coherence of the idea that one can have an experience of God mediated by Scripture in at least two ways, by inviting one to encounter the divine and by providing a medium through which one can have layered perceptions of God. In the next section, I will look at some objections and applications that come with using the ability of Scripture to facilitate such experiences as a way of explicating the inspiration of a religious text.

## V

For Coleridge, Scriptural revelation is a process that occurs across time as the various members of a tradition treat a text as not just a record of truths or a record of God's work in time but as being itself a manifestation of God's continuing work in time. If a text really is a manifestation of God's continued activity, then it is inspired, and part of its being inspired is its having the property of facilitating experiences of God. These experiences may convey information in a dyadic or triadic mode of shared attention, but the point of this kind of inspiration is having a relational experience with God.

In this last section, I want to examine some objections and applications to a notion of inspiration grounded in religious experience.

One might worry that counting an ability to facilitate a religious experience as a genuine species of textual inspiration makes the concept of inspiration needlessly heterogeneous and might only distract from the important debates surrounding propositional inspiration. Relatedly, one might think that Scripture could only be inspired in the sense of facilitating shared attention with the divine if and to the extent that

Scripture is inspired in a propositional sense. Perhaps the ability to foster a religious experience is, at best, a property that a text that is propositionally inspired would have. Thus, one might think that an account of the relationship between textual inspiration in the propositional sense and textual inspiration in the shared attention facilitating (SAF) sense needs to be forthcoming.

The relationship between these two varieties of inspiration may be less heterogeneous than one might initially think. A sufficient condition on a text being divinely inspired is that God ensures that it has a structure that facilitates knowledge of God. One way to satisfy this sufficient condition is for God to ensure that words are written down which capture true propositions about Himself in linguistic form. Another way to satisfy the sufficient condition is for God to ensure that words are written down which will redirect the right kind of reader into shared attention with God. The religious experience communicates knowledge by acquaintance as well as propositional truths derivable from that experience. Both means communicate knowledge of God by way of a divinely ordained textual structure. Thus, one can see that there is a parallelism between the ends and means of inspiration in a propositional and an SAF sense.

Of course, one might take inspired propositions to cover any number of subjects other than the nature and activities of the divine. For example, the Bible speaks about how people ought to behave towards one another, relate to their possessions, and what exact implement Samson used to kill Philistines. One might think that many different kinds of propositions are inspired which do not seem to be about God or even to involve

God as the apparent speaker. One can, however, preserve a good deal of the parallels between SAF inspiration and propositional inspiration by way of considering experiences of triadic shared attention with God. If Scripture can act as a medium for experiencing God, it seems that it should also be able to act as a medium for experiencing God as directing one attention to one's sin, the need to love others, or even His plans for the world. It may not be important to locate an SAF role that every sentence in Scripture can play, but what is important is that more types of texts can have such a role than one might initially notice.

In fact, rather than thinking that having an SAF role would have to be an incidental feature of an inspired proposition, one can easily imagine that relationship being reversed. In and of itself, it is not important to future generations of believers that Samson slew Philistines with a jawbone and had a hankering for Philistine women, but it may be important to preserve the story of Samson because of the way it draws readers into Samson's experience, establishing a first point of contact in a potential shared attention encounter with God or, at least, a perception of God's pattern of behaviour displayed towards human beings.

Furthermore, it seems plausible that one could endorse the SAF inspiration of a text from a number of possible positions on propositional inspiration. If a lover brings a story and presents it to his beloved as an indication of his ardent regard, the story can get the message across to the beloved in many different ways. The message could be conveyed by a newspaper article, a selective essay, a scrapbook, or a parable. Likewise,

the lover could convey his message through text that he dictated, commissioned, edited, or just selected from available materials. There may well be important differences that would attend the lover's choice of a medium. The point, however, is that, in principle, the facilitation of shared attention is consistent with different kinds of mediums, and the result is that textual inspiration in an SAF sense can, to some extent, float free of debates over propositional inspiration.

One interesting consequence of the position that I have argued is that proponents of widely divergent positions on the propositional inspiration of a text can agree that that text is inspired in a substantive sense. Two believers can endorse a text as having an important role conveying knowledge of God while disagreeing strongly over such matters as whether passages are to be taken literally or how and when the document was composed. In fact, my position on SAF inspiration may offer a nice tool for a debate over propositional inspiration to move forward. If two parties agree that a text is SAF inspired, then they could attempt to make a case to one another concerning what sort of position on propositional inspiration would best accommodate that fact that they hold in common.

One might worry that it is too easy for something to become an inspired text along SAF lines. There is no reason in principle why a divine being couldn't ensure that a piece of music, a shroud with a distinctive pattern, an elegant mathematical proof, or a beautiful sunset had a structure such that the receptive onlooker was redirected into an experience of God or had a layered perception of God. Thus, there does not seem to be any reason that SAF inspiration should be seen as peculiar to religious texts in the way

that propositional inspiration is often supposed to be.

By way of response, there is no conceptual problem with there being inspired propositions located in texts which do not function as religious texts for a given tradition. There would be nothing amiss, for example, if God had inspired some of the propositions expressed by Aquinas or Luther. There is no conceptual problem with God inspiring some of the propositions of Confucius or Plato for that matter. It need not affect a theory of propositional revelation if one learned that God had ensured the accuracy of various mathematical and scientific propositions written down in various places for the benefit of mankind. The point of claiming that a religious text expresses inspired propositions is that the truth of the propositions in question is supposed to play a privileged role in guiding and constraining the life of a religious tradition and its adherence. There is a parallel line of response open for SAF inspiration of a religious text. An SAF inspired text is one that has a privileged role guiding and constraining the pursuit of relational encounters with God.

One may have a concern with SAF inspiration of quite another stripe, namely that the willful manipulation of the imagination called for by Coleridge opens oneself up to self-deception. There are four things that need to be said here in response. The first is to point out that the project of the essay is only to demonstrate a possibility, not an actuality. It is not a part of the circumscribed project that I am about in this essay to demonstrate the reliability of this hermeneutical practice. It does not seem, however, that it is

necessary that self-deception thoroughly infect religious experiences mediated by Scripture.

Second, a tradition is not just a set of people, but a rule-governed community constituted and regulated by certain practices and dogma. By submitting oneself to one's tradition, one is put in a position to transfer the work of justifying one's practices to the tradition which may have the better resources to discern trends of reliability in producing those goods which are supposed to accrue to one in virtue of encountering the divine (e.g. the fruits of the Holy Spirit). A religious tradition often has constraints on both religious experience and hermeneutical practice that may help safe-guard one's participation in that practice against self-deception. The religious experience I have defended in this paper is a religious experience mediated by Scripture, where a text only counts as Scripture because of the way in which it is situated in a tradition as a sacred document. Much like a physical gesture taken out of context loses some of its relational force, so one would expect Scripture taken in isolation from a tradition dictating the manner in which one is to approach that text will lose some of its ability to facilitate share attention. If one picks up the Bible thinking its just another classic work of fiction, one would expect its SAF properties to be muted. For self-deception to threaten the account I have given, it must undercut Scriptures ability to play an SAF role within its natural context.

Third, any theory of propositional inspiration must deal with a parallel problem. Anyone who claims that a religious text is propositionally inspired should admit that one can willfully misunderstand and misappropriate inspired propositions. In the Christian

Scriptures and tradition, the devil is often depicted as a deceiver who misuses previous things that God has said. Certainly, one might forward an objection from self-deception while being opposed to any form of inspiration. The point, however, is that the believing objector incurs a parallel problem.<sup>19</sup>

Fourth, on a shared attention model, inspiration is a matter of facilitating an experience of God by way of a kind of perception. To the extent that some kind of manipulation of the imagination is concerned, it is supposed to make one available for the having of a perception. The human components of a text act as an arrow, pointing to the object to be perceived. Responding to an arrow by looking where it points is not sufficient for seeing what the arrow is supposed to point one towards. The object must actually be present and appear to one. Self-deception can influence our perceptual judgments, but we do not indict perception in general as a result. Likewise, approaching a religious text in such a manner that one can be redirected into an experience of God is equivalent to allowing one's visual search to be guided. What protects the realist dimension of SAF inspiration is that a document is only SAF inspired if "looking" for God via the text tends to produce an actual experience of God in the receptive reader.

By way of conclusion, Coleridge recognized that a text could be inspired because

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<sup>19</sup> In fact, the believing objector may have a bigger problem handling self-deception than she would have if she made use of SAF resources. Consider a parallel scenario in the human domain. If I read something you wrote and am strongly inclined to read that statement in my favor, one of the best ways of checking my inclination for self-deception is through relationship with you, through seeing you say what I have read, and perhaps through experiencing you correcting me. In contrast, reading your statement in isolation is a scenario which makes it much easier for me to believe what I want of your statement.

of the experiences it makes available to one. I have explicated this insight in terms of the ability of a text to facilitate shared attention with the divine. I have defended the coherence of this notion, and I have suggested that it may be utilized to build bridges between persons who strongly disagree over the nature and method of propositional inspiration.