



si si no no

"But let your speech be, 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no', and whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)"

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They Think They've Won!

Part 9

THE TRIUMPH OF MODERNISM OVER CATHOLIC EXEGESIS

In our last article we showed how those in modernist Rome "think they've won" even in the field of Catholic exegesis, an apparent and ephemeral victory, as we are assured by the divine promise-*non praevalerunt* (*They will not prevail*). Yet, this modernist victory has had devastating repercussions on the entire life of the Church, and threatens to eradicate the faith of Catholics, from the clergy down to the simple faithful. To prove this, it is simply a matter of considering the heresies that are propagated concerning Holy Scripture, or of casting a glance at the humblest of parish bulletins.

Starting in the reign of Pope Pius X until the year 1960, it seemed as though the Church had triumphed over the assaults of the modernist heresy. Actually, the forces of evil lay hidden in the shadows, preparing for the explosion of the neo-modernist crisis in the Second Vatican Council. St. Pius X himself had warned that the:

...(M)odernists have not abandoned their schemes of disturbing the peace of the Church. In fact, they have never stopped looking for new followers, whom they gather together in secret associations (Motu Proprio, *Sacrorum Antistitum*, September 1, 1910).

Even before the last Council, alarming symptoms of a fresh outbreak of modernism were making themselves felt here and there in the Catholic world, especially in Biblical studies. We may well point out that just as it was in Biblical studies that modernism first came to maturation through Fr. Alfred Loisy, it was also in the same domain that the rebirth of modernism made its formal reappearance. This time, however, it was not in Paris at the Institut Catholique that modernism was reborn, but rather in Rome, at the Pontifical Biblical Institute. This Institute had been established by Popes Leo XIII and St. Pius X to defend and protect Biblical studies from modernism, which is the poison that St. Pius X had exposed (*Pascendi*, 1907) as being hidden "in the very veins and in the bowels" of the Church, and which was now even attacking Its head.

In order to explain this phenomenon, no one has seemed to us to be more competent than Msgr. Francesco Spadafora who, together with Msgr. Romeo (now deceased), opposed it openly as soon as it made its appearance in 1960. (The titles and subtitles are added by *si si no no*.-Ed.)

A QUESTION OF VITAL IMPORTANCE

She [Perpetua] finally arrived, shamelessly, with a large cabbage under her arm, as if nothing had happened, leaving the poor Don Abbondio to his suffering, after he had pleaded with her for a solution to his problem.

This passage from Manzoni (*I Promessi Sposi* [*The Betrothed*] ch. II) came to memory when I read that long-awaited document from the Pontifical Biblical Commission, first spoken of some time ago, and published last November under the title: *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Libreria editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1993, 126 pages). This document was prefaced by the speech given by his Holiness John Paul II on April 23, 1993 during an audience which he gave commemorating the centenary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* and the fiftieth anniversary of Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, both of which dealt with Biblical questions.

It was during this audience that Card. Ratzinger presented John Paul II with the document prepared by the Pontifical Biblical Commission:

It is with great delight that I receive this document, the fruit of a collegial effort undertaken on your initiative, Cardinal Ratzinger, and pursued with utmost perseverance over a number of years. It provides an answer to one of the concerns which I take to heart, since the interpretation of Holy Scripture is of capital importance for the Christian Faith and for the life of the Church...

This preamble is followed by an explanation of the value of the two Encyclicals by Leo XIII and Pius XII devoted to Biblical questions. This explanation was summarized in the following manner by Msgr. Gianfranco Ravasi in the October 1993 edition of *Gesit*: the encyclical *Providentissimus* (1893) by Leo XIII against rationalism (modernism), is "apostolic." *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) by Pius XII, on the contrary, holds strictly to a positive line, urging Catholic exegetes to make scientific studies of Holy Scripture, and to make use of the instruments now made available through the progress of the various auxiliary sciences, like archaeology, philology and literary criticism, etc.

In his address on this occasion, John Paul II did not even touch upon this problem which has so troubled the Church since 1960. At the same time, the Pontifical Biblical Institute has openly adopted the two latest rationalist systems, *Formengeschichte* (R. Bultmann, H. Dibelius, 1920) and *Redaktionsgeschichte* (1945), completely disregarding the magisterium's precise doctrinal teachings found in all of its official documents. These new systems repudiate those three pillars of truth which serve as the foundation of Catholic exegesis: the divine inspiration of Holy Scriptures, their absolute inerrancy, and the historical authenticity of the four Holy Gospels.

These three basic truths of the Catholic Faith, constantly reaffirmed up to the time of Vatican II (see its declaration on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*), are now denied. The modernists now offer an interpretation of the Conciliar text, prepared by the Jesuit Fathers of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, with Card. Carlo Maria Martini, presently Archbishop of Milan, as their head. The document drafted by them, which was approved by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, states that they "do not claim to take a definite position on all the questions concerning the Bible, such as, for example, the theology concerning its inspiration" (p.28). It is as though they were dealing with secondary matters, rather than those of "capital importance for the Christian Faith and the life of the Church."

THE (CAUTIOUS) FAVOR OF CARDINAL RATZINGER

In the document's Preface (pp. 21-23), written by Card. Ratzinger himself, we read:

In the history of [Biblical] interpretation, the use of the historical-critical method has marked the beginning of a new era. Thanks to this method, new possibilities of understanding Biblical texts in their original meaning have come forth.

The above statement would seem to be the opinion of an incompetent person, of one who is not only ignorant of the great progress made in authentic Catholic exegesis, from Pope Leo XIII's pontificate to this day, but who is also ignorant of the destruction caused by the so-called "historical-critical method." The Cardinal continues:

Everything that helps us to better understand the truth...offers a valuable contribution to theology. It is in this sense that we can say that it is just that the historical-critical method be accepted in theological work. We must reject everything that limits our horizons and prevents us from seeing and hearing that which is above and beyond what is simply human, so that there is always an opening [to other possibilities]. This is why the appearance of the historical-critical method immediately gave rise to a bitter controversy regarding its usefulness and its true configuration. Up to the present time, this debate has in no way come to a conclusion. In these matters, the magisterium of the Church has, a number of times, taken its position through important documents....Leo XIII in particular expressed various criticisms....Pope Pius XII tended to give more leeway to encouragement of these doctrines...

Such is the thesis put forth by the "innovators" of the Pontifical Biblical Institute:

...but only after the death of that Pope. *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation (November 18, 1965), takes up all of these issues, bringing together the enduring perspective of patristic theology and the new methodological knowledge of the moderns, giving us a synthesis which remains authorized....The Pontifical Biblical Commission gave itself the task, one hundred years after the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* and fifty years after the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, of seeking to define a position for Catholic exegesis for our times.

Newly confirmed after Vatican II, the Pontifical Biblical Commission is not a branch of the magisterium. Rather, it is a committee of experts who, conscious of their scientific and ecclesiastical responsibilities as Catholic exegetes, take positions on basic problems of scriptural interpretation. They are also aware of having the confidence of the magisterium in these matters....I believe that this document opens up new perspectives, and that it truly supplies valuable assistance in clarifying the matter of finding the right path that leads to understanding Holy Scripture. It follows along the same lines as the encyclicals of 1893 and 1943, and fruitfully extends their line of thought.

JUST A FEW OBSERVATIONS:

"That the historical-critical method be accepted in theological work is just," says Card. Ratzinger.

This is not very clear language. Perhaps it was deliberately meant to cover up the treachery perpetrated against the magisterium of the Church in the domain of Catholic exegesis. *Formengeschichte*, or the theory of the "history of forms," is understood here to be an "historical-critical method" (see p.32 of the document), and is one of the rationalist methods clearly opposed to the three revealed truths which constitute the foundations of Catholic exegesis: divine inspiration of Holy Scriptures, their absolute inerrancy, and the historical authenticity of the four Holy Gospels. Moreover, this "method" denies the dogmatic principle by which the infallible magisterium of the Church is the "proximate norm" for the Catholic exegete. (We will be later documenting amply what we are simply mentioning here).

For Card. Ratzinger, why is it right "that the historical-critical method be accepted in theological work"? A theologian worthy of the name should realize that what is at stake here is dogmatic in nature, since it concerns the very foundations of the Catholic Church. For this reason, Card. Ratzinger, with his title of Prefect of the Congregation for the Faith, should have intervened a long time ago, in order to bring this scandal to an end - a scandal that has existed since 1960, and which has poisoned, and is now poisoning students of the Pontifical Biblical Institute with its venom.

Card. Ratzinger has declared that the debate on the usefulness of the historical-critical method "has in no way come to a conclusion." If this is the case, what have these "experts" been working on for so long? Why have there been repeated announcements about this document, only to arrive at no conclusion? So, while studies are being carried out in Rome, or rather, while it is said that these matters are being studied, the Church is at the mercy of heretics.

And yet, the reasons for ending the "debate on the usefulness of the historical-critical method" do exist. We have barely alluded to them, but even the least "expert" of readers is able to realize this. The debate has not been closed for the simple reason that those responsible do not want it to come to a conclusion, to the great advantage of error and heresy.

For Card. Ratzinger, however, the debate has somehow come to an end through the "synthesis" of old and new forms of exegesis, a synthesis which, he says, is "authorized." But through which interpretation? In the one circulated by the Pontifical Biblical Institute, since it furnishes this synthesis with its own special arguments?

It is absolutely false that such a document "follows along the same lines as the encyclicals of 1893 (Leo XIII) and 1943 (Pius XII), and extends their line of thought in a fruitful manner." This is easily demonstrated, and we will do so later on.

VAIN ATTEMPTS

When Card. Ratzinger took up his position in the former Holy Office, I made it my duty to provide him with all the necessary information on the rebirth of modernism in the field of Scriptural studies, information which was contained in my book *Leo XIII and Biblical Studies* (Rovigo, 1976).

My efforts had no effect, however, and when I read the book *L'Esegesi Cristiana Oggi* (*Christian Exegesis Today*) (ed. Piemme, 1991, 246 pages), containing the writings of Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., Romano Guardini, Joseph Ratzinger, Giuseppe Colombo, and Enzo Bianchi. I realized that it was altogether hopeless today to expect a remedy from the Dicastery, which is charged with the protection of Catholic doctrine.

Card. Ratzinger's name is thus to be found right next to that of Fr. Ignace de la Potterie, the promoter of the historical-critical method, who denies the historic authenticity of the Gospels, and who advocates the erroneous, heretical interpretation of *Dei Verbum*.

Once again I felt it was my duty to protest against these matters with Card. Ratzinger in person. I requested an audience with him at the beginning of June, and which I obtained for July 25.

Amongst other things, I told him that "the magisterium is *here*, and *not* at the Biblical Institute." Card. Ratzinger answered by mentioning that the Holy Father intended to intervene personally on the question of Biblical studies, after which I was kindly dismissed. Then, on April 23, 1993, John Paul II gave his disappointing speech, which appears at the beginning of this article.

Wishing to leave no stone unturned in defense of the dogmas that constitute the foundations of Catholic exegesis, I decided to try to interest the Italian bishops in these questions. In a meeting that Archbishop Giuseppe Agostino (Vice President of the Conference of Italian Bishops) kindly granted to me, I explained this very grave matter to His Excellency and left him with all the necessary documentation. About one month later, I received the following response:

Dear Professor,

First of all, I would like to express my great satisfaction in having met you. I understand well the seriousness of the problems you have brought to my attention, and have carefully read all the information that you kindly left with me. We must, of course, know how to accept what the magisterium itself proposes to us (cf. *Dei Verbum*). We are all aware of the fact that in recent times, as you have pointed out to me, various advanced, and sometimes deviant positions have arisen. However, I can say that the Pontifical Biblical Commission establishes norms for the interpretation of Sacred Scripture.

Trusting in the work of the Spirit and in the hope of a humbler and more luminous Church, I remain respectfully yours,

Crotone, June 24, 1993

Giuseppe Agostino, Archbishop

Towards the end of July, I sent the Archbishop the following letter:

Your Excellency,

The Letter that Your Excellency was good enough to send me on June 24 has bitterly disappointed my expectations. However, I allow myself to make a few observations since I am sure of yours Excellency's comprehension, and confident in your goodness towards me.

There is no truth of Faith as clearly expressed by all the Fathers as that of the absolute inerrancy of Holy Scripture, a truth that echoes the words of Jesus: *Is it not written...Scripture cannot be broken?* The infallible magisterium is unanimous on this score. For example, we have Vatican Council I, and Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus*, which was defined as the Magna Charta for Holy Scripture by Pius XII.

...It was in order to comply with the rationalists, by accepting their two latest systems, *Formengeschichte* and *Redaktionsgeschichte*, that the Pontifical Biblical Institute abjured Catholic doctrine (see *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Feb 20, 1993). At the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, the professors of the Pontifical Biblical Institute asked for the restriction of the infallibility of Holy Scriptures to passages concerning dogma and morals. The result of this was to render superfluous the doctrines of the Faith concerning the divine inspiration of the Bible. These matters had already been proposed as part of their teaching, starting in 1960, at which point the Holy Office intervened.

It is therefore not a question of some advanced, and sometimes deviant positions, but of programmatic deviations concerning dogma; true heresies stubbornly upheld and proclaimed, scandalizing the faithful. I would like to point out one final example demonstrating this fact. Recently, on May 6, 1993, before an audience containing many professors and students, Msgr. Romano Penna (professor of Holy Scriptures at the University of the Lateran) had the impertinence to present all the quibblings and inventions of rationalist Protestants as proof against the authenticity and historicity of Jesus' words concerning the primacy of St. Peter and of his successors, the Roman Pontiffs. He pretends that these texts (Matt. 16:17-19; Lk.22:8-13; and Jn. 21:15-19) are simply belated creations of the second century, thought up by the "Petrine" faction and the Roman community. This is exactly like what Fr. Alfred Loisy, the leader of the modernists, (and excommunicated by St. Pius X), had dreamt up.

As for Card. Ratzinger, we can expect nothing from him. He seems to be completely under the influence of the Jesuits of the Biblical Institute, and particularly under that of Ignace de la Potterie, S.J....In short, it seems to be impossible to have any confidence in the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

God knows that I am not lying. Shortly after His Eminence Card. Ratzinger's arrival in Rome to take up his new duties, I was received in audience with him. For more than one half hour, I was able to inform him of the grave situation caused by the Pontifical Biblical Institute, which has broken with the magisterium of the Church, and which is presently engaged in open warfare with supreme Dicastery of the ex-Holy Office. I left him with my books as documentation.

He graciously agreed with what I put before him. On several other occasions I tried, but always with the utmost difficulty, to obtain an audience with him. However, on July 25 of last year I did succeed after a month-long wait. Again, this time, I was received graciously by His Eminence for about one half hour. In this audience I protested vigorously against the publication of the book, *Esegesi cristiana oggi*, (*Christian Exegesis Today*), written by Ignace de la Potterie, the Cardinal, etc. In this book, Fr. de la Potterie denies the absolute inerrancy and authenticity of Holy Scripture, justifying these positions through recourse to *Dei Verbum*. And so, His Eminence, by participating in Fr. de la Potterie's book, with a study of R. Bultmann's *Formengeschichte*, gives the logical impression of sharing the same heresies.

Finally, given the seriousness of this crisis, which has existed since 1960 with enormous damage to the students of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, many of whom are now professors of the Holy Scripture in universities and seminaries, I decided to speak about these matters to the Conference of Italian Bishops, of which Your Excellency is Vice-President. In the eyes of God, Catholic bishops are seriously bound in conscience to preserve and defend the deposit of the Faith (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 4:7).

CONCLUSION

So, in the end with things being as they are, I felt it was my duty to speak out publicly on those essential points, established by the infallible magisterium (extraordinary and ordinary), which form the basis of Catholic exegesis. It was also my intention to inform readers on the treachery perpetrated against the Church by the Pontifical Biblical Commission and the Pontifical Biblical Institute, which are in favor of the kind of "criticism" that destroys everything supernatural, and which rejects the basic teachings established by the magisterium for Catholic exegesis.-Msgr.Francesco Spadafora

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