

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

June 23, 2024

Newsletter no. 223

As we continue our discussion on the Bible, it is time to say something about what biblical inspiration means. Thus far we have spoken about how the Bible came into its present state and about the languages in which the Bible was not only written but also translated into. The issue of inspiration has to do with how the Bible can claim to be the Word of God.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) had this to say in one of its most important documents, the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*: “Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the apostles, holds that both the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church itself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and, while employed by him, they made use of their powers and abilities, so that, with him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things that he wanted. Therefore, as everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully and without error the truth that God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation. Therefore, ‘all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correcting, for instruction in justice, so that the man of God may be perfect, equipped for every good work’ (2 Timothy 3:16-17).”

This important statement expresses the Church’s traditional understanding of the inspired nature of the Bible without at the same time giving more than a vague explanation of how inspiration works. As the document says, God chose men and acted in them and through them so that, as true authors who were using their own powers and abilities, they wrote all the things that he wanted, and only those things.

But how, exactly, did God use human beings to produce his teachings in written form? That the Holy Spirit must have dictated the words of Scripture to them, so that they simply copied them down, was a theory held by many ancient theologians, but it has now been discredited; the authors of Scripture were not automatons. Or did the authors of Scripture write whatever they wrote in such a way that it would later be approved by the Spirit? But the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* rejects this theory when it states that the Spirit was “acting in them and through them” precisely as they were writing. Was there a combination of the Spirit’s inspiration and human authorship, with the result that the Bible was the product of both factors? If so, how were the Spirit’s and the human contributions parceled out? Or was the Spirit’s inspiration based on the Church’s acceptance, so that once the Church accepted the Scriptures as inspired (which was a process that was only completed in the fourth century and which will be discussed in a future newsletter), they were then seen as inspired, but not before? But that would mean that the Spirit’s inspiration was dependent on the Church’s acceptance of it, although God is dependent on nothing.

Any discussion of the Bible’s inspiration has to contend with the realization that Scripture contains factual errors, instances of immorality that are not only not condemned but even presented as praiseworthy, and quite a bit of tampering with history; examples of each of these could easily be produced. If we are to accept that the Bible teaches “firmly, faithfully and without error the truth that God wanted to put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation,” then we will have to set aside some of what Scripture says, most especially in the Old Testament, as not immediately relevant to God’s purpose of instructing us “for the sake of our salvation.” In that case, if “everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit,” then “everything” should be understood in a general rather than a particular sense, as applying to the Bible as a whole rather than necessarily to this or that particular phrase or passage.

As we can see from what has been said here, biblical inspiration is a difficult concept to understand and equally difficult to explain. Clearly, the last word on the meaning of biblical inspiration remains to be spoken.

A forthcoming newsletter will say something about how the books of the Bible came to be accepted as inspired and authoritative texts.

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from June 22nd to 30th

Saturday-Sunday, June 22nd-23rd

4:00 pm: Eileen Castello (D)
8:00 am: St. Joseph's Parishioners
10:00 am: Dorothy Ehmser (D)
12:00 noon: Michael LoCicero (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Katarine Gerencser (D)
6:00 pm: In Thanksgiving to Jesus

Monday, June 24th (The Birth of St. John the Baptist)

7:00 am: Juliano Abaton (D)
12:15 pm: Brandon Kelly (D)

Tuesday, June 25th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: John Flanery (L)

Wednesday, June 26th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Miecio Majowicz (D)

Thursday, June 27th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Mary McHugh (D), Birthday

Friday, June 28th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Mimi Aliperti (D)

Saturday, June 29th (Sts. Peter and Paul)

8:00 am: Ann Cleary (D)
12:15 pm: Paul Schuler (L)
4:00 pm: Stan Sitarski (D), First Anniversary

Sunday, June 30th

8:00 am: St. Joseph's Parishioners
10:00 am: Patricia Casey (D)
12:00 noon: Ray Hess (D)
6:00 pm: Martin Wales (D)

The Hungarian Mass, usually held at 2:00 pm, is canceled today.