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Veritas Scripturae

The Bulletin of the St. Jerome Biblical Guild

A publication that focuses upon the doctrines
of Biblical inspiration and inerrancy —
in light of Tradition and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church

“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth” (Jn 17:17)



From the Director: Papal Motivation for the Task

The discovery of Pope Benedict XV's papal encyclical, *Spiritus Paraclitus* (On the Fifteenth Centenary of the Death of St. Jerome), decades ago, was a turning point in my intellectual formation. Divine Providence used this document to train and encourage me, with a Catholic mindset, to read and study and meditate upon God's Word.

Promulgated in 1920, *Spiritus Paraclitus* falls under the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Catholic Church. Available in pamphlet form, the length is about 40 pages. Written in plain language, the encyclical is the right blend of history, doctrine, and practical application.

Spiritus Paraclitus focuses upon the “Father of Biblical Studies,” St. Jerome; an influence behind *Veritas Scripturae*. Some of the highlights from the document:

- St. Jerome and his work.
- His teachings on inspiration, authority, and inerrancy.
- The errors of the Modernists.
- The uses of Holy Writ for the Church Militant.
- The graces derived from the knowledge of the Scriptures.

Much could be written about this forgotten papal dispatch. Please read it; *Spiritus Paraclitus* is the Magisterium at her finest.

Godspeed,
Salvatore J. Ciresi, M.A.

St. Jerome (A.D. 343-420) says:

“Read assiduously and learn as much as you can. Let sleep find you holding your Bible, and when your head nods let it be resting on the sacred page” (Letter 22.17.2; A.D. 384).

“Constantly read the Bible; in fact, have it always in your hands. Learn what you have got to teach” (Letter 52.7.1; A.D. 394).

“Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (*Commentary on Isaiah* bk. 18, prologue; A.D. 408-410).

“Love the Bible and wisdom will love you...” (Letter 130.20; A.D. 414).

Scripture Memorization and Exegesis from the Old Testament:

Sirach 2:1-6

“My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation. Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be hasty in time of calamity. Cleave to Him and do not depart, that you may be honored at the end of your life. Accept whatever is brought upon you, and in changes that humble you be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in Him, and He will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in Him” (Sir 2:1-6).

The book of Sirach goes by the Latin title, “Ecclesiasticus,” in older English translations. On the book’s value, “St. Augustine professed himself to have ‘discovered more essential material in this work’ than in any other of the Scriptures” (N. McEleney, gen. ed., *Pamphlet Bible Series* 40:13). The Greek translation is the canonical text.

The decision to “serve the Lord” (recall the Heb. phrase *na'āvōdh 'eth-yehwāh* from an earlier study of Josh 24:14-15) is the main theme in the pericope of Sirach 2:1-6. Here are three points.

Firstly, a believer’s commitment to the one, true God comes with the warning about “temptation” or “testing” (the Gr. *peirasmon* equals the Heb. *nissāyōn*). The “lead us not into temptation” line in Matthew 6:13, from the mouth of the Savior, comes in relief. St. Peter also: “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Pet 5:8-9).

Secondly, following the first point, is the call to be “steadfast” (*karterēson*) and to “cleave to Him” (*kollēthēti*). Related concepts are found in Sirach 6:7 and 44:19-20. The New Testament mirrors this thinking in James 1:2-4: “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”



Thirdly, one’s resignation to God’s will with docility, and by longsuffering, is brought home with a popular Biblical illustration (“gold is tested in the fire”). As precious metal is refined to bring out its best qualities, so the disciples of the Lord are humbled as a means of sanctification. The result — they are called “acceptable men” (Gr. *anthrōpoi dektoi* points to the Heb. *'anšē rāšōn*). This purification has a rich testimony in the Old Testament (cf. Ps 66:10; Prov 17:3; Wis 3:6; Is 48:10; Zech 13:9; Mal 3:3).

Ending this brief study, Fr. J. Cevetello gives an incentive for further reading and meditation upon Sirach: “This book aims to point out a way of life for those who seek wisdom and strive to live according to the Divine Law” (*Getting to Know the Bible*, p. 92). It is no surprise that Sirach was quoted so often by the Church Fathers.

In addition to the sources mentioned above, this column drew assistance from P. Skehan and A. Di Lella, *The Anchor Bible* 39:148-151, and L. Keck, et al., *The New Interpreter’s Bible* V:653-655.

Scripture Memorization and Exegesis from the New Testament:

Jude 3

“Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

The epistle of St. Jude is one chapter of 25 verses; approximately 461 words in the Greek text. This fills about two pages in a vernacular translation. Such a small missive may appear trivial, but the book is both inspired and inerrant; it rates our attention.

“Beloved” (*Agapētoi*), the opening word in the extract, is a familial name for the members of the Catholic Church. The term is used in like manner in Jude 17 and 20. Outside the epistle, the New Testament employs this same tender description (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 10:14; 2 Cor 12:19; Phil 4:1; Heb 6:9; 1 Pet 2:11; 2 Pet 3:8; 1 Jn 4:7; 3 Jn 5). In a related way, “beloved” also designates the Church’s head; Christ Himself (cf. Mt 12:18; Eph 1:6).

The words “our common salvation” (*tēs koinēs hēmōn sōtērias*), according to St. Bede the Venerable, conveys the unity among the Church Militant with respect to “one common salvation, one faith and one love of Christ” (G. Bray, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XI*:249). This unity or “oneness” is a mark of the Catholic Church. A “mark” is a quality or endowment that is attributed to the religious society founded by Jesus Christ (cf. P. Parente, et al., *Dictionary of Dogmatic Theology*, p.174). One may conclude, after reading St. Jude’s entire book, that there is a link between sound doctrine and ecclesial unity.



The term “faith” (*pistei*) used in Jude 3 signifies that collection of immutable truths known as the deposit of faith. These divine teachings are “incapable of increase or diminution” (J. MacEvilly, *An Exposition of the Epistles of St. Paul and of the Catholic Epistles II*: 466). Such unalterable instructions are non-negotiable for St. Jude: “In the face of danger, he exhorts the Christians to contend for the purity of the faith... preached by the Apostles as an unchangeable doctrine for all times” (Catholic Biblical Association, *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 651). This deposit is described as “the standard of teaching” in Romans 6:17, “the faith” of Colossians 2:7, and “the word of God” per 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (cf. E. Kevane, gen. ed., *Resources for Catechetical Teachers: Teaching the Catholic Faith Today*, pp. xix-xx).

The pivotal expression “delivered to the saints” (*paradotheisē tois hagiois*) is likely a reference to “catechetics”: the passing down of Catholic truth. The cognate Greek term *paradoseis*, which is rendered “traditions” in 1 Corinthians 11:2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15, and the related word *paradosin*, given as “tradition” in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, lends confirmation to this interpretation. St. Jude’s divine opus gives testimony that the Church of the New Testament took seriously the Master’s command to teach all the nations (cf. Mt 28:18-20).

Fr. E. Maly tells us that “Jude wrote to bolster the traditional faith and morality” (*New Testament Reading Guide* 12: 26). This is an incentive to grapple with this divine book that came from the age of the Apostles.

St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) was a battle-tested apologist, trusted guide for the interior life, revered member of the episcopacy, and a providential founder of a religious congregation. Such qualities led to his canonization, and later, his declaration as a Doctor of the Church. If one has never read anything about this luminary of the Catholic Church, then consider A. Ravier's *Francis de Sales: Sage and Saint*.

This learned bishop's attitude toward Holy Writ is a guide for every student of the Holy Bible. In his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, de Sales teaches:

“Always give good heed to the Word of God, whether you hear or read it in private, or hearken to it when publically preached: listen with attention and reverence; seek to profit by it, and do not let the precious words fall unheeded; receive them into your heart as a costly balsam; imitate the Blessed Virgin who ‘kept all the sayings’ concerning her Son ‘in her heart.’ And remember that according as we hearken to and receive God’s words, so will He hearken and receive our supplications” (II:XVII).

Francis tells us that attentiveness and devotion to the Sacred Scriptures are not limited to lectures or during Holy Mass. Truly, our focus and respect should be shown to the divine word even during our personal studies. We should follow the example from our Heavenly Mother, who meditated upon revealed truth (cf. Lk 2:19, 51). Indeed, there is a relation between how intently we listen to God speak in Divine Revelation and His subsequent response to our prayers. This implies the Catholic adage that grace builds upon nature.

Near the end of his life, St. Francis would say of God's Word: **“In the first place, we must prepare ourselves to hear it with the attention it deserves, not as if it were just any other word. As a woman who did not love her husband more than her servant would not love him enough, nor as she should; as a child who would love his father with a love equal only to that he bore his tutor would not love his father properly; so whoever hears a sermon with the same dispositions and attention he pays to any entertaining story or tale, does not hear it as he should. If his pleasure is the same for both, one could certainly conclude that he did not love God’s word sufficiently. To dispose ourselves to understand it well we ought to open our hearts in the presence of the Divine Majesty, receptive to this heavenly dew...”** (L. Fiorelli, ed., *The Sermons of St. Francis de Sales for Lent*, p. 156).

“Always give good heed to the Word of God, whether you hear or read it...”

The saint points to the required interior disposition for receiving benefits from the Scriptures. There we find the voice of God Himself — the “Divine Majesty” (a favorite Salesian expression). Thus, to treat Holy Writ in the same manner one views television, reads the local newspaper, or listens to the radio, is unacceptable. St. Francis tells us the Book of Books deserves better.

The holiness of St. Francis de Sales is worthy of imitation. The faithful would do well to likewise copy his esteem for the Sacred Page. We should not overlook the saint's zeal for God's Word; as much a trait of Francis as his renowned gentleness. Abundant proofs on this matter can be discovered in De Sales' *The Catholic Controversy*.

The Church Fathers and Scripture:

The School of Antioch

Fr. Aloys Dirksen writes in *Elementary Patrology*: “Antioch had been for years a great center of pagan scholarship and its Christian school was started to counteract the influence of Origen and the Alexandrian school. All these early Christian schools, although theological, were chiefly exegetical. The Antiochian school concentrated on the literal, historical, and grammatical study and exposition of Scripture” (pp. 56-57). The previous column examined Alexandria; now, a look at Antioch.

Antioch of Syria was founded circa 300 B.C. by Seleucus I Nicator (d. 281 B.C.). In the Old Testament era, Antioch was the royal city of the Seleucid Empire, with the municipal serving as a kind of headquarters (cf. 1 Macc 3:37; 4:35). Moving to the New Testament period, St. Paul spent some time in Antioch; a base for his early mission trips (cf. Acts 13:1-3; 15:35). The memorable line in Acts 11:26 discloses “in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians.” As an aside, the Scriptures mention a second Antioch; tied to the region of Pisidia (cf. Acts 13:14; 14:21).

The School of Antioch launched near the end of the Third Century. Lucian is often attached to the institution’s beginning. Other names connected with the place are Eustathius of Antioch, Titus of Bostra, Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and John Chrysostom. The gem of the group is the latter; one of the “Great Doctors of the East” — renowned for his preaching, exegesis, and heroism. Chrysostom’s commentaries, accessible to this day, remain popular in academic circles.



Following the Dirksen quote as a guide, the thrust of the Antiochene practice to read Holy Writ with respect to the literal sense may be described twofold. Firstly, there is the stress given to the historical context of each book of God’s Word. Here is an example from each inspired Testament. One will grasp the meaning of a book such as Leviticus only when situating it within the background of the Pentateuch. One will grasp the meaning of a book such as Hebrews only when situating it within the background of worship in the First Century. Secondly, with the Antiochene method, there is an attention directed to the grammar of the Sacred Page. In our time, think of how valuable are the scholarly monographs of even a single key Biblical term or phrase, such as “atonement,” “Son of Man,” “law,” or “day of the LORD.”

In view of both Alexandria and Antioch, Fr. Boniface Ramsey states: “What the Fathers lacked in the kinds of exegetical skills that we consider indispensable today, they made up for, first of all, by their very proximity to the time of the composition of the New Testament, whose human authors used some of the same techniques, like typology and allegory, that the Fathers themselves used. They had a certain sensitivity, in other words, to the style and method of the New Testament that we have unavoidably lost. In addition, thanks to their insistence on seeing Christ as the fundamental meaning of the Old Testament, and of course of the New, they had an infallible standard by which to judge what they read and how it was understood” (*Beginning to Read the Fathers*, p. 39).

St. Thomas Aquinas and Revelation:

Commentary on John 8:58

The ageless commentary on the fourth Gospel by the Angelic Doctor stands out by its theological richness and devotional efficacy. John 8:58 will be the focus.

Here is some context as the Divine Savior faces His opponents:

“Jesus answered, ‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that He is your God. But you have not known Him; I know Him. If I said, I do not know Him, I should be a liar like you; but I do know Him and I keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.’ The Jews then said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’ (Jn 8:54-58).

The words above have taken place in the Temple, in or near the treasury (Jn 8:2, 20, 59). In the bigger picture, this part of St. John’s Gospel is often called the “Book of Signs;” chapters 1 to 12. The signs from that portion are the seven notable miracles by the Messiah. Chapters 13 to 21 are known as the “Book of Glory;” this section centers upon the suffering and exaltation of the God-man.

With that background, here is Thomas (adapted from F. Larcher, trans., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1-8*, pp. 486-7):

“Because Christ had said that Abraham rejoiced that he was to see his day, the Jews, having a carnal mind and considering only his physical age, ridiculed him and said, ‘you are not yet fifty years old.’ Indeed, he was not yet fifty years old, or even forty, but closer to thirty: ‘and Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age’ (Lk 3:23). The Jews said, ‘you are not yet fifty years old,’ probably because they held the year of Jubilee in the greatest reverence and



computed everything in terms of it — it was a time for freeing captives and giving up certain possessions. They were saying in effect: you have not yet lived beyond the span of a Jubilee, and have you seen Abraham? However, our Lord did not say that he saw Abraham, but that Abraham saw his day.

To counteract their ridicule, our Lord answers the Jews by explaining his words, saying, ‘amen, amen I say to you, before Abraham was made, I am.’ These words of our Lord mentions two things about himself that are noteworthy and efficacious against the Arians. One is that, as Gregory says, he combines words of present and past time, because before signifies the past, and am signifies the present. Therefore, in order to show that he is eternal, and to indicate that his existence is an eternal existence, he does not say, before Abraham, I was, but ‘before Abraham, I am.’ For eternal existence knows neither past nor future time, but embraces all time in one indivisible instant. Thus it could be said: ‘he who is, sent me to you,’ and ‘I am who am’ (Ex 3:14). Jesus had being both before Abraham and after him, and he could approach him by showing himself in the present and be after him in the course of time.

The other point, according to Augustine, is that when speaking of Abraham, a creature, he did not say, before Abraham was, but ‘before Abraham was made.’ Yet when speaking of himself, in order to show that he was not made as a creature is, but was eternally begotten from the essence of the Father, he does not say, I came to be, but ‘I am’ he who ‘in the beginning was the Word’ (Jn 1:1); ‘before the hills, I was brought forth’ (Prov 8:25). ”

Aquinas employs the Gospel of St. John to refute the opponents of Christ’s Deity. This is a lesson for Biblical Apologetics today: Thomas’ same arguments are still valid when addressing modern opponents such as Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The Magisterium Speaks:

Pope Pius XI's *Biblorum Scientiam*: Timeless Directions for Today

Pope Pius XI (r. 1922-1939) issued an Apostolic Letter, *motu proprio*, named *Biblorum Scientiam*. This 1924 papal document, probably little known today, conveys perennial guidance for Bible students in the Twenty-First Century.

The Holy Father explains in his opening paragraph: **“From the beginnings of the Christian religion up to now, writings that teach and defend the faith demonstrate particularly how much the Church has always esteemed biblical studies. In fact, whatever we know of God, of Christ the redeemer of the human race, of the innate constitution of the Church and of instruction about morality relies on and is supported by the sacred Books which are one of the sources, no less than unwritten tradition, of divine revelation. This is why the more biblical studies have flourished, so much the more has it been necessary either to explain the truth or refute deceptive errors brought with great ill-will against the divinity of Christ and the Church. When non-Catholics and rationalists advanced in their rashness and audacity up to the point of attacking the authority of Sacred Scripture itself and its immunity from error, it seemed to Us necessary that Catholics should descend into the arena well supplied with a balanced erudition in order to defend the divine gift of heavenly Wisdom against the devices of false knowledge”**

The Supreme Pontiff's text addresses both the doctrinal and the practical spheres. His words could have been uttered today; we still face the same challenges. Here are three observations from the Apostolic Letter.

Firstly, Pius speaks of [“how much the Church has always esteemed biblical studies.”](#) History has shown that his papal predecessors, and successors, have manifested the same attitude and encouragement for the Divine Letters (a fact which justifies publishing a bulletin such as *Veritas Scripturæ*). Long and deep study of God's Word is one of the best intellectual exercises, with its attendant periods of contemplation, that may be undertaken by a believer. The Catholic Church approves of such labors.



Secondly, the Vicar of Christ does not shy away from calling out the critics who attack [“the authority of Sacred Scripture itself and its immunity from error.”](#) Pius confronts those outside the fold who were attacking the power and veracity of Holy Writ, but it was evident that the attacks came also from within Holy Mother Church. Modernism was a danger to the Catholic Faith at that time, as neo-Modernism is a danger to the Faith at this time. The Pope knew of this threat; his own Holy Office (today's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), less than six months earlier, had to condemn a text, *Manuel biblique ou Cours d'Écriture Sainte à l'usage des Séminaires* — a purportedly Catholic work that found its way into Catholic circles (see the 1923 letter, *Iam Pluribus*).

Thirdly, the Holy Father says [“Catholics should descend into the arena well supplied with a balanced erudition.”](#) The Church Militant ought to train with prayer, humility, and charity. Such preparation will undergird scholarship that is reasonable and has depth.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission:

The Response of 1908, Part IV

Part I in the opening column on the 1908 Response on Isaiah set down the actual document. Part II covered some basics on the office of prophet. Part III surveyed the main New Testament passages that specifically name Isaiah. Part IV, this closing column, will end with some final considerations on the Response.

The Response, recall, was formatted into five questions. Questions 1 to 3 defends fulfilled prophecy, one of the “motives of credibility.” This adheres to Vatican I’s *Dei Filius* chapter 3 (1870), about a generation earlier, which gave some particulars on the motives, when it stated, in part, “in order that the submission of our faith be conformed to reason, God willed that, joined to internal helps of the Holy Spirit, there be external proofs of His revelation, namely divine acts, especially miracles and prophecies. Since these proofs splendidly display God’s omnipotence and infinite knowledge, they are most reliable signs of revelation, and are adapted to the intelligence of all men” (J. Broderick, trans., *Documents of Vatican Council I: 1869-1870*, p. 43). The Biblical Commission, following the First Vatican Council, is refuting the error known by the Latin phrase *vaticinium ex eventu*: “prophesying from an outcome.” This error states that rather than a true prediction, one has only a prophecy placed on the lips of a narrative figure after a real, subsequent event (cf. A. Patzia and A. Petrotta, *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies*, pp. 121-122). In other words, one has predictions retrofitted back into the book. This error undermines both the writing, as well as the person, of Isaiah.



Matters of philology (i.e., language and style) are mentioned in Questions 4 and 5. In this light, much language and style is common to both Isaiah 1—39 and 40—66. A crucial example is the expression “Holy One of Israel,” spread over both parts; twelve times in Isaiah 1—39 (Is 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23) and thirteen times in Isaiah 40—66 (Is 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14). The phrase appears only five times in the rest of the Old Testament (Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Jer 50:29; 51:5). Designations for Israel itself, found in both sections and unique to Isaiah, also witness to a single author: “deaf” (Is 29:18; 42:18), “blind” (Is 35:5; 42:16), “who forsake the LORD” (Is 1:28; 65:11), “ransomed of the LORD” (Is 35:10; 51:11), and “work of my hands” (Is 29:23; 60:21). More details are found in R. Margalioth’s *The Indivisible Isaiah*.

In addition to the philological aspect, the Dead Sea Scrolls testify to a lone writer for Isaiah. The “Isaiah Scroll,” perhaps the oldest complete copy of an Old Testament book, shows “chapter 40 begins on the very last line of the column which contains 38:9—39:8... the scribe was not conscious of the alleged fact that an important change of situation, involving an entire change of authorship begins with chapter 40” (O. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah*, p. 40).

Finally, the Isaian origin of the full work was the norm until the late 1700s. Both the Jewish and Christian testimonies agree on this point of authorship. One cannot ignore such a tradition (cf. E. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah* II:xii).

The book of Daniel is the last among the four “major” prophets (following Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) in contemporary Bible translations. Daniel lived in the Sixth Century B.C., with the Jewish exiles, in the locale of Babylonia. He gives us an eyewitness record of this dispersion, and also sets down future events (i.e., prophecy).

Daniel opens: “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it” (Dan 1:1). Observe a related account from Jeremiah 46:1-2: “The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations. About Egypt. Concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates at Carchemish and which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah.”

Here is some background. Jehoiakim ruled Judah, the Southern Kingdom of a divided Israel, 609-597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon 605-562 B.C. He is known for his interventions into Judea, especially 597 B.C. and 586 B.C. Daniel and Jeremiah are speaking above about an intrusion in 605 B.C., when Daniel was taken captive. Neco, 609 B.C. at Meggido, took the life of King Josiah. Neco put Jehoahaz on the throne (3 mos.), then replaced him with Jehoiakim. Before Daniel’s exile, the Pharaoh in 605 B.C. lost his territory west of the river to the rising Babylonians (cf. E. Clendenen, et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary*, p. 822 and J. MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, pp. 876, 947-950).



Now, back to the passages of Daniel and Jeremiah; their veracity the focus. An apparent discrepancy arises from the year of action by Nebuchadnezzar (or Nebuchadrezzar). Daniel 1:1 says “third” (Heb., *shālōsh*), while Jeremiah 46:2 reads “fourth” (Heb., *hārēvī’ith*). Is there a solution?

There is an easy answer. R.K. Harrison states in his reliable *Introduction to the Old Testament*: “This difference of one year can be accounted for by the fact that in Babylonia the year in which the king ascended the throne was designated specifically as ‘the year of the accession to the kingdom,’ and this was followed by the first, second, and subsequent years of rule. In Palestine, on the other hand, there was no accession year as such, so that the length of rule was computed differently with the year of accession being regarded as the first year of the particular reign. Daniel thus reckoned according to the Babylonian system of chronology, while Jeremiah followed the normal Palestinian pattern. Consequently, the third year of the Daniel-system of computation would be identical with the fourth year in that employed by Jeremiah, an explanation that removes the alleged difficulty” (p. 1112).

The precise year described by Daniel 1:1 and Jeremiah 46:2 is likely 605 B.C. Whatever the exact date, the main difficulty in these passages is alleviated when the two different ways to render chronology in the Near East are taken into account. For further reading on this and other intricacies in the inspired text from Daniel, see Robert Dick Wilson’s *Studies in the Book of Daniel*.

The life of the man variously called "Simon" (Jn 1:42) or "Cephas" (1 Cor 15:5) or "Peter" (Acts 1:13), within the pages of the New Testament, offers a fascinating study. He is one of the great personages from Sacred History. For a Catholic, most important is his ecclesiastical office, not his person. The Bible throws light on this role of St. Peter.

One may begin with the three crucial pericopes in the Gospels: Matthew 16:13-19; Luke 22:31-32; and John 21:15-19. The Matthean texts disclose the name change which indicates a raising in status, an establishment of a foundation for the Catholic Church as the New Israel, and an explicit authority connected to this calling. The Lukan verses single out St. Peter from among the Twelve to reinforce papal primacy. The Johanian section is a threefold confirmation which makes amends for a painful threefold denial earlier in John 18:15-27. A notable treatment of the pericopes is found in S. Butler, et al., *Jesus, Peter & the Keys: A Scriptural Handbook on the Papacy*.

Moving forward to the book of Acts, it becomes evident why St. Peter is called the "Prince of the Apostles." The inspired tome offers this survey about the inaugural Roman Pontiff:

- Insists on a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15-26).
- Preaches the first sermon after Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36).
- Guides the first converts into the Church via baptism (Acts 2:37-42).
- Performs the first miracle credited by name to a specific Apostle (Acts 3:1-10) and then gives the second sermon



after Pentecost (v. 11-26).

- Makes the first defense of Christianity before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-12).
- Administers the first ecclesiastical discipline (Acts 5:1-11).
- Has his shadow sought for healing (Acts 5:14-15).
- Besought for his intercessory prayer by Simon the magician (Acts 8:14-24).
- Heals a paralytic (Acts 9:32-35).
- Raises one from the dead (Acts 9:36-42).
- Ushers the first Gentiles into the Church (Acts 10:9-48).
- Defends the Gentiles before the party of circumcision (Acts 11:1-18).
- Undergoes an imprisonment which results in earnest prayers by the Church (Acts 12:1-11).
- Leads and guides the debates at the first council (Acts 15:1-21).

Rounding out the survey of the papal office in Acts, recall St. Paul verified his Gospel message with St. Peter (Gal 1:18; 2:1-2). This historical fact cannot be ignored by non-Catholics. In addition, one must not overlook the two inspired epistles from the "Chief of the Apostles": 1 and 2 Peter. The eight chapters comprising the two books are required reading for every Christian.

In view of St. Peter's pedigree in the Bible, Msgr. Charles Journet declares: **"As far as jurisdiction is concerned, the apostles are legates of Christ, to use an expression of Saint Paul, for the carrying out of Christ's plan, the founding of local churches and the incorporation of these in the universal Church; Peter alone is the vicar of Christ and possesses supreme jurisdictional authority"** (*The Primacy of Peter*, p. 60).

Fr. W. Russell writes on the Redeemer: "He saw possible comparisons and analogies between natural things around Him and the supernatural truths which He came to teach. These parables are a true picture of Galilean life as He saw it day by day. He wove these natural scenes into stories, parables which illustrated what He wanted to teach. Hence a parable is a mode of instruction... It is an invitation to think, to reflect, and to seek for further information" (*Christ the Leader*, pp. 185-186).

The Greek term *parabolē*, connected to the Hebrew word *māšāl*, appears almost 50 times in the Gospels. Some classify the parables as dogmatic, moral, and prophetic. Others classify via the "kingdom of God" theme per its nature, members, and duties (cf. J. Steinmueller and K. Sullivan, *Catholic Biblical Encyclopedia: Old and New Testaments*, pp. 476-479). Whatever the grouping, such stories set into the minds of the Apostles certain spiritual and moral truths, while hiding from the Master's enemies the exact content of His teachings (cf. I. O'Brien, *The Life of Christ*, p. 286).

The number of parables and their parallel occurrences are uncertain. The following list is adapted from *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*, p. 287:

- The salt losing its savor (Mt 5:13 / Mk 9:49-50 / Lk 14:34-35).
- A lamp under a basket (Mt 5:14-16 / Mk 4:21-22 / Lk 8:16-17; 11:33-36).
- The son who asks his father (Mt 7:9-11 / Lk 11:11-13).
- The wise and the foolish (Mt 7:24-27 / Lk 6:46-49).



- Old and new garments (Mt 9:16 / Mk 2:21 / Lk 5:36).
- Old and new wineskins (Mt 9:17 / Mk 2:22 / Lk 5:37-39).
- The sower (Mt 13:3-23 / Mk 4:2-20 / Lk 8:4-15).
- The wheat and tares (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43).
- The mustard seed (Mt 13:31-32 / Mk 4:30-32 / Lk 13:18-19).
- The leaven (Mt 13:33 / Lk 13:20-21).
- The hidden treasure (Mt 13:44).
- The pearl of great price (Mt 13:45-46).
- The dragnet (Mt 13:47-50).
- The lost sheep (Mt 18:10-14 / Lk 15:3-7).
- The unforgiving servant (Mt 18:23-35).
- The laborers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16).
- The two sons (Mt 21:28-32).
- The wicked vinedressers (Mt 21:33-46 / Mk 12:1-12 / Lk 20:9-18).
- The wedding feast (Mt 22:1-14).
- The fig tree (Mt 24:32-35 / Mk 13:28-31 / Lk 21:29-33).
- The thief (Mt 24:43-44 / Lk 12:39-40).
- The two stewards (Mt 24:45-51 / Lk 12:42-48).
- The ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13).
- The talents (Mt 25:14-30).
- The growing seed (Mk 4:26-29).
- The watchful servants (Mk 13:32-37 / Lk 12:35-38).
- The creditor and two debtors (Lk 7:41-43).
- The good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37).
- The friend at midnight (Lk 11:5-10).
- The rich fool (Lk 12:16-21).
- The barren fig tree (Lk 13:6-9).
- The great banquet (Lk 14:15-24).
- The building of a tower (Lk 14:28-30).
- The king going to war (Lk 14:31-32).
- The lost coin (Lk 15:8-10).
- The lost son (Lk 15:11-32).
- The unjust steward (Lk 16:1-13).
- The rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31).
- The unprofitable servants (Lk 17:7-10).
- The persistent widow (Lk 18:1-8).
- The Pharisee and publican (Lk 18:9-14).
- The pounds (Lk 19:11-27).

Book Recommendation (out-of-print):

The Virgin Birth: An Evaluation of Scriptural Evidence

Manuel Miguens, O.F.M. *The Virgin Birth: An Evaluation of Scriptural Evidence*. Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1981, second edition, 204 pp.

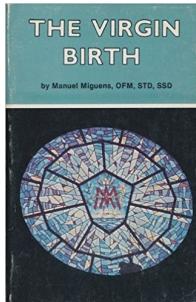
Fr. Miguens earned doctorates in both Theology and Scripture. His graduate work took him to Rome, Jerusalem, and Louvain. This loyal Franciscan was at home in English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Syriac. Miguens published scholarly works in multiple languages, and was a competent and experienced teacher.

Such qualifications fortify *The Virgin Birth*. Miguens analyzes the New Testament on historical grounds — to establish the beliefs of both the Evangelists and their apostolic community, concerning Our Lord's miraculous birth and His divine son-ship. Both truths are allied to each other.

Miguens addresses several areas within the New Covenant writings which are germane to his tome. He looks at St. Mark's treatment of fatherhood with respect to Jesus, in light of His mother (pp. 7-22). The same is handled in St. John (pp. 33-39), with consideration outside his Gospel (pp. 39-43). Here, the city of David also comes into view (pp. 28-33). The bearing of St. Paul on the topic is given attention as well (pp. 44-53).

Of course, Ss. Matthew and Luke are two objects of investigation in this kind of book. In defense of the veracity of the opening sections in the Matthean and Lukan Gospels, Miguens, in a typical extract, writes in part:

"the general framework of the first two chapters in both Mt and Lk shows that there is a historical dimension to their infancy narratives. This historical dimension, however, goes beyond the general (and external) framework. In point of fact, these narratives deal with Jesus, Mary and Joseph, who are persons perfectly identifiable at this period of history by sources other than the infancy narratives. The same thing applies to the case of John the Baptizer. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is well established on very early post-biblical evidence. That Jesus and Mary are related as son and mother rests on the basis of the entire Christian records outside these narratives. The same tradition is witness to the fact that Jesus and Joseph (and Mary) were related to each other within a family structure. That Jesus was raised and lived in Nazareth as in 'his home town' is commonplace in the fourfold Gospel tradition of Christ's ministry; and that Nazareth is in Galilee is perfectly correct. That Bethlehem was associated with David and his family is a solid datum of Old Testament history; as it is geographically true that Nazareth is in Galilee. The distinction itself between Judea and Galilee is accurate. Particularly striking is that in Mt 1:22f the text of Is 7:14 is quoted *in extenso* as a sort of scriptural evidence of the episode; now in Is 7:14 it says that the name of the 'virgin's' child is Emmanuel — but, oddly enough, Mary's child is called Jesus, as historical truth demanded. That a boy went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem when he was 12 (Lk 2:42) is in perfect agreement with the customary law of the time. The assumption that the missing Jesus could be in the travelling group of pilgrims (Lk 2:43f) also corresponds to the usages of the time" (pp. 115-116).



An appendix contains Miguens' replies to critics of the book's first edition. It is a true pleasure to read his scholarly responses: logical, faithful, devoid of timidity, with no overbearing attitude. Used copies of *The Virgin Birth* may be found at bookfinder.com.

Book Recommendation (in-print):

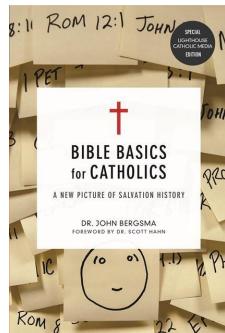
Bible Basics for Catholics: A New Picture of Salvation History

John Bergsma. *Bible Basics for Catholics: A New Picture of Salvation History*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 2012, 184 pp.

This book is a readable and substantial introduction to Holy Scripture in under 200 pages. Dr. John Bergsma, a world class scholar, targets the beginner. In the process, he has composed a text that is also valuable for the advanced student.

A strength of *Bible Basics for Catholics* is the ability to point out interesting facts that are easily overlooked within Holy Writ. An example: “In the course of the Bible, God makes at least six major covenants with the men I mentioned above: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. Years ago, when I was first teaching the Bible’s story line — which we call “salvation history” — I was looking for ways to simplify and visualize this pattern of covenants. Looking for what they all had in common, I noticed that each of the six covenants was made on a mountaintop, that is, the ritual or ceremony for each took place on top of a mountain” (p. 6, italics in original). Such keen remarks are found throughout the text.

The Sacred Page is complex at times. *Bible Basics for Catholics* uses charts, pictures, and fitting Bible quotations from the Old and New Testaments to unravel God’s Word. Bergsma shows how the covenants in Scripture form a unified whole, which in the opinion of many, is the best way to read Sacred History (also called “Salvation History”). The explanation of key Old Testament events is one of the book’s fine merits.



One more extract. Explaining the Last Supper in view of Luke 22:7-8, 14-20, Bergsma says: “**This is one of the most important events in human history. We are moving from the Old Covenant (Mosaic) to the New Covenant.** There are two major connections to the Old Covenant: First, it’s Passover time, and Jesus is celebrating the Passover. The Passover was, in many ways, the biggest holiday and the main sacrifice of the Old Covenant. Second, Jesus refers to the sacrifices at Sinai when Moses confirmed the Old Covenant with the people of Israel. At the foot of Sinai, Moses sprinkled the blood of the lambs on God’s altar and on the people, saying, ‘Look! The blood of the covenant!’ (Ex 24:8). Jesus says something similar, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood.’ Once more, it’s the *blood of the covenant*, only this time it’s ‘my’ blood and the covenant is ‘new.’ What Jesus is doing here on Mount Zion with the Twelve Apostles is every bit as significant as what Moses was doing at Mount Sinai with the Twelve Tribes. **The covenant relationship with God is being completely remade**” (p. 141, italics in original).

The book could use a Scriptural index. A better footnote/endnote format would also improve the work (the endnotes are enlightening, it is only their layout that could use enhancement).

Here and there, the field of Catholic Biblical Studies produces small but weighty resources. One such book, worthy of multiple re-readings in order to grasp all its insights, is *Bible Basics for Catholics*. It deserves a place in every Catholic home.

A.M.D.G.**J.M.J.**

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37).

"Jesus said to them, 'Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?'" (Mk 12:24).

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He [Christ] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Lk 24:27).

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn 20:30-31).

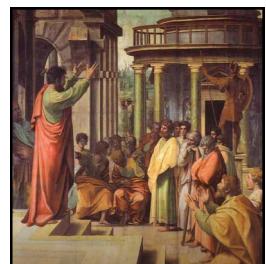
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+ + +

Mr. Salvatore J. Ciresi, founder and director of the St. Jerome Biblical Guild, served two tours in the U.S. Marine Corps and is now employed in the aviation sector. He earned his M.A. in Theological Studies, with a Scripture concentration, from the Notre Dame Graduate School of Christendom College, where he serves on the faculty. His other ecclesiastical activities include past co-host of 'Cross Talk,' a Catholic radio program in Virginia; a contributor on behalf of the Arlington Diocese to the 2005 revision to the *National Catechetical Directory*; a former board member for a private Catholic school; a past columnist for the *Arlington Catholic Herald*; and a contributor to *The Latin Mass: The Journal of Catholic Culture and Tradition*. Mr. Ciresi resides with his wife and children in Virginia.



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