

Proclaim

The Newsletter for Lectors of Holy Name of Mary Parish

Let Go, And Let God

Today I let go and I let God
take charge of this life of mine.
Now in the dark corners of my soul,
His light is beginning to shine.

All of the cares and worries that
I have carried around for so long
He has lifted them from my shoulders,
and filled my heart with love

Problems that were overwhelming
suddenly seem very small,
and come what may, starting today,
I know I can handle them all.

If you are troubled,
'Let Go and Let God'
take charge of your life for you, and
however dark life's shadows seem,
His light will come shining through.

D.A. Orth

Understanding Inspiration: How the Bible Was Written

- extracted from *Liguorian*, September 2003,
by William J. Parker, C.Ss.R., Editor-In-Chief



What does it mean to say that the Bible is "inspired"? Many Christians believe it simply means the Bible was written by God, and because it is God's Word, we can rely on it completely.

The Catholic teaching on biblical inspiration, however, is not quite that simple. I would like to start by saying what biblical inspiration is not. By eliminating some of the common misperceptions about inspiration, we will be in a better position to understand what it really is. The most common misunderstanding is sometimes referred to as the *dictation theory* of inspiration. According to this theory, God spoke the words of Scripture, and the human author wrote it all down like a secretary taking dictation.

Another less common but equally distorted view of inspiration makes the human author totally responsible for the Scriptures. The human author came up with the idea and wrote it down. God liked what the human author had done and claimed it as inspired. This theory is called the *subsequent approbation* theory, which simply means that God approved what was written after the fact.

The problem with both of these theories is the misplaced emphasis on the author. In the dictation theory all of the emphasis is on God as the author. The human being played no significant role except to be the channel by which God's words got onto the scroll or papyrus. In the subsequent approbation theory the emphasis is solely on the human author. God did not really have a hand in the writing but simply approved what was written after the fact and took credit for it. In the course of tradition, the Catholic Church has rejected both theories. Biblical inspiration is a delicate balance between the human and divine authors. If we tip the balance one way or the other, our view of the Bible will be distorted. The Catholic Church has wrestled with this balance for centuries.

The clearest statement of the Catholic Church's teaching on inspiration is found in the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" promulgated in 1965 at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. The statement on inspiration was a summary of the Church's pronouncements going back to the Council of Trent, the First Vatican Council, and the encyclicals of two popes. We find the classic definition of inspiration as: "*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 which He wanted*" (11). This official teaching sounds

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Party Time! Our Christmas celebration is on **Friday, Dec 12, 6:30 pm, El Torito**

(3133 E. Garvey) on Restaurant Row in Covina. Come join in the yuletide fun of your ministry! Call Martha Vasquez for details. See you there!

There are still some unclaimed Lector Workbooks. These will be moved to the Sacristy (on the shelf below where the Lectionary normally sits on Sundays) for available pick up on weekends or during Lector practice.



The Bible is God's Word in human words.

Baptism - derived from the Greek word, *bapto*, or *baptizo*, to wash or to immerse; the sacrament of regeneration by water in the word (per aquam in verbo); frequently called the “first sacrament”, or “the door of the Church”.

How The Bible Was Written (continued from page 1)

terribly convoluted, but it was carefully crafted over the centuries to avoid misunderstanding. It can be restated in a simpler way: *the Bible is God's Word in human words*. Both God and human beings are the authors of the books of the Bible. The human author wrote freely as any human author would. As an author, the human writer wrote in the style and idiom of his or her own time, using literary forms and images that would be familiar to the audience of that time. Yet all the while the human author was freely writing, he or she was writing only what God wanted written and not one word more or less.

So what's the point of all this discussion on inspiration? To understand what God is saying in the Bible, we have to take very seriously what the human author actually recorded on parchment or papyrus. That human author wrote in a language and in a culture vastly different from ours, using literary forms that we may be unfamiliar with. Once again, the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" outlines the task that biblical interpreters should undertake in their work: “*The interpreter of sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words*” (12). In other words, we cannot hope to truly understand what God is saying if we don't understand what the human author intended to communicate.

If we accept the Catholic teaching on biblical inspiration, then we cannot just interpret the Scriptures literally. A good



Catholic understanding of inspiration must keep both the divine and the human author together. If we want to understand what God is saying in the Bible, then we have to pay attention to the human author. This human author is the only way we have of getting to God's Word. In the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" the Catholic Church says exactly that: “*The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture*” (12).

For the ordinary Catholic, then, three areas must be considered when studying any book of the Bible:

First, we must consider the time frame in which the human author wrote. The Bible was produced over a thousand-year timespan. When reading or studying a particular book of the Bible, we need to ask ourselves what was happening at the time the biblical author was writing this particular book. What did the world look like from the biblical author's viewpoint?

A second area of consideration must be the audience for whom the author wrote. Where did they live? What kind of culture and society did they form? What were their customs? What questions did they have?

Finally, what form(s) of writing did the biblical author employ to convey his or her message?

Biblical inspiration is a deceptively simple teaching of the Catholic Church, but its implications affect how we understand and interpret the sacred Scriptures. Studying the Bible seriously requires a lot of effort.

Look backward with gratitude and forward with confidence.



OH I WOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT GETTING LOST
... WISEMAN #1 TOLD ME THAT HE HAS SOME
SORT OF GLOBAL POSITIONING SYSTEM

QUICK NOTES

- ◆ December 8, Feast of the Immaculate Conception is a Holy Day of Obligation.
- ◆ January 1, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, is **not** a Holy Day.
- ◆ Lector Practice for Thursday, Dec 18, has been **cancelled** due to the School Christmas Program.
- ◆ There is Lector Practice scheduled for **Monday, Dec 22**, from 6:30—7:30 pm for all Lectors scheduled for the Christmas masses and the Dec 27/28 weekend.

Your proclamation enables God's word to achieve the purpose for which it was sent.