

## Another Heresy Enters the Church

### Scripture Crucified on the Cross of Liberalism

Satan never rests. After we have just experienced a monumental controversy over the heretical sentence placed, by liberal clerics, into page 131 concerning the Mosaic covenant into the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, another heresy has been injected by like-minded liberals into an official instrument of the Church. The working document from which the bishops will conduct their upcoming Synod on Scripture, *Instrumentum Laboris*, contains a gross heretical statement. It declares that Scripture contains mistakes of fact and that it is only error-free when it is speaking about things concerning salvation, not historical events. In article 15(c) of the English language version that was carried by *L'Osservatore Romano*, a total distortion of the words of Vatican II's *Dei Verbum 11* has been injected into *Instrumentum Laboris*. It reads:

**“Although all parts of Sacred Scripture are divinely inspired, inerrancy applies only to ‘that truth which God wanted to put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation’ (DV 11).”**

Now, compare this to what *Dei Verbum 11* actually said. We will use the Flannery edition on page 757:

**“...we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.”**

*Dei Verbum 11* is thus teaching that God inspired Scripture to be without error so that we would have a sure record of what we needed to acquire salvation. In other words, Scripture is without error for the sake of our receiving salvation, not that Scripture is without error only when it speaks about our salvation. This clever twist of words is a trick of the devil, and the devil has entered into the highest echelons of the Catholic Church today. Never before in the 2000-year history of the Catholic Church has it been taught that Scripture contains error or that it is only error-free when it speaks about salvation. The only possible conclusion we can come to is that *Instrumentum Laboris* contains a heresy of earth-shattering proportions, and it must be stopped dead in its tracks.

I suggest that you flood the Vatican, the USCCB and your local bishop with letters protesting this heretical intrusion into the Catholic faith. As we saw what happened with the USCCB's catechism when we raised our voices, so it can happen here. We have a duty, according to Canon 212, 2-3, to raise our objections to our pastors. To explain the details of this deplorable situation, I am going to allow my good friend, Fr. Brian Harrison, one of the leading experts on the topic of Scripture and its Inerrancy, to speak to you with an article that was published in *The Wanderer* a few weeks ago.

One place you can start writing to is:

Most Rev. Archbishop Nikola Eterovic,  
 General Secretary, Synod of Bishops,  
 Palazzo del Bramante,  
 Via della Conciliazione, 34  
 00193 Rome  
 ITALY

The Synod starts a week from this Monday, on October 6, and goes on for two weeks. So airmail letters sent in the next few days or week will get there in time to make an impact.

Robert A. Sungenis, Ph.D.

## **SYNOD WORKING DOCUMENT REVIVES BIBLICAL INERRANCY CONTROVERSY**

By Fr. Brian W. Harrison, O.S., S.T.D.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* ('working document') to be used by representatives of the world's Catholic hierarchy at the forthcoming Synod of Bishops is quickly attracting attention because its controversial treatment of the Bible's divine inspiration and inerrancy. The theme of the Synod, scheduled to meet in Rome in October this year, will be "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church". Lively Internet discussion has begun and a number of scholars qualified in biblical studies are already privately networking over the possibility of a joint intervention voicing their concern as to how, if at all, the document's position on these topics can be reconciled with the teaching of both Vatican Councils and the papal encyclicals on Scripture studies.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* (*IL*) has no magisterial authority and is simply approved by the Synod organizers as a basis for beginning the assembled Fathers' deliberations. It was presented at a press conference in Rome on Thursday, June 12, by the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, Archbishop Nikola Eterović, and the Undersecretary, Msgr. Fortunato Frezza. Surprisingly, neither of the two officials, in their respective commentaries on the *IL* at the press conference, made any mention of what is by far the most newsworthy feature of the document, namely, the fact it appears to take sides in one of the gravest ongoing disputes within the Catholic Church as to how Vatican Council II should be interpreted. This dispute, parallel to that which has already driven the world's Protestant denominations into liberal and conservative camps over the

last century and a half, touches the credibility of the Bible, and thus, the credibility of Christianity as such.

One side in the dispute holds that, by virtue of the divine inspiration of the books of Sacred Scripture, *all* of the human biblical writers' affirmations, *regardless of subject-matter*, are guaranteed to be true (in the sense they themselves intended, of course). This thesis of *unrestricted inerrancy* was once held by virtually all Christians of all denominations and was very strongly insisted upon as a truth of Catholic doctrine by all the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church as well as the five pre-Vatican-II papal encyclicals treating biblical studies.

The other side consists of those Christians – Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican – who no longer accept this classical position, but who still believe the Bible is in some sense divinely inspired and hold out for *restricted inerrancy*. They claim that the Bible's divine guarantee of truth extends only to what the inspired authors affirm about *a certain limited range of subjects*. The way this privileged subject-matter is described varies: some have spoken of inerrancy as confined to “spiritual” things; for others it covers “religious” (as distinct from “profane”) matters; some speak of matters of “faith and morals”; and still others say it is restricted to the Bible's “salvific” teachings (those given “for the sake of salvation”).

These internal variations, however, tend to produce similar results in practice. Bible students following this general hermeneutic will in any case approach a given affirmation of an inspired writer with the prior question in their mind as to whether its *subject-matter* is of such a nature as to guarantee its truth. The late Father Raymond Brown, S.S., for instance, claimed that Vatican Council II replaced unrestricted by restricted inerrancy as official Church doctrine. On that basis he then argued that the Magisterium itself now implicitly requires us to question whether a belief that has to do with “biology” – namely, our Lord's virginal conception – can really be proved from Scripture. In spite of St. Matthew's clear assertion that Joseph “had no relations with [Mary] before she bore a son” (1: 25), Brown said in his book *The Birth of the Messiah* that since Vatican II, “A faithful Catholic would have to ask: Should one rank the biological manner of Jesus conception as a truth God wanted put into the Sacred Writings for the sake of our salvation?”

This newspaper has long been vigorously active in challenging this interpretation given by Brown and other liberal exegetes to the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (*DV*). The late John J. Mulloy penned many articles in the 1970s and 1980s upholding what Pope Benedict XVI has now called a “hermeneutic of continuity” in magisterial teaching, as did the late Msgr. George A. Kelly, in his 1984 book *The New Biblical Theorists: Raymond Brown and Beyond*. The present writer also argued in these columns that article 11 of *DV* has in fact maintained the traditional doctrine of unrestricted biblical inerrancy: cf. B. W. Harrison, “‘For the Sake Of Our Salvation’: Vatican II and Biblical Inerrancy”, *The Wanderer*, November 21, 1985, p. 3. (I subsequently received my Roman doctorate in theology for a dissertation which, among other things, argues in much more detail for doctrinal continuity on this point.)

The essential position of those who claim Vatican II maintains the doctrine of unrestricted inerrancy is that when *DV 11* is translated correctly, and interpreted in the light not only of the footnote references to patristic and magisterial sources but also of the drafting history of this conciliar text, the liberal claim of a doctrinal about-face simply does not hold up. Its opponents adduce powerful evidence that the phrase “for the sake of our salvation” was added to the sentence about inerrancy in order to indicate God’s purpose in giving us *the whole* of Sacred Scripture. That is, *not* in order to imply that only certain passages or themes within Scripture have this saving purpose (and are guaranteed error-free), while others do not (and so are error-prone). After all, in the very next sentence the Council Fathers appeal to II Timothy, where St. Paul affirms that “*all Scripture*” is *both* inspired by God *and* “profitable” for moral and spiritual formation.

In my own doctoral dissertation I have shown that the common published English versions of *DV 11* unduly favor the restricted inerrancy reading when they translate the term *Litteris Sacris consignari* as “put into the Sacred Writings”, or “consigned to” them, or “confided to” them. For such renditions of the Latin misleadingly depict the Bible as being a kind of recipient or container into which, therefore, both salvifically relevant and salvifically irrelevant material could have been deposited. However (contrary to appearances) *consignari* does not mean “to be consigned [to]”. It means “to be recorded”. And the words *Litteris Sacris*, in the ablative case, portray “the Sacred Writings”, in their totality, as the *instrument by which*, or the *form in which*, God willed to record his saving truth. In short, a correct translation makes it clear that *everything* in the Bible is there “for the sake of our salvation” – and is guaranteed by its divine authorship to be free of error. Readers can compare the following new, and, I submit, more faithful, translation with those found in common versions such as the Abbott and Flannery editions of the Council documents:

**“Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors or sacred writers affirm must be held as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that, by means of the books of Scripture, the truth that God wanted recorded for our salvation in the form of the Sacred Writings is taught firmly, faithfully, and without error.”**

Now, how does this all relate to the newly-released *Instrumentum Laboris* for the upcoming Synod of Bishops? The *IL* is controversial insofar as it favors the *restricted*-inerrancy side in the long-standing dispute explained above – the side of discontinuity with pre-Vatican-II teaching.

First, a ‘red herring’ has to be dealt with. In article 15 (c) of the English-language version released on June 12, we find that the first clause of the key sentence is so badly translated that it explicitly calls in question the full extent of the Bible’s divine inspiration. However, even when this poor translation (which occurs in no vernacular version other than the English) is corrected as follows in accord with the official Latin text, the statement still clearly proposes the thesis of restricted inerrancy:

**“Although all parts of Sacred Scripture are divinely inspired (*quamvis omnes Sacrae Scripturae partes divinitus inspiratae sint*), inerrancy applies only to ‘that**

truth which God wanted to put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation' (*DV 11*).”

The words “although” and “only” in this statement are those that most clearly bring out its doctrinal novelty. The first reveals how the *IL* authors feel the need to admit that the whole Bible’s divine inspiration – defined dogma no Catholic can deny – certainly *appears at first sight* to imply its unrestricted inerrancy. In truth, it has always so far ‘appeared’ that way to the Church herself! Since the Holy Spirit cannot affirm anything untrue, all relevant magisterial statements up till now (including, as we have just seen, *DV 11*) have presented freedom from error as a necessary consequence of the Holy Spirit’s simultaneous affirmation of what the inspired human writers affirm. So if He affirms *everything* that they affirm, then *everything* that they affirm, regardless of subject-matter, is error-free.

According to the *IL* authors, however, this seemingly logical inference – that whatever is divinely inspired must also be inerrant – is in fact a fallacy. They are telling us that while inspiration is indeed universal, inerrancy is not. For the latter, they say, applies “only” to certain select parts, themes or aspects of Sacred Scripture, namely, those which God wanted “put into” it “for the sake of salvation”. But if, then, there are also *other* affirmations in the Bible that have *not* been “put into” it for that purpose and so are open to error, how can their divine inspiration be upheld? The only way to answer to this question without incurring the blasphemy (not just heresy) of attributing error to the God who is Truth itself will be to *reinterpret the very concept of biblical inspiration*. “Inspiration” itself will now have to be redefined as something other than what Vatican II, all the Fathers, and all other relevant magisterial statements have understood it to mean, namely, true divine *authorship* in the sense of a unique charism by which the human writer’s affirmations are simultaneously affirmed by the Holy Spirit.

Is it any real surprise, then, to find that in the very next proposition (still in 15(c) of the *Instrumentum Laboris*) its authors do in fact present us with a hitherto unheard-of definition of inspiration? Here is what they say: **“In virtue of the charism of inspiration, the Holy Spirit constitutes the books of the Bible as the Word of God and entrusts them to the Church, so that they might be received in the obedience of faith”** (emphasis added). What does this strange terminology mean? Why do the biblical books *need* that sort of “constituting” if they already came into existence as a result of the Holy Spirit’s own authorship? What is the *IL*’s authority for proposing such a novelty? And how will it measure up against the solemn *anathema* pronounced by Vatican Council I against all those who say that sometimes, in accordance with the progress of science, dogmas proposed by the Church are to be given a different sense from that in which the Church has hitherto understood them (DS 3043)?

No statement of the Magisterium has ever said what Catholic bishops from around the world are being asked to endorse in this perplexing document, with a view to its subsequent confirmation by the Supreme Pontiff himself. The stage seems set for a vigorous debate in the months ahead, up to and during the Synod in October.