

Item #32 (A Review of *A Theology of the Christian Bible*)

A former student of mine at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, Fr. Denis Farkasfalvy, O.Cist., of Arlington, Texas and a research scholar of the University of Dallas (full disclosure), has written an immensely erudite book on Christian Revelation, Inspiration and Canon as regards the Bible. He has sent me a gift copy and after a careful reading I feel constrained to make a few remarks in public. The most important of which is that anyone interested in the Christian faith, Scripture scholar though he be, will profit from reading what Fr. Farkasfalvy has to say. His native language is Hungarian, but his command of English (presumably with the help of a native English speaker) is remarkable: one grasps what he wants to say, though perhaps, occasionally, after a careful reading.

The Catholic University of America Press has done a remarkable job of producing an error-free typographical masterpiece of 239 pages counting bibliography and index. (But my ageing eyes would have liked a type font that was somewhat larger.)

There are twelve chapters plus introduction and conclusion. For this reviewer the early chapters were a bit heavy going, with F.'s explanation of his rather negative views of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's attempts to come to grips with problems involving inerrancy and authorship. Things improved considerably in the latter portions of the book when F. tried his hand at these and similar problems.

Among many impressive aspects dealing with historical matters is F.'s treatment of the formation of the Biblical Canon (pp. 159-198). But more needs to be done in studying the Fathers of the Church in the first centuries and how they looked on Inspiration and the formation of the Canon.

In his Conclusion (pp. 213-223) F. remarks that the conclusions he draws in his book "most concern the topics Pope Benedict XVI assigned to be studied after the Synod of Bishops in 2008. The first concerns biblical inspiration, while the second is about the truth of the Bible" (p. 213).

As regards biblical inspiration: F. calls attention to the parallel authorship of the Bible, human and divine, but with the divine authorship speaking through the texts in an "overarching continuity" that never ceases and is so framed that it takes in the individuals with whom it communicates, whereas the human authorship terminates when a book is physically finished, Divine authorship is analogous to human authorship but fully transcends it (see p. 216).

As regards truth: "The Truth in the Bible ultimately means Christ, who cannot be seen as a propositional truth of rationally sound observations and reasoning, but is by his divine and human constitution the Truth about

God and Man, God's internal trinitarian life made manifest so as to constitute the truth of man's relationship to himself, his neighbor and God, which facilitates his journey to God from sin to salvation, while mirroring the journey through which God's people wander in history in pursuit of the revealed truth" (pp. 220-221).

F.'s use of the incarnation as an analogy in the discussion of truth in the Bible convinced me that this is the way to go, with his citation of Luke 2,52. I think now that my original view that Jesus could have had "faith-trust" as I presented it in my interpretation of Hebrews 2,13a in *Hebrews: An Interpretation* could be valid after all.

But I do differ from F. in his interpretation of the author of the Fourth Gospel. I think it was John the Apostle, but in a different perspective, as I explain in Item #1 on this website in Chapters 1 and 3 of *John: An Interpretation*. I also think that the Eucharist has a strong role to play in the prologue of John's Gospel, as I explain in Chapter 2 of Item #1, in contrast to F.'s conventional view manifested in several places in his study.

I further suggest that F., should investigate the possibilities of using Abraham and Isaac and their relation to Jesus and his death on the cross to show the centrality of Christ in Scripture. Abraham and Isaac appear nowhere in F.'s study. But this reviewer profited from F.'s present book much more than these suggestions for possible improvement would indicate. **(21 August 2019; 11 October 2019)**