

Item #77 (Scripture and Tradition in the Light of Personal Judgment)

My 50 years of residence at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome were punctuated by frequent absences, especially during the summer months when there were no classes. But in general I was present much more often than not and, of course, this meant contact with my fellow Jesuits at meals. Not only with my fellow Jesuits but also with guests they invited for meals. This meant an occasional opportunity for sharing and widening one's knowledge with non-Jesuits. I recall one occasion when Fr. Paul Mankowski, S.J., a gifted teacher of Hebrew and of much else besides (later a victim of a premature death, God rest him), invited me to share a table with a Cardinal whom he knew. I was honored by the invitation and took a modest part in the conversation that was in English. I forget at what point the conversation was when I observed that intelligence was not always accompanied by good judgment. And that at times even persons of modest intelligence showed excellent judgment. To my satisfaction the Cardinal agreed, and added that of course modest intelligence was not necessarily a sign of good judgment. I have since reflected on this sharing of knowledge as I ponder the quality of judgment of people I know personally and the people I know only by report. And the quality of my own judgment as it is tested by events. Of course I have constantly to bear in mind that the knowledge on which said judgments including my own are based is often beyond my ken. This is part of the background for my insistence in both my websites that opinions I advance are to be considered "plausible" and not as "proved". This is not to deny that I consider some interpretations of Scripture as "proved" provided that the teaching authority of the Church has come into play. It is just to assert implicitly that I do not share in this teaching authority even though I benefit from it through the gift of faith that has been given to me. But if poor judgment is a reality today it is clear that poor judgment was possible in the past. This is accordingly one of the constant challenges associated with attempting to interpret Scripture. (**James Swetnam, S.J., August 20, 2021**)