

Denver Catholic Biblical School

Year 3

Summer Reading Assignment:

A Catholic Introduction to the Bible by Drs. John Bergsma and Brant Pitre

SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. Why is a historical exegesis of the Bible important?

“The reason for the emphasis on history in a Christian introduction to the Bible is simple: Christianity is a historical religion, and divine revelation is inextricably bound up with ‘deeds and words’ performed by God ‘in the history of salvation’ ...this need for historical exegesis is rooted in the historical reality of the Incarnation itself. Because the Word became flesh and dwelt in history (Jn 1:14), any Catholic approach to Scripture must give serious attention to the historical-critical and textual questions surrounding the Bible.” (pg. 9)

2. Why is a theological exegesis of the Bible important?

“At the same time, this historical approach to the Scriptures will be balanced by a theological approach. The reason for this is equally straightforward: according to the Catholic faith, Sacred Scripture is not just a human book; it is also ‘inspired by God’ (2 Tim 3:16). In the final analysis, this means that ‘God is the author of Sacred Scripture’ and that ‘the divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.’” (pgs. 9-10)

3. What are the three fundamental criteria for theological exegesis of the Bible?

The unity of Scripture, the living Tradition of the Church, and the analogy of faith. (pg. 10; see also CCC 111-114)

4. a) Was there a “closed canon” of Jewish Scripture in the days of Jesus?

“Although certain parts of the Jewish Scriptures were widely agreed upon, other parts were the subject of continuing debate, with the result that by the time of Jesus in the first century, there was still no ‘closed’ canon of Scripture, demarcating exactly which books were inspired and which were not. Instead, different sects within Judaism had divergent views of exactly which books were inspired and authoritative...during the life of Jesus and at the time of the birth of the early Church, there was significant and widespread disagreement within Judaism over exactly which ancient Jewish writings were inspired Scripture, and this was just the one of many disputed religious questions that were expected to be resolved by the coming of the Messiah (cf. Jn 4:25).” (pgs. 22-23)

b) What was the final determining factor needed to close the canon of Scripture?

“‘Canon’ and ‘canonization’ are Christian ecclesiastical terms that presuppose a single teaching authority (Latin magisterium) competent to make formal decisions on religious

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matters that are universally binding.” (pg. 23)

SUGGESTED ANSWERS (continued)

“The Scriptures do not require the approval of the Church to become inspired; they were inspired by God during their composition. However, the individual believer does require the guidance of the Church in order to know which books are inspired. In other words, the Church has an epistemological, not ontological, role with respect to Scripture; she does not make the Scriptures inspired, but does make known which Scriptures are inspired.” (pgs. 26-27)

“The exact limits of the canon of Scripture were a disputed point in ancient Judaism at the time of Jesus. While the New Testament does not provide a list of canonical books, it does make clear that Jesus authorized the apostles to make authoritative judgments about religious law...One such question of religious law was the correct list of inspired books – that is, the canon. Jesus taught the apostles by word and example which books were part of authoritative Jewish Scripture, and they, in turn, passed down this tradition, along with the authority to ‘bind and loose’, to their successors, the bishops of the Church, who began to address the canon question explicitly in the second half of the fourth century, when circumstances were favorable to the clarification of Church doctrine. Their decisions about canon concerned which books were suitable to be read in public worship...The bishops and Fathers of the fourth-century councils discerned the limits of the canon on the basis of tradition, especially liturgical tradition, and under the guidance of the successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome. They did not innovate; rather, they approved those books which had been used by the Church of the apostles as inspired Scripture for centuries.” (pgs. 31-32)