

PASTORAL LETTER

ON THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

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*TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD: THE CLERGY, THE RELIGIOUS
AND THE FAITHFUL
GRACE, JUSTICE AND PEACE FROM OUR LORD,
JESUS CHRIST!*

With the dissemination of the **NEW TESTAMENT** in the **SAMAR-RENYO POPULAR VERSION** we wish to offer the People of God in the Diocese of Borongan, Eastern Samar, some reflection on the **INSPIRED WORD OF GOD** from which, according to the infallible testimony of the Holy Spirit Himself, we can obtain innumerable benefits: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living, so that the man who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good work."¹

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The desire to be happy is deeply rooted in our human nature. Everybody looks for happiness. Some believe they can find happiness in riches and in fame; others look for it in power and influence; still others seek it in pleasures.

However, any Christian who knows God and what He has revealed knows that such things cannot make us supremely and permanently happy. It is only in the supernatural possession of God in glory that we can truly find eternal happiness. Says St. Augustine: "Our heart, O Lord, is restless until it rests in Thee!"² It is, therefore, only in God that we find our salvation.

NECESSITY OF FAITH

In our quest for happiness and ultimately, for our salvation, supernatural faith is absolutely necessary, as Christ Himself tells us:

¹ Timothy III:16-17.

² Confessions, I, 1.

"Whoever believes . . . will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned."² Moreover, Apostle Paul confirms: "No man can please God without faith. For whoever comes to God must have faith . . ."⁴

However, to have the faith is not merely enough. We must act the faith; we must live the faith in our daily lives. In other words, even though God has given us the gift of believing all He has revealed, we must exercise such gift.

For faith, like a tiny seed, is infused into the soul by God. If given the proper nourishment and care, this precious gift of faith grows to maturity and produces fruits "like a mustard seed, the smallest seed in the world . . . which when it is sown, it grows . . . and puts out great branches, so that the birds of the air can dwell beneath its shade."⁵

THE LIVING VOICE OF THE TEACHING CHURCH

Faith — "a supernatural virtue by which, with the inspiration and help of the grace of God, we believe to be true all that by Him has been revealed, not because of the intrinsic truth of these things as perceived by the natural light of reason, but by the authority of God Himself who reveals them, since He can neither deceive nor be deceived"⁶ — is indeed our guide to happiness and salvation. Vatican II points out that "the obedience of faith must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals, and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. If this faith is to be shown, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind, and giving joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it."⁷

However, since God does not tell each of us personally what to believe, the question arises: How can we know what God has revealed? How can we find out what we must believe in order to reach perfect happiness and salvation?

It is the CHURCH that makes known to us what God has revealed and tells us what we must believe. THE LIVING VOICE OF THE TEACHING CHURCH is our RULE OF FAITH. Christ, in commanding the heads of the Church to spread the faith, said: "All power

² St. Mark XVI:16.

⁴ Hebrew XI:6.

⁵ St. Mark IV:31-32.

⁶ I Vatican Council, Dei Filius, Ch. 3.

⁷ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, No. 5.

in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world."⁸ Moreover, in another occasion, He told them: "He who hears you, hears Me; and he who rejects you, rejects Me."⁹ Furthermore, Vatican II confirms that "the task . . . has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the Word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit; it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed."¹⁰

The LIVING VOICE of the ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, and APOSTOLIC CHURCH, then, is the source of knowledge of what we must know, believe and do to possess God. This VOICE reaches us through the duly authorized representatives of Christ and His Church here on earth, "so that by hearing the message of salvation the whole world may believe; by believing, it may hope; and by hoping, it may love."¹¹

DEPOSIT OF FAITH

The Living Voice of the True Church bases its teaching on the DEPOSIT OF FAITH which contains all the truths communicated by God to man through supernatural means, and this DEPOSIT OF FAITH is contained in the only SOURCE — who is GOD — of DIVINE REVELATION but with two modes of transmission, written and oral: SACRED SCRIPTURE and SACRED TRADITION. These form "one sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is committed to the Church,"¹² and both "are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence."¹³

DIVINE REVELATION

God did not disclose the TRUTHS of REVELATION to man all at once, but gradually with the passing of time. The Public Revela-

⁸ St. Matthew XXVIII:18-20.

⁹ St. Luke X:16.

¹⁰ Divine Revelation, No. 10.

¹¹ Ibid., No. 1.

¹² Ibid., No. 10.

¹³ Ibid., No. 9.

tion of those truths which God communicated to the human race was first made to Adam and Eve, then to the patriarchs and after them to Moses and the prophets and finally, by Jesus Christ, either directly or through His Apostles and His Church. Vatican II has this to say: "God . . . gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities. Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents . . . Then, at the time He had appointed, He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation. Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this nation to acknowledge Himself as the one living and true God, provident Father and just Judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him. In this manner He prepared the way for the gospel down through the centuries . . . Then, after speaking in many places and varied ways through the prophets, God last of all in these days has spoken to us by his Son."¹⁴

The truths which God has revealed to the human race and which form the **CONTENT** of **REVELATION** can never be known unless revealed by God, for these are deepest truths about God and the salvation of man. Says Vatican II: "In His goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature . . . By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man is made clear to us in Christ, who is the *Médiator* and at the same time the fullness of all revelation."¹⁵ And even if discovered without revelation but only through human reason, these truths can only be grasped with greater ease and certainty once God reveals them. Vatican II again says: "Through His revelation . . . those divine realities which are by their nature accessible to human reason can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in the present state of the human race."¹⁶

THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

The divinely revealed realities, having been consigned to writing under the **INSPIRATION** of the **HOLY SPIRIT**, are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture. The Living Voice of the Teaching

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Nos. 3-4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 6.

Church holds that the books of Sacred Scripture are sacred to indicate its divine authorship, the nature of the truths it contain and the purpose for which it was written.¹⁷

Through DIVINE INSPIRATION, God moved and directed chosen men to write. He then aided them in the actual work in such a way that they wrote all that He wished to be written and only what He wished to be written. "For, by supernatural power, He so moved and impelled them to write — He was so present to them — that the things which He ordered, and those only, they first rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could not be said that He was the author of the entire Scripture."¹⁸ Thus, "everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit..."¹⁹ In other words, the human authors acted under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in such a manner that God is really the Author. Therefore, although different times have written the books of Sacred Scripture, and although these vary in many things according to the human authors' own individual character, style and personal traits, the collection is truly one book having a primary Author, God Himself, and one Common Theme, Jesus Christ.

INERRANCY OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Since Sacred Scripture is divinely inspired and has God for its Author who is the Supreme Truth, then, obviously, it is totally free from error in all its statements. Leo XIII says: "All the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and so far is it from being possible that any error can coexist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the Supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true."²⁰ Hence, "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted to put into the Sacred Writings for the sake of our salvation."²¹

¹⁷ Cfr. *Ibid.*, No. 11.

¹⁸ Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter "On the Study of Holy Scripture."

¹⁹ Divine Revelation, No. 11.

²⁰ Leo XIII, *op. cit.*

²¹ Divine Revelation, No. 11.

UNITY OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Since the books of Sacred Scripture, both the Old and the New Testaments, are inspired and have but one Author, there immediately follows the **UNITY** of both Testaments, there is in them a **UNITY** of **CONTENT**: "All the pages of both Testaments move toward Christ as to their center."²² In prophecy and prefiguration, the Old Testament contains the realities of the New; the Old Testament achieves fullness of meaning only in the light of the New: "God in His wisdom has so brought it about that the New should be hidden in the Old and that the Old should be made manifest in the New."²³ In simple words, the New Testament perfects the Old.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The books of the **OLD TESTAMENT** tell the story of creation, the fall of man, the Hebrew people, and the preparation of the world for the coming of the Redeemer who, as had been promised, would restore the human race to friendship with God.

Says Vatican II: "The principal purpose to which the plan of the Old Covenant was directed was to prepare the coming both of Christ, the universal Redeemer, and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy, and to indicate its meaning through various types. Now the books of the Old Testament, in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men. These same books, then, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence."²⁴

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The books of the **NEW TESTAMENT** deal with the life, passion, death, resurrection and glorious ascension of Christ our Redeemer, as well as with His doctrines and His Church to which, for her preservation, growth and sanctification, the Holy Spirit perpetually provides life and strength.

²² Benedict XV, Encyclical Letter "Spiritus Paraclitus."

²³ Divine Revelation, No. 16.

²⁴ Ibid., No. 15.

Vatican II states that "It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special pre-eminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness of the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our Savior."²⁵

Besides the four Gospels, in the writing of the Epistles of Saint Paul and other Apostolic Writings, "by the wise plan of God, those matters which concern Christ, the Lord, are confirmed, His true teaching in more and more fully stated, the saving power of the divine work of Christ is preached, the story is told of the beginning of the Church and her marvelous growth, and her glorious fulfillment is foretold."²⁶

SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST AND HIS APOSTLES²⁷

Christ Himself, even though He "obtained authority by miracles, merited belief by authority and by belief drew to Himself the multitude,"²⁸ in the exercise of His divine mission, frequently appealed to Sacred Scripture. He used the Word of God to prove that He is sent by God and is God Himself. From its wisdom, He cited instructions for His disciples and confirmation of His doctrine. He quoted it against the calumnies of the Sadducees and Pharisees and against satan who tried to tempt Him. At the close of His earthly life as well as after His resurrection and ascension to the glory of His Father, Christ used to expound the Scripture to His disciples.

The Apostles, on the other hand, though granted by Christ Himself to perform "signs and wonders by their hands,"²⁹ did use effectively the Sacred Words to convince the people of the wisdom of Christianity and to suppress obstinacy and heresy. This is clearly manifested in the discourses of St. Peter who presented a series of citations from the Old Testament. The same thing can be found in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John, and in the Catholic Epistles, but most remarkably in Apostle Paul who "boasts that he learned the law at the feet of Gamaliel, in order that, being armed with spiritual weapons, he might afterwards say with confidence. "The arms of our warfare are not carnal but mighty unto God."³⁰

²⁵ Ibid., No. 18.

²⁶ Ibid., No. 20.

²⁷ Cfr. Leo XIII, Op. Cit.

²⁸ St. Augustine, De Util. Cred. 14,32.

²⁹ Acts XIV:3.

³⁰ St. Jerome, De Stud. Script. Ad Paulin, Ep. 53,3.

SACRED SCRIPTURE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The Church always venerates Sacred Scripture with a deep sense of devotion and reverence. For, from Sacred Scripture, we do certainly enjoy fuller knowledge of Jesus Christ who is the Author of our redemption and our sanctification and who teaches us lessons of holiness, humility, justice, truth, charity, and mercy. Moreover, from the Word of God which is imported without charge, we unceasingly receive the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy; the Holy Spirit's fire of love is enkindled in our hearts; and our Father in heaven meets us with great love and speaks with us.³¹ Furthermore, from the force and power in the Word of God, we obtain spiritual support and energy, strength of faith and food for our souls,³² sustaining us in times of strife and amidst adversity and misfortune, and helping us to remain steadfast in serenity of mind. Indeed, "the Word of God is living and effectual, more piercing than any two edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit."³³

The Church, because of her untarnished faith in the divine authority and perfect truth of the Word of God, encourages us to move ahead toward a deeper understanding of Sacred Scripture. In 1898, Pope Leo XIII and the Popes after him encouraged the members of the Church to acquaint themselves with Sacred Scripture. For, "ignorance of Sacred Scripture is ignorance of Christ,"³⁴ but "a man who is well grounded in the testimonies of the Scripture is the bulwark of the Church."³⁵

Besides encouraging her members to have a fuller knowledge of Sacred Scripture, through Councils and common Teachings, the Church also strongly appeals to the tireless industry of her learned men in translating the Sacred Scripture from tongue to tongue, so that "easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful."³⁶ "But since the Word of God should be available at all times the Church with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made in different languages, especially from the original texts of the Sacred books. And if, given the opportunity and the approval of Church authority, these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them."³⁷

³¹ Cfr. Divine Revelation, No. 21.

³² Ibid.

³³ Hebrew XIV:12.

³⁴ St. Jerome, In Isaiam Prol.

³⁵ Ibid., In Isaiam 54, 12.

³⁶ Divine Revelation, No. 22.

³⁷ Ibid.

SACRED SCRIPTURE IN SAMARENYO POPULAR VERSION

The patience and the dedication of our expert translators as well as the cooperation of our separated brethren and the Church's approval brought into reality the message of Sacred Scripture in our own familiar dialect. Today, Sacred Scripture is communicated to us in a way that we all can understand. God speaks our language. Thus, with the availability of the **NEW TESTAMENT** in the **SAMARENYO POPULAR VERSION**, there is much hope that progress in Christian truths becomes simple and steady.

We believe that the possession of this priceless treasure in every home of our Diocese is expression enough of our gratitude to Almighty God and to all the wonderful people who were instrumental in making its translation popular.

CONCLUSION

We, therefore, end this Pastoral Letter, with the hope that, through the presentation of the **SAMARENYO POPULAR VERSION** of the **NEW TESTAMENT**, in our Diocese, may we be able to profitably grow familiar with Sacred Scripture. Thus, from our intensified veneration for the **INSPIRED WORD OF GOD** which shall always be "an inexhaustible treasury of heavenly doctrine"³⁸ and "an overflowing foundation of salvation,"³⁹ may we be able to obtain a new surge of spiritual vitality and growth.

As a pledge, then, of heavenly grace and as a sign of our episcopal concern, we lovingly impart to you all, our beloved People of God, our pastoral blessings.

Given at our Episcopal Residence in Borengan, Eastern Samar, on May 24, 1979, the Second Anniversary of our Episcopal Ordination.

³⁸ St. Chrysostom, In Gen. Hom., 21,2; Hom. 60,3; St. Augustine, De Disc. Christ., 2.

³⁹ St. Athanasius, Ep. Fest., 39.