

## PRIVATE INTERPRETATION

Among the many important passages of Holy Scripture which have been given a misleading and erroneous interpretation in the “New English Bible—New Testament”, few have a more direct bearing upon the controversy concerning the relationship between the authority of the Bible and the authority of the Church than the declaration of Peter in 2 *Peter* 1. 20, 21, regarding the divine origin and inspiration of the sacred writings.

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (*Authorised Version*)

It is significant, if not surprising, that the New English Bible translation of the verse is in the closest possible harmony with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on the subject of “private judgment”. The Apostle was inspired to assert that the Prophets were not merely expressing their personal opinions regarding the will and purpose of God and the shape of things to come, but “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”. The Church of Rome contends that the passage means that individual readers must not exercise their private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures, but submit to the judgment of the “Church”.

### **Erroneous Dogma**

The new translation appears to concur with this erroneous dogma by telling the reader that “*no one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself*”. This rendering may clearly express the opinion of the translator, but it does not translate what Peter wrote. That the new version is consistent with Rome’s teaching in the past is evident from the second article of the *Creed of Pope Pius IV*, which asserts that it belongs to “our holy mother the church” to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures, and that the Scriptures may be interpreted only “according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers”. More recently the Jesuit scholar, H. Willmering, New Testament Professor at St. Mary’s College, Kansas, U.S.A., has written in the “*Catholic Commentary*” on this verse: “It is of prime importance to know that prophecy of Scripture is not subject to private interpretation by every individual, as the false teachers assume it is.”

In this particular case some of the Roman Catholic translators are more reliable than their commentators. The Douay version is, “that no prophecy of Scripture is made by private interpretation”, and Ronald Knox reads: “It was never man’s impulse, after all, that gave us prophecy.” Here the translation is satisfactory, but the commentary and application are false.

### **The Progress of Error**

The nineteenth-century revision supported the Authorised Version, but the American Revised Standard Version, following the Twentieth Century New Testament and Moffatt, forced the erroneous application into the actual text, asserting that, “no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation”. The Translators of the New English Bible have taken the corruption of the text a stage further, and invite their readers to acknowledge that, “No one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself”.

There is now a vitally important difference between what Peter wrote and what is read in some of the modern versions. The Apostle was telling us how prophecy was given. The new translators are trying to tell us how it should be received. In order to do so they have brought something into the text that was not there. The translators of the Authorised Version gave an accurate and trustworthy English rendering of the Greek words actually used by the inspired Apostle. Their treatment of this verse is confirmed, but hardly excelled by the Berkeley Version: “No prophecy ever resulted from human design.” In many other respects the Berkeley Version is far from reliable. (See the review, No.34, published by the Trinitarian Bible Society.)

### **Error exposed by the Reformers**

The New English Bible misinterpretation of this passage is not of recent origin. Modern Biblical scholars are merely promoting an error which was rightly exposed and condemned in the century before the Authorised Version was published. The significance of the error was wisely assessed by John Calvin in his commentary on the Epistle.

“They pervert what Peter says, that they may claim for their own councils the chief right of interpreting Scripture. Peter demonstrates that, were the whole world unanimous, and the minds of all men united, still what would proceed from them would be ‘private’ or their own. The word of man is here set in opposition to divine revelation, so that the faithful, inwardly illuminated by the Holy Spirit, acknowledge nothing but what God says in His Word.

“Peter especially bids us to believe the prophecies as the indubitable oracles of God, because they have not emanated from men’s private suggestions. They dared not announce anything of their own, but obediently followed the Spirit as their guide, Who ruled in their mouth as in His own sanctuary.”

### **The Rule of Faith**

The doctrinal basis of the *Trinitarian Bible Society* reverently acknowledges the Holy Scriptures as the “sole, supreme and infallible rule of faith and practice”. The new version appears to suggest that this supreme and infallible rule may be subordinate to the authority of a supreme and infallible church. Rome claims to exercise this supremacy and infallibility and plainly states that the New Testament is her exclusive property, of which she is “the absolute Owner, Guardian, Trustee and Interpreter”.

Discerning readers will remember that the first translators of the English Bible were faithful unto death in their resistance to these tyrannous claims. They suffered martyrdom because they exercised their private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures and were led to conclusions which the “Church” denounced as heretical. The ecclesiastical denial of the right to exercise private judgment in such matters has now been written into the text of the English Bible, and meekly accepted with quiescent silence throughout the English-speaking world.

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## **INFALLIBLE TRUTH**

“The church of God must therefore be bound to no other authority than unto the voice of the Gospel and unto the ministry thereof—this infallible truth, the only Word of God... In every family and household each should cause his family and children to read some part of the Bible for their erudition, to know God. Likewise, he should constrain them to pray unto God for the promotion of His Holy Word... Remember, Christian reader, that the gift of interpretation of the Scripture is the light of the Holy Ghost given unto the humble and penitent person that seeks it only to honour God with. Remember therefore to examine all kinds of doctrine by the Word of God, for even such as preach it aright have their infirmities and ignorance... The adversaries of truth defend many a false error under the name of the ‘holy church’. ‘Truth’ is nothing, except the authority of God’s Word contain the said truth.”

*Selected from “A Declaration of Christ and His Office”, by the martyr Dr. John Hooper, printed in Zurich in 1547.*

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