

# THE TEACHING OF II PETER 1:20

## ON THE INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

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IN THE short New Testament commentaries which have become popular in recent years there is a tendency to pass over texts of lesser importance in the interest of passages of greater prominence. Yet this selective procedure is not always happy. A case in point is the verse of the *Secunda Petri* discussed in these notes. In the Douay-Challoner version the text reads: "understanding this first, that no prophecy of scripture is made by private interpretation."

The preceding references to the parousia (v. 16a) and the transfiguration (vv. 16b-18) and the following strong assertion of God's authorship of all prophetic utterance (v. 21) have combined to submerge and obscure the cautionary statement contained in v. 20. Yet this verse is not without intrinsic interest. Indeed, its discussion may be considered timely. Following of necessity the Latin Vulgate, both the Douay-Challoner version and its new American revision render II Pet. 1:20 in a manner not quite consonant with the underlying Greek text.<sup>1</sup> It is only natural that attention should be called to the fact.

We may take as our starting-point in this discussion an article written some thirty years ago by A. Durand.<sup>2</sup> As Durand noted, there is first and foremost the central problem of determining the meaning of this puzzling verse in its context—the sense it would have for the original addressees of the *Secunda Petri*; there is the further task of interpreting in positive terms the negative content of the verse. The problem of this verse is not made lighter by dearth of patristic guidance.

### THE SENSE AND BEARING OF THE TEXT

After recounting the great benefits conferred on humanity by Christ (1:3-7), the *Secunda Petri* proceeds at once to urge its Christian

<sup>1</sup> The writer is not finding fault with these renderings of the Vulgate text.

<sup>2</sup> A. Durand, "Le Sens de IIa Petri, 1, 20," *Rech. de science religieuse*, II (1911), 187-89. The writer regrets that he has not had access to an article by W. H. Weeda, in *Nieuwe Theologische Studiën*, II (1919), 129-35.

readers to make sure their entry into the heavenly kingdom by a constant practice of high virtue (vv. 8-11). Next come the reasons for this exhortation to virtue. It is a matter of duty with him, the sacred writer indicates, to warn his addressees—the more so as he knows that his death is not far distant (vv. 12-14). He must indeed make provision for the future (v. 15).

At this point the sacred writer's outlook narrows to the question of Christ's parousia. There is nothing fanciful or artificial, he insists, in the apostolic teachings concerning the parousia (v. 16a). Two arguments are adduced in support of this assertion: the apostle's own vision of the transfigured Christ (vv. 16b-18), and secondly the *sermo propheticus* (v. 19a). This second point suggests the counsel (v. 19b) to which our text forms an adjunct, and serves to introduce the pericope in which we are interested.

The passage runs as follows:

19. And we have the prophetic utterances [τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον], surer still, to which you do well to take heed, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until Day dawns and the Day Star rises in your hearts;

20. hoc primum intellegentes, quod omnis propheta scripturae propria interpretatione non fit [τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται];

21. for it was not by will of man that prophecy was brought of old; on the contrary, borne along by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God.<sup>3</sup>

As the dominant thought in this section of the letter is the parousia (cf. v. 16), and as the second part of v. 19 refers clearly to the time of that event, it is natural to infer that the *sermo propheticus* here mentioned denotes primarily, if not exclusively, prophecies concerning the Second Coming of Christ. It would appear, too, that these "prophetic utterances" are not oral pronouncements of Christian prophets like Agabus (cf. Acts 11:27 f.), but rather the prophetic sayings found in the Scriptures. Such indeed is the sense we should expect in the phrase *προφητικὸς λόγος*, a standard expression in Philo,<sup>4</sup> and in St. Justin.<sup>5</sup> Then, too, the *sermo propheticus* of v. 19 is surely

<sup>3</sup> The translation follows the critical Greek text. The last part might also be translated, "men spoke on the part of God."

<sup>4</sup> Philo, *De plantatione*, XXVIII, 117 (ed. Colson-Whitaker, *Philo*, Loeb Classical Library, III, 272); cf. also *Leg. Alleg.*, III, c. 14, n. 43 (ed. Colson-Whitaker, *Philo*, I, 328).

<sup>5</sup> S. Justinus, *Dial. c. Tryph.*, c. 56, n. 6; c. 77, n. 2; c. 110, n. 3 (ed. Archambault, *Dialogue avec Tryphon*, Paris, 1909, I, 251; II, 15, 166).

to be understood in line with the *prophetia scripturae* of v. 20. Now according to the ordinary force of *scriptura* in the New Testament, the scriptural prophecies here in view are those of the Old Testament. Hence there can be little doubt that the *sermo propheticus* is a collective reference to the various Old Testament passages pertaining to the parousia of the Messiah. J. B. Mayor suggests passages such as Mal. 4:2, Isa. 40:5, 9; 60:1.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the quotation of Dt. 18:15, 19 and Lev. 23:39 in Acts 3:20–21 provides us with a Petrine example of parousiac prophecy.

The general tenor of the passage is clear. Such scriptural prophecies as were judged in apostolic times to refer in one sense or another to Christ's parousia bear convincing testimony to the truth of that coming event. These prophecies should be pondered and heeded by every Christian right down to the day of their fulfilment. They are the lamp given by God to illumine the path of the Christian across the dark night of the present. But while the sacred writer urges Christians to give heed to the utterances of the prophets on the parousia, he takes occasion in v. 20 to warn them of the attitude they must adopt toward the scriptural prophecies during the period of expectation.

### Verse 20

Despite a few variants,<sup>7</sup> modern critical editors (Tischendorf, Westcott-Hort, von Soden, Vogels, Merk) are in agreement on the Greek text of II Pet. 1:20. And if we are to judge by the *Editio Minor* of Wordsworth and White, the Sixto-Clementine edition represents the true Vulgate text of this verse. It is, therefore, somewhat surprising that the Vulgate reads *propria interpretatione* instead of *propriae interpretationis*.

Perhaps the Vulgate reading was influenced by the pre-Hieronymian version, which held its ground for so long in the West. In the Fleury Palimpsest, a witness of the Old Latin text current in Africa, verse 20 reads: "omnis profetiae scriptura interpretatione indiget."<sup>8</sup> The

<sup>6</sup> J. B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 108.

<sup>7</sup> We may note the following: *γραφή προφητείας*; *επιλυσεως ιδίας*; *omittitur ιδίας*. The MSS authority for the several variants may be seen in Von Soden (II, 638).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. H. von Soden, *Das Lateinische Neue Testament zur Zeit Cyprians* (Texte und Untersuchungen, XXXIII; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909), p. 571.

reading *interpretatione indiget* is also found in Ambrosiaster,<sup>9</sup> in Bachiarius,<sup>10</sup> and thrice in the *Liber Apologeticus* commonly attributed to Priscillian.<sup>11</sup> Lagrange explains this Old Latin reading of v. 20 as a free rendering of the Greek text.<sup>12</sup> Were this point certain, the Old Latin reading would indicate clearly the way in which our Greek text was understood throughout the Latin Church in the first centuries. However, the absence of *propria* and of the negative—two characteristics of the Old Latin of v. 20—may have been due to a variant Greek text now lost or to a misreading of the present Greek text. It is possible, for example, that ΙΔΙΑΣ was read in some MSS as ΕΝΔΕΗΣ.<sup>13</sup> In that event the omission of the negative would be almost automatic. Later on we shall refer to the form which v. 20 takes in Rufinus' translation of Origen. In any case, it is not improbable that the ablative *interpretatione* of our Vulgate is a residue of the Old Latin of v. 20.

That our text enunciates a general principle is clear from the very form of the sentence. The author speaks in this verse of *omnis prophetia scripturae*, not merely of such prophecy as has to do with the parousia. His mode of speech is all-inclusive. "No [πᾶσα . . . οὐ] prophecy," he says, "contained in scripture—and therefore no parousiac prophecy—*ιδίας ἐπιλύσεως . . . γίνεται*." Before embarking on our direct examination of this enigmatic phrase, a passing reference may be made to the interpretation championed by Estius and others, which gave *prophetia scripturae* the meaning "expositio scripturarum."<sup>14</sup> This view is no longer common nor can it be said that Estius' arguments are at all convincing.

THE NOUN.—Years ago, in the article already mentioned,<sup>15</sup> Durand

<sup>9</sup> Ambrosiaster, *In I Tim. 2:1-4* (PL, XVII, 466 C).

<sup>10</sup> Bachiarius, *Libellus de fide*, n. 6 (PL, XX, 1034 A).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Priscillian, *Liber Apologeticus*, I, 9; VI, 92; VIII, 119 (ed. Schepss, *CSEL Vindob.*, XVIII, 9, 69, 87). In the case of VIII, 119 the sentence, "Omnis profetia uel scribura interpraetationem indiget," is expressly referred to "beatissimus Petrus."

<sup>12</sup> Cf. M. J. Lagrange, O.P., *La Critique rationnelle* (Paris: Gabalda, 1935), p. 557.

<sup>13</sup> The combination *γίνομαι ἐνδεής* with a following genitive is to be found in the LXX of Prov. 11:16; Wisd. 16:3; Ez. 4:17. The idiom *ἐμπνεύας προσδέεται*, though with reference to translation, occurs in Pseudo-Aristeas, *Epistula ad Philocratem*, n. 11 (ed. Tramontano, *La Lettera di Aristeo a Filocrate*, Napoli, 1931, p. 14).

<sup>14</sup> Estius (*in h.l.*) gives the following paraphrase: "Omnis scripturarum expositio, quae prophetia dici mereatur, propria interpretatione non fit."

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Durand, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

pointed out that future discussions of II Pet. 1:20 would have to start from the fact that the term *ἐπίλυσις*,<sup>16</sup> a *hapax* in the New Testament and LXX, has the meaning "interpretation" or "explanation." The statement is quite just. It would perhaps be sufficient simply to take note of the point and pass on at once to a discussion of the construction of the verse. Still, in view of the comparative rarity of the term, it may be helpful to outline the metaphorical usages of *ἐπίλυσις* relevant to our text. A recapitulation of its metaphorical usages will serve to give us a feeling for the word and a keener appreciation of its possibilities in v. 20.

As the noun is rather infrequent it seems legitimate to take note too of occurrences of the cognate verb *ἐπιλύειν*. The tabulation will not be complete as there are several references which we have been unable to control. However, the following usages have been noted:

1) The solution of objections or fallacious arguments. Thus, Clement of Alexandria used the verb to designate the solving of difficulties raised by pagans against the parousia of Christ.<sup>17</sup> Philo used the verb to signify the exposure of fallacious argumentation.<sup>18</sup> Both noun and verb were used by Sextus Empiricus in this sense.<sup>19</sup>

2) The explanation of puzzling or mysterious statements, problems, etc. (a) The verb is used more than once by Athenaeus to indicate the explanation of puzzles or riddles.<sup>20</sup> The same usage is found in Josephus.<sup>21</sup> (b) An anonymous Greek translator of the Old Testament mentioned in Origen's *Hexapla* used the noun in Eccles. 8:1 (7:30) to signify the wise man's interpretation of the difficult matters submitted to his consideration.<sup>22</sup> (c) The two terms seem to have been favorites of Aquila when speaking of symbolic dreams. In Gen. 40:8 he used the noun to designate the explanation which Joseph was to give of the mysterious symbols seen by the fellow prisoners of that patriarch in their dreams.<sup>23</sup> Here the LXX reads *διασάφησις*. In that same verse, and again in a similar

<sup>16</sup> Conjectural emendations of the text to *ἐπιλευσεως* or *ἐπηλυσεως* are now universally abandoned. Likewise we may entirely disregard Spitta's emendation of *ιδίως* to *αργίως*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Clement, *Strom.*, VI, c. 1, n. 1 (ed. Stählin, *CGS Berol.*, Clementis Tom. II, 422).

<sup>18</sup> Philo, *De agricultura*, III, n. 16 (ed. Colson-Whitaker, *Philo*, Loeb Classical Library, III, 114).

<sup>19</sup> Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhon. Hyp.*, II, n. 246 (ed. Bury, *Sextus Empiricus*, Loeb Classical Library I, 314).

<sup>20</sup> Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, X, 450 e (ed. Gulick, *Athenaeus*, Loeb Classical Library, IV, 542).

<sup>21</sup> Josephus, *Antiq.*, VIII, [c. 6, n. 5], 167 (ed. Thackeray-Marcus, *Josephus*, Loeb Classical Library, V, 662).

<sup>22</sup> Origen, *Hexapla*, in *h.l.* (ed. Field, Oxford: Clarendon, 1875, II, 395).

<sup>23</sup> Origen, *op. cit.*, I, 57.

context in the following chapter,<sup>24</sup> Aquila made use of the cognate verb in quite the same manner. (d) In the Greek version, no longer extant, of IV Esdras the noun seems to have been used to signify the interpretation of a mysterious vision. For we know that the term *absolutio*, found in the Latin version of IV Esd. 10:43, was not infrequently employed to translate *ἐπιλυσις* in this sense.<sup>25</sup> (e) Heliodorus (IV, 9) is said to have used the noun to signify the interpretation of oracles.<sup>26</sup>

3) The explanation of stories and parables. (a) Aristotle used the verb in reference to the explanation of myths.<sup>27</sup> (b) In the third part of the *Shepherd* of Hermas both noun and verb are constantly used to indicate the explanation of the "Similitudes."<sup>28</sup> Irenaeus, in like manner, employed the terms *ἐπιλυσις*, *ἐπιλύειν* (or the corresponding *absolutio*, *absolvere*) to denote the explanations of their parables given by the Gnostics.<sup>29</sup>

4) The lucid explanation of obscure writings. Both noun and verb were so used by Vettius Valens.<sup>30</sup>

5) Clement of Alexandria used the plural of the noun to indicate the various allegorical interpretations which might be given the "stater" mentioned in Mt. 17:27.<sup>31</sup>

The metaphorical use of our term and its normal connotation seem clear. Both noun and verb are employed to express the idea of interpretation or explanation, and generally with a connotation of obscurity or even mystery in the object of the interpretation.

In the case of II Pet. 1:20 commentators who accept the meaning "interpretation" (and today practically all so understand the noun<sup>32</sup>)

<sup>24</sup> I.e., Gen. 41:8, 12; cf. Origen, *op. cit.*, I, 58. Symmachus, we may add, is said to have used the noun, and Theodotion the verb, to render *teraphim* in Os. 3:4 (cf. Origen, *op. cit.*, II, 945); a case, however, of *obscurum per obscurius*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. G. H. Box, *The Ezra-Apocalypse* (London: Pitman and Sons, 1912), p. 237, note g.

<sup>26</sup> So Mayor, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Fragm.* 164 (ed. Bekker, *Aristotelis Opera*, Berlin: Reimer, 1831-70, V, 1505).

<sup>28</sup> Hermas, *Pastor*, Sim. V, c. 3, n. 1; c. 4, nn. 2, 3; c. 5, n. 1; etc. (ed. Funk, *Patres Apostolici*, Tübingen, 1901, I, 534, 536, 538, 542, etc.).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. S. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, I, c. 19, n. 2, and II, c. 28, n. 2 (ed. Harvey, Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1857, I, 176, 351); several other passages in *Adv. Haer.* might be cited.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. H. Moulton-G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), s. *vv.*, p. 241; the texts are quoted *in extenso*.

<sup>31</sup> Clement, *Paedag.*, II, c. 1, n. 14 (ed. Stählin, *CGS Berol.*, Clementis Tom. I, ed. 2, 163).

<sup>32</sup> Spitta's proposal (cf. *supra*, note 16) to give the noun the meaning "dissolution," and to interpret the verse after the fashion of Mt. 5:17 and Jn. 10:35 has been without influence.

apply that thought either to the readers' interpretation of prophecy or else to the explanation made by the prophets themselves. The latter view has two forms. Some commentators have taken "interpretation" to refer to the prophets' understanding of the signs, visions, etc., vouchsafed them; others have understood the term to signify the explanation which the prophets might have appended to their prophecies. There are, then, really three ways in which "interpretation" might be construed in our verse. Contrary to what is sometimes stated, the term *ἐπίλυσις* admits of each of these constructions, as may be seen from the foregoing list of its usages. So far, then, as the noun is concerned, all three explanations of the word in the present text are possible. Our choice of interpretation will have to turn on further considerations of text and context.

THE VERB AND ITS DEPENDENT GENITIVE.—Some older authors insisted that *γίνεσθαι* here must denote origin. According to Alford, who discusses this question rather thoroughly, the meaning of v. 20 would be: "no prophecy . . . comes of private interpretation," or "prophecy . . . springs not out of human interpretation."<sup>33</sup> If the predicate construction is so understood, it is obvious that "interpretation" must be taken to signify, in Alford's words, "not our interpretation of prophecy, but its *resolution*, or *interpretation*, by the prophets themselves."

Although predicate genitives of origin with *γίγνομαι* are surely not impossible, A. T. Robertson is the only New Testament grammarian, so far as the writer knows, to favor that construction in II Pet. 1:20. Robertson regards *ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως* as an "ablative case," a "case of origin, source, . . ."<sup>34</sup> Today, however, the greater number of grammarians explain the genitive in v. 20 as one of quality or of pertinence—variations of the possessive genitive.<sup>35</sup>

It is true, of course, that *γίνομαι* is but rarely followed in the New Testament by predicate genitives; it is true too that in the few instances where this construction occurs, the genitive is usually one of outright possession (cf. Luke 20:14, 33) or of measure (cf. I Tim. 5:9). However, the *ἐγένετο γνώμης* of Acts 20:3 is in all probability to be

<sup>33</sup> H. Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Lee and Shepard, ed. 4, 1872), IV, 400 f.

<sup>34</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, ed. 3, 1919), pp. 514, 518.

<sup>35</sup> Thus Bauer, Bigg, Debrunner, Durand, Mayor, Zorell.

explained grammatically as a quasi-possessive genitive or genitive of pertinence.<sup>36</sup> With other verbs predicate genitives of this type occur several times in the New Testament (e.g., Heb. 12:11). As for the classical writers, this construction is rather frequent even with *γίγνομαι*.<sup>37</sup> This verb has then a force equivalent to our English expressions "become one of," "fall to (the lot, etc.) of," "belong to," "come under the scope of," etc.

With regard to II Pet. 1:20, however, it seems safest at this stage of the discussion to concede that the predicate genitive there could be one either of origin or of pertinence. Yet the latter construction does seem to be the more likely one. For even though it would be excessive perhaps to maintain with Mayor (*loc. cit.*) that Alford's interpretation "attributes to *γίνομαι* a force which it could only bear if followed by the preposition *ἐκ*," still it must be admitted that New Testament usage (cf. Gal. 4:4; I Tim. 6:4; Heb. 11:12) would lead one to expect the preposition in Alford's interpretation.

Before entering upon the next phase of our discussion we must take note of the following point. Though a predicate genitive of origin in our text would necessarily involve the meaning "interpretation by the prophets of the visions, etc., which they had received," a quasi-possessive genitive would not of itself limit "interpretation" in v. 20 to any one sense. On the contrary, several interpretations would still be possible according to the force given the adjective *ιδίαις*. This adjective may indeed be regarded as the key-word of the whole verse.

THE ADJECTIVE.—It has become more or less customary to translate *ιδίαις* in v. 20 by "private." Still it should be remembered that neither the Greek word nor the corresponding *propria* of the Vulgate has that meaning of itself and apart from its context.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, except for the phrase *κατ' ιδίαν*, the adjective *ιδιος* seems hardly ever to signify "private" in the New Testament. The prevailing use of the word, with or without the article, is that of an equivalent for *ἑαυτοῦ*,

<sup>36</sup> Cf. A. Debrunner, *Friedrich Blass' Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, ed. 6, 1931), n. 400, 7; pp. 227 f.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. H. G. Liddell—R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), s.v., II, 3, a (II, 349).

<sup>38</sup> The adjective "private" is more properly translated by *ιδιωτικὸς* (cf. e.g., IV Mach. 4:3), or by the Latin *peculiaris*, etc.



ἐαυτῶν (*suus*, or *ipsius*, *ipsorum*), expressing possession with greater or less emphasis: "his," "his own," etc.<sup>39</sup> Forms of this adjective occur relatively often in the *Secunda Petri* (cf. 1:3, 20; 2:16, 22; 3:3, 16, 17). In II Pet. 3:17 it occurs in the sense of "your" or "your own."

This New Testament usage of the adjective—its normal usage in the *Secunda Petri*—must evidently be kept in view in our further discussion of II Pet. 1:20. We have noted above that neither the term "interpretation" nor the fact of a predicate genitive with γίverαι points decisively either to the quasi-possessive construction or to that of a genitive of origin. It is now our task to examine how these two general constructions fit in with the reflexive connotation inherent in the adjective. And it is time, too, for us to take up several contextual considerations passed over in the foregoing pages.

*The Hypothesis of a Genitive of Origin.*—This construction, as we have said, makes ἐπιλήσεως refer to an interpretation made by the prophets themselves, either prior to, or in the act of prophecy. "No prophecy comes of an interpretation" made by the prophets. It is, of course, a truism that prophecy is not derived from the prophet's unaided interpretation of signs and visions. The petition of the prophet Daniel (cf. Dan. 12:8 f.) for light to understand the vision granted to him has often been cited in support of the present hypothesis.<sup>40</sup> The thought is also to be found in Philo,<sup>41</sup> and in Hippolytus.<sup>42</sup> But is it the thought of v. 20?

In this understanding of the text the possessive adjective would have to have the meaning "their own," with reference to the "prophets." This construction is very awkward, for no express mention is made of "prophets" either in the text or in the preceding context. It would, indeed, seem that the normal force of the adjective ἴδιος must be considered to rule out the genitive of origin construction. Nor is the situation much different where the adjective is translated

<sup>39</sup> Cf. J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. I (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, ed. 2, 1906), pp. 87 ff.; cf. also G. A. Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1901), pp. 123 ff.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. also Zach. 4:4 ff.; I Pet. 1:10 f.

<sup>41</sup> Philo, *Quis rerum divinarum haeres*, c. 52, n. 258 ff. (ed. Colson-Whitaker, *Philo*, Loeb Classical Library, IV, 412 ff.); cf. also *idem*, *Vita Mosis*, I, c. 51, nn. 280 f. (ed. Colson, *Philo*, VI, 420 f.).

<sup>42</sup> Hippolytus, *De Christo et Antichristo*, n. 2 (*CGS Berol.*, Hippolyt. Tom. I-2, 5).

by "private." For the privacy in question must be that of the individual prophet or perhaps that of the prophetic circle. Neither "prophet" nor "prophets" have been expressly mentioned in the context.

A further point. We conceded above that *ἐπιλύσεως* might possibly be construed as a genitive of origin in v. 20. But against that possibility lie several considerations of context. Had the sacred author intended *ἐπιλύσεως* to serve as a genitive of origin, he would have appended some dependent genitive such as *δραμάτων*, signifying "visions," "signs," etc. Ordinary clarity would have demanded some such addition. All the more so, as the foregoing term "prophecy," with its connotation of obscurity and mystery, could easily be taken by readers as the logical object of the process of "interpretation." The absence of a dependent genitive of object is a strong argument against the hypothesis of a genitive of origin in v. 20. We may note in addition that this construction does not smooth the connection between vv. 20 and 21. For v. 20 would be hardly anything more than a mere anticipation of the first half of v. 21. It does seem rather strained to find in v. 20 the idea proper to v. 21.

It is usual to cite, in support of the present hypothesis, the commentaries—really two recensions of the same commentary—which pass under the names of the mysterious "Oecumenius" and the eleventh-century Theophylact.<sup>43</sup> A child of the Greek *Catena*e, as Staab calls it, this twofold recension is our main channel back to the exegesis of our text current in the Greek Church. We shall follow the Theophylact recension: it happens in the present instance to be fuller than that of "Oecumenius." After a quotation of vv. 20–21 the commentary proceeds:<sup>44</sup>

The prophets knew the inspired words they were receiving from the prophetic Spirit, and the bearing of those words; still they did not know them in the exact detail in which those words were later fulfilled. It was for this reason that, as the Lord has said (cf. Luke 10:24), the prophets yearned to see the issue of their predictions.<sup>45</sup> Now Peter is here explaining why the prophets refrained from interpreting [*ὄχι ἠρμήνευσαν*] their sayings; at the same time he distinguishes

<sup>43</sup> Cf. K. Staab, "Die Griechischen Katenenkommentare zu den katholischen Briefen," *Biblica*, V (1924), 352.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *PG*, CXXV, 1264 D f.

<sup>45</sup> The parallel "Oecumenius" text (cf. *PG*, CXIX, 592 B) terminates here.

true prophecy from the demoniacal and counterfeit prophecy to be found among the heretics. 'No prophecy of scripture,' he says, 'ιδίας ἐπιλόσεως... γίνεται.' That is to say, the prophets receive their prophecy from God, not however as they would wish, but according as the divine Spirit works in them. And while they knew and understood the prophetic message sent down to them, *they did not work out its explanation* [οὐ... τὴν ἐπίλυσιν αὐτοῦ ἐποιούντο]. That the prophets, while under the movement of the Spirit of God, were conscious that their message was being sent to them by the divine Spirit, is clear from the voluntary character of their service: they said what they wished to say, they kept silent what they did not wish to say. Not so the false prophets! These men were unconscious of the influences working in them; beside themselves in their frenzy, like drunken men they were not conscious of the forces operating in them. . . .

There can be no doubt of the sense given in this commentary to v. 20. It would be interesting to know if this explanation of our text was taken from a major patristic writer. The commentator's preoccupation with mantic inspiration, probably that of the Montanists whose tenets persisted so long in the East, is evident in the text. Perhaps II Pet. 1:21*a* had been abused by heretics in an effort to exclude liberty from the concept of prophetic inspiration. At all events, this very preoccupation of the commentator lessens the value of his comments as regards v. 20.

Much has been made, too, of the fact that Bede and a long line of later Latin commentators support the interpretation which refers *propria* to the prophets. The venerable Northumbrian monk is explicit:

Pendet hic versiculus ex eo quod superius ait: "cui bene facitis attendentes"; qui enim prophetarum verba attendentes bene utique faciunt, ut per haec lucem habere possint scientiae, hoc primum intellegere debent, quia *nullus prophetarum sanctorum propria sua interpretatione populis dogmata vitae praedicavit*, sed quae a Domino didicerant, haec suis auditoribus agenda commendabant. . . .<sup>46</sup>

However, it should not be forgotten that Bede is commenting the Vulgate text of II Pet. 1:20. The Vulgate reading *propria interpretatione non fit* all but imposes this mode of exegesis. But there is reason to suspect that Bede was not entirely satisfied with the exposition given. For, after a brief contrast of the methods pursued by pagan seers, he continues:

<sup>46</sup> Ven. Bede, *in h.l.* (PL, XCIII, 73 C).

Sicut ergo prophetae non sua propria, sed Dei verba scribebant, ita et *lector eorum non sua propria interpretatione potest uli*, ne a sensu veritatis exorbitet, sed hoc omnimodis debet intendere, quomodo sua voluerit intellegi ipse qui scripsit.

*The Hypothesis of a Quasi-Possessive Genitive.*—As we noted once before, several interpretations are possible in this alternative hypothesis. First there is the chance that *idias* refers to the grammatical subject of the clause, to “prophesy,” with the meaning: “no prophesy of Scripture becomes an object of *its own* interpretation.” In other words, the sacred author would be stating that scriptural prophesy is not self-explanatory. A few authors seem to have defended this construction.<sup>47</sup>

Though from the grammatical standpoint this construction is not impossible, it is more usual for *idios* to refer to persons than to things. Furthermore it is doubtful that the sacred writer would express so obscurely a straightforward thought of this sort. In II Pet. 3:16, where a similar thought is recorded, he used the expression *δυσνόητα* (*difficilia intellectu*)—a clear-cut and unambiguous form of speech. In the present case he would probably have used *δυσερμήνευτος* (cf. Heb. 5:11) or some such word. Finally we may note that the interpretation in question does not easily harmonize with v. 21. It could hardly be said, in support of the contention that prophecies are not self-explanatory, that “not by will of man was prophesy brought of old, etc.”

Another possibility. The adjective *idias* might be taken to refer grammatically to the *intelligentes* of v. 20. The phrase would then mean “*your own* interpretation.” So understood, the adjective would refer directly and almost exclusively to the immediate readers of the *Secunda Petri*. There is, of course, no difficulty in referring the possessive adjective to a second person plural (cf. II Pet. 3:17). The difficulty of this interpretation lies rather in the fact that the term would function here as an indirect, and not as a direct, reflexive. The present writer has found no clear instance of this usage. Still more at variance with this construction is the fact that the scope of v. 20 is much broader than that of v. 19. The universal statement in v. 20 is not limited to any single group of persons.

<sup>47</sup> Mayor (*op. cit.*) names Werenfels, Brücker, and Bisping.

There remains a third construction. Taking into account the personal connotation usual with *ἴδιος* and making allowance for the universal character of the principle enunciated in v. 20, modern commentators generally agree in referring the possessive adjective, not indeed to the readers merely of the parousiac prophecies, but to any and all readers of the prophetic Scriptures. In this understanding of the passage, v. 20 may be translated: "no prophecy of Scripture becomes a matter (*or* comes within the scope) of *one's own* interpretation." The further shading and more exact determination of the force of "one's own" turns on considerations of context.

Clearly this explanation fits in neatly with the contents of v. 21. Some, it is true, who favored the genitive of origin in our text, urged that difficulty in the interpretation of prophecy is a notion alien to the preceding context. For, it has been argued,<sup>48</sup> the apostle speaks of prophecy "not as difficult of interpretation, but as a candle shining in a dark place, nay, as being even more firm and secure than external proofs of the same proofs." At first sight the objection appears to be not without force. Still, Bellarmine's answer remains valid today: "Respondeo hoc etiam loco (i.e., II Pet. 1:19) prophetarum voces vocari lucernam, *non quia facile intelliguntur, sed quia intellectae illuminant* et iter ostendunt ad Christum."<sup>49</sup> Truly, the objection is more seeming than real. To take a rather parallel case in our *Secunda Petri*, the sacred writer certainly appears to approve and encourage his readers' familiarity with certain letters of Paul (cf. 3:16); yet the author does not hesitate to observe that these same letters contain "some things hard to understand."

It has always been considered a weak spot in the quasi-possessive hypothesis that the trend of patristic comment, as evidenced in Bede and in the Theophylact commentary, lay the other way. However, there is a piece of patristic evidence which offsets the reference of *ιδίαις* (*propria*) to the prophets. So far as the writer has observed, a text in Rufinus' translation of Origen's *Homilies on the Book of Numbers* has never been quoted in discussions on the meaning of II Pet. 1:20. For the sake of clarity, the text must be quoted at some length:

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Alford (*op. cit.*, IV, 300), who in this is following Hüther.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *De Verbo Dei*, III, c. 2, ad arg. 4.

'Et exsurget' ut 'stella ex Iacob, perdet liberatum de civitate.' Non in hoc solum, sed in omni paene prophético stilo quae dicuntur, involuto satis et obscuro sermone dicuntur. Non enim placuit sancto Spiritui, qui de his scribi voluit, ut *palam haec et pedibus*, ut ita dicam, *imperitorum conculcanda* ponerentur, sed ita providit, ut, cum publice haberi videantur, sermonum tamen obscuritate recondita in arcanis et secretis oblecta serventur. Et nunc ergo quod ait: 'Perdet liberatum de civitate,' nisi ad consuetudinem propheticam respicias, de qua dicitur: '*Omnis propheta non potest propria absolute constare,*' valde difficilis videbitur intellectus. Videamus tamen, si forte hoc modo poterit explanari. Civitatem. . .<sup>50</sup>

Some might wish to attribute to Origen the integral text just quoted; it will be safer, however, to treat this passage simply as representing the views of Rufinus (+ ca. 409).<sup>51</sup> Now granted that the text of II Pet. 1:20 is presented here somewhat freely, there can be no doubt that Rufinus understood the *propria* of v. 20 in a manner not consonant with the hypothesis of a genitive of origin. For, whether he was following the Old Latin text current at Aquileia, as seems to have been his usual practice,<sup>52</sup> or was rendering freely our present Greek text of v. 20, one fact stands out clear: Rufinus did not take *propria* as referring to the prophets. On the positive side, Rufinus' meaning is less clear. He may have meant, "no prophecy can be made manifest through one's own interpretation," and so have taken the phrase in accord with his previous remarks on the *imperiti*—the everyday readers of scriptural prophecy. More probably, however, he was emphasizing the thought of his master Origen, that prophetic speech is often to be taken in an allegorical sense, not in the sense suggested by the bare literal meaning of its terms. In either case, reference of *propria* to the prophets is excluded. This testimony from the great patristic age is surely as weighty as the comments of Bede and of the Theophylact commentary.

In the hypothesis of a quasi-possessive genitive, the sequence of the apostle's thought is clear. In the matter of the parousiac prophecies the essential point was the fact itself of the Lord's future parousia. The reality of that future fact, we know (cf. II Pet. 3:4), had already

<sup>50</sup> Origen, *In Numeros Homiliae* XVIII, c. 4 (ed. Baehrens, *CGS Berol.*, Origenis Tom. VII, 175). The texts here discussed are the LXX of Num. 24:17c and 19b. It is curious that Baehrens does not list II Pet. 1:20 in his *Index Bibliicus*.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. F. H. Chase, "Peter, Second Epistle," in Hasting's *Dictionary of the Bible*, III, 803.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. A. Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1913), p. 82, note 2.

become an object of attack. And so, the addressees of the *Secunda Petri* were exhorted to cling to the *sermo propheticus*—the divine testimony assuring them of the reality of that great event of the future. They should see in that testimony their source of light across the dark places of the present time. Yet they were to be on their guard against abuses in their devotion to the prophetic Scriptures. Some, for example, might urge that passages customarily taken in a parousiac sense had quite another meaning. Others might forget that there is much in prophecy that is obscure and enigmatic, that circumstances of time and manner may remain indefinite in prophecy without prejudice to the reality of the events predicted. The failure of the parousia to materialize was already proving a stumbling-block to many; some were even ready to attack the truth of parousiac prophecies. In such circumstances the apostle encourages devotion to those prophecies, but at the same time he warns his readers that it is not within the scope of "one's own interpretation" to decide what is or is not prophetic, or to determine and treat as prophetic circumstantial details outside the sphere of God's prophetic testimony.

#### THE POSITIVE TEACHING OF THE TEXT

The form of the general statement in v. 20 is negative; the term *idios*, in its fundamental reflexive sense "one's own," is essentially relative. The positive force of the text will evidently turn on the question: To what is "one's own" contrasted in the context of the *Secunda Petri*? Several theories have been advanced on this point.

#### *The Contrast*

*Mayor's Position.*—J. B. Mayor put forth the thesis that "private" in our text stands in contrast to "general interpretation." No prophecy, he states, "is exhausted by one interpretation to which it is, as it were, tied."<sup>53</sup> Later on, in his Comments, he expresses his view more definitely:

Prophecy is not restricted to the particular meaning assigned to it by a particular man or a particular generation. The special work of the prophet is to interpret the working of God to his own generation. But in doing this he is laying down the principles of God's action generally. Hence there may be many fulfilments of one prophecy, or, to speak more exactly, many historical illustrations of some one principle of Providential Government.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Mayor, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Mayor, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

Other considerations apart, one may indeed doubt that the author of the *Secunda Petri* intended any such meaning in v. 20. A message of this kind would have defeated the purpose of the apostolic exhortation pronounced in v. 19*b*. The faithful, while urged to heed the prophecies—the prophecies pertaining to the final parousia, would at the same time be given to understand that the full meaning of those same prophecies is not exhausted by the parousiac sense attached to them! It is little wonder that Mayor's view has won few adherents.

*Contrast with the Holy Spirit.*—Most commentators, though with a variety of nuance that need not delay us, emphasize today the contrast between *idias* and the divine author of the prophecies.<sup>56</sup> The contrast is evident: "no prophecy of Scripture comes within the scope of one's own interpretation; for it was not by will of man that prophecy was brought of old; on the contrary, borne along by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God." As prophecy is superhuman in origin, so no merely human interpretation will suit its contents. The meaning of a prophecy is the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit. And obviously, as many modern writers insist, there must be nothing arbitrary or capricious in man's interpretation of prophetic sayings.

### *The Organs of Interpretation*

*The Apostolic Leaders.*—That the interpretation of prophecy must be in accord with the sense intended by the Holy Spirit, would seem to be the direct and immediate lesson of v. 20. But is that the full message of the verse? Is there not present, too, an implicit contrast with the judgement of the Church? Certainly the apostles' authoritative teaching on the force and bearing of prophetic passages of the Old Testament cannot have been far from the mind of the sacred writer. His insistence on the position of the apostles (cf. II Pet. 1:1, 13, 16–18) and his antithetical mention of the "false-teachers" (cf. 2:1 ff.) make it legitimate to infer that in the sacred writer's mind resort should be had to apostolic authority to discover, in cases of doubtful or difficult prophetic sayings, the sense intended by the Holy Spirit. Nor should the evidence of Chapter 3 be neglected in this connection. Without adopting Ladeuze's hypothesis of an accidental transposition of II

<sup>56</sup> Thus Bigg, Calmes, Chaine, Felten, Huby, Wand, Windisch.



Pet. 2:3b-22 and 3:1-16,<sup>56</sup> there can be little doubt that the sense of 1:16-21 is next resumed in 3:1-16. And there the authentic character of the parousiac teaching of the apostles, as contrasted with that of the scoffers, is set forth very definitely. There are also other data in the New Testament to be considered.

According to St. Paul's teaching, as Bonsirven notes apropos of II Cor. 3:13-16,<sup>57</sup> it is a principle of Christian exegesis that the Bible cannot be understood save "by means of the faith in Christ Jesus." Jewish exegesis, through its refusal to accept that faith, was incapable of understanding fully the message of the Old Testament. The failure of the Jewish leaders to understand "the utterances of the prophets which are read every sabbath" (cf. Acts 13:27; also 3:17) is stressed as an immediate cause of their final opposition to Jesus.

Still, mere possession of faith in Christ Jesus—so our text clearly indicates—did not qualify every individual Christian to expound the prophecies. To understand the associations which II Pet. 1:20 would evoke in the minds of the first addressees of that letter, we must take note of the manner in which the prophets were expounded authoritatively in the apostolic age. And from the scanty records which have come down to us, it is clear that the office of authoritative exposition was vested in the major Christian teachers.

At the very dawn of the Church's existence the risen Christ is described by Luke as "opening" the Scriptures to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Reflecting later how their Master "had interpreted [διερμήνευσεν] to them in all the Scriptures the things referring to himself," Cleophas and his companion exclaimed in wonderment: "Was not our heart burning within us while he was speaking on the road and *opening* [διήνοιγεν] to us the Scriptures?" (cf. Luke 24:27, 32). It is significant that the term "opening" is akin to the term "releasing" [ἐπίλυσις] used metaphorically in our text in an analogous sense. Now the power of "opening the Scriptures," mentioned by the Emmaus disciples, was soon to be com-

<sup>56</sup> Cf. P. Ladeuze, "Transposition accidentelle dans la IIa Petri," *Revue biblique*, n.s. II (1905), 543-52.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. J. Bonsirven, S.J., *Exégèse rabbinique et exégèse paulinienne* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1939), p. 272.

municated by Christ to His apostles. Shortly before the ascension, Christ in the company of the apostles "opened their minds that they might understand the Scriptures" (cf. Luke 24:45).

In the following decades several instances of authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures are recorded. Peter (cf. Acts 2:16 ff.; 3:22 ff.), Stephen (cf. Acts 6:10; 7:1 ff.), Philip the deacon (cf. Acts 8:29 ff.), James (cf. Acts 15:16 ff.), and Apollos (cf. Acts 18:28) stand forth as representative expositors of the Scriptures. There is hardly any need to speak of the numerous cases of scriptural interpretation by Paul. Still, it is of special interest to note that on one occasion Paul's scriptural exegesis is described as an "opening" of the Scriptures. His evangelical labors at the synagogue of Thessalonica are thus described: "And Paul . . . reasoned with them from the Scriptures; explaining [= *διανοίγων*, i.e., 'opening'] and showing that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead" (cf. Acts 17:2 f.).

Making all due allowance for the habits of contemporary Jewish exegesis, the assurance and authority with which Paul founded lessons and even arguments on his typical interpretation of Old Testament passages, make it all but evident that the Apostle of the Gentiles was aware and confident of the divinely inspired character of those interpretations.<sup>58</sup> The fact of their inspiration must have been acknowledged by his fellow teachers of apostolic rank (cf. II Pet. 3:15). It cannot be doubted that both they and the primitive Christian communities looked on Paul's exegesis of Old Testament prophecy as the fruit of an inner teaching of the Holy Spirit. What is said of Paul in this connection, may be said with all justice of the other major apostles. Hence it seems only natural to infer that the ancient readers of our letter would see in II Pet. 1:20 an allusional contrast to the authoritative scriptural interpretations handed out by the primary Christian teachers of the time.

*The Charismatics.*—It is possible perhaps to go a step further. Authoritative interpretation of the Scriptures may well have been an appanage of the charismatics of the primitive Church. This aspect of our problem, while not new, is little noticed in modern discussions of our text. And yet the *Secunda Petri* should be studied against its first century background.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Bonsirven, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

Two centuries ago, Calmet maintained that the power to interpret the Scriptures belonged to the charism of prophecy.<sup>60</sup> The theory is deserving of some consideration. In Paul's hierarchy of charisms,<sup>60</sup> the prophets are normally listed right after the apostles.<sup>61</sup> Early Christians held these prophets in highest esteem. Paul himself shows a special regard for this type of charism (cf. I Cor. 14:1 f.). Like Agabus (cf. Acts 11:28; 21:10 f.) these charismatic prophets were wont to foretell the future. As preachers they were under some special guidance or even inspiration of the Holy Spirit. However, their connection with scriptural interpretation is less evident. For their preaching seems to have been directed more to the heart than to the mind; it seems to have been essentially paraenetic. Insofar as their work is described by St. Paul,<sup>62</sup> its specific aim was to edify, to exhort, and to console.

Teaching or *didaskalia*, the third in Paul's hierarchy of charisms, may with greater reason be considered in connection with scriptural interpretation. But first a word or two about these doctors or teachers.

In the very earliest period of the Church the charisms of prophecy and teaching might be found in the same individual. Thus, in the beginnings of the Christian community at Antioch, Barnabas and Saul and the other leaders of that great center are styled "prophets and teachers" indiscriminately (cf. Acts 13:1). Later however, after the founding of so many local churches, the *didaskaloi*, unlike the itinerant "apostles," seem to have belonged as a rule to definite communities.<sup>63</sup> Paul's celebrated statement in Eph. 4:11 is to be noted: "And he himself gave some men (to the Church) as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, *others as pastors and teachers*

<sup>60</sup> A. Calmet, O.S.B. (*in h.l.*, according to Mansi's Latin translation) makes this statement: "Primis Ecclesiae Christianae temporibus, in singulis Ecclesiis erant Prophetae, peculiari explicandarum Scripturarum dono praestantes. Jubet Petrus hos consuli aut Apostolos, ut germanam sacrorum voluminum sententiam assequere; vetatque unumquemque vulgo Magistrum ac Doctorem agere in hoc studii genere, vulgare hominum ingenium adeo superante."

<sup>60</sup> Cf. I Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11.

<sup>61</sup> The term "apostles" here is not limited to the Twelve; cf. J. Huby, S.J., *In Eph.* 4:11; cf. also M. J. Lagrange, O.P., *In Rom.* 16:7.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:11; I Cor. 12:8; Rom. 12:7.

<sup>63</sup> On these charismatics, compare *Didache*, c. 11 and c. 13 (ed. Funk-Bihlmeyer, *Die Apostolischen Väter*, Tübingen, 1924, I, 6-8).

[τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους]. . .” The way in which Paul groups the last two charismatic orders under the same definite article, points to the conclusion that the “pastors” of the early Christian communities were normally *didaskaloi*.<sup>64</sup> For the rest, a pastor would ordinarily have to be able to instruct his flock and so would have to exercise the work of *didaskalia*.

Although our information on this charism is rather meager, there is fairly general agreement that the *didaskaloi* were catechists raised up providentially and endowed with the “discourse of knowledge.”<sup>65</sup> Their task was to provide the current teaching of Christian truth. Now as a very considerable part of the early Christian catechesis was taken up with interpretations of the Old Testament prophecies, it is difficult to evade the conclusion that scriptural interpretation formed part of the office of the *didaskalos*, that it pertained to the charism of *didaskalia*.

Bonsirven,<sup>66</sup> who in this follows Prat, would seem to hold that the catechetical discourses of these teachers were inspired. It would follow, too, that their scriptural interpretations were inspired. Yet the point would be difficult to prove. Lagrange denies the inspiration of the *didaskaloi*.<sup>67</sup> Allo, in turn, defends the very reasonable view that the charism of *didaskalia* is to be taken in the broader sense of “grace of state.”<sup>68</sup> These more moderate views do not at all belie the authoritative status of the *didaskaloi* in the primitive Christian community.

And now for the application of all this to II Pet. 1:20. If interpretation of the Scriptures belonged to the office of the local *didaskaloi*, the primitive addressees of the *Secunda Petri* could not fail to sense in the *ιδίαις ἐπιλύσεως* of v. 20 a contrast, not only to the explanations given by the great apostolic leaders, but also to the interpretations offered by the charismatic *didaskaloi* of their local churches. And it is suggestive, to say the least, that *pseudodidaskaloi*, the “false teachers,” should be introduced in the section of our letter (cf. 2:1) following the pericope in which we are interested. It is

<sup>64</sup> This interpretation of the text is at least as ancient as St. Jerome: cf. *In Eph.* 4:11-12 (PL, XXVI, 500 B).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. F. Prat, S.J., *La Théologie de Saint Paul*, Vol. I (Paris: Beauchesne, ed. 16, 1927), p. 500.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Bonsirven, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Lagrange, *In Rom.* 12:7.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. E. B. Allo, O.P., *Première épître aux Corinthiens* (Paris: Gabalda, 1934), Exc. xiii, p. 337.

instructive to note that if these "false teachers" are to be identified with the "scoffers" of Chapter 3,<sup>69</sup> their primary error seems to have been opposition to the parousiac prophecies.

Our object in this paper has been to determine how II Pet. 1:20 was understood by its original readers in the first century—how the sacred writer intended this verse to be understood. The expression *ιδίας επιλύσεως* lay in direct opposition to the interpretation intended by the Holy Spirit; indirectly, however, it suggested to its first readers a warning that their own interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures was not to be preferred to the inspired interpretations of the great apostolic leaders or to the official interpretations given by their local *didaskaloi*. In this sense, then, our text may be said to teach implicitly the part of the Church's *magisterium* in the interpretation of the Scriptures. A note must now be added on the relation of our text to the celebrated Tridentine decree of April 8, 1546.

#### *The Tridentine Decree and II Pet. 1:20*

Assuming that the Tridentine decree on the interpretation of the Scriptures is entirely dependent on our text,<sup>70</sup> non-Catholic commentators at times complain that the Fathers of Trent proceeded illegitimately in extending to the whole of Scripture what Peter had only said of prophecy. In answer we might recall that the complaint overlooks the less rigid use of the term "prophecy" in apostolic times.

The term "prophet" was commonly employed as a collective designation for all the post-Mosaic writers of the Old Testament. Not only the *prophetae posteriores*, but also the *prophetae priores* and even the writers of the *hagiographa* were thus designated on occasion. It is, of course, obvious that, as the term "Law" in combination with "Prophets" signified only the Pentateuch, the term "Prophets" in the common expression "Law and Prophets" must frequently have had this wider sense.<sup>71</sup> One might compare Luke 24:27 and 24:44 in this connection. Indeed, David is called a prophet by Peter himself (cf. Acts 2:30). We may add, too, that this wider use of

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Ladeuze, *op. cit.*, p. 545.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Concilium Tridentinum*, sess. IV (ed. Soc. Goerres., Vol. V, Friburgi Br.: Herder, 1911, 92). As the subsequent Tridentine "Profession of Faith" in the time of Pius IV (cf. Mansi, XXXIII, 221) and the decree of the Vatican Council on this matter (sess. III, cap. 2; *Coll. Lacens.*, VII, 251) are, historically speaking, restatements in positive form of the earlier decree of Trent, there is no need to discuss their relation to II Pet. 1:20.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Rom. 3:21.

the term "prophet" was not unknown in contemporary Jewish circles.<sup>72</sup>

As for the extension of the term "prophecy" to the Mosaic portion of the Old Testament, it is well known that Moses was commonly regarded as the prophet par excellence.<sup>73</sup> There are even references to his prophetic status in the New Testament (cf. Mt. 11:13). Certainly the character of the Old Testament quotations which occur in Romans and Hebrews supposes the extension of the terms "prophets" (cf. Rom. 1:2; Heb. 1:1) and "prophetic writings" (cf. Rom. 16:26) to all the writers or writings of the Old Testament collection.

While it cannot, then, be said that the expression "prophecy of Scripture" in II Pet. 1:20 affords no basis for the decree of Trent, there is still need of great caution in determining the exact relation of the Petrine text to the Tridentine decree. Trent does not quote our text or refer to it in any way. Indeed the phraseology of the Tridentine decree is hardly reminiscent of II Pet. 1:20.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, the causes that led to the enactment of that decree as well as its theological basis are very clearly set down in the Tridentine text. Finally, the *acta* preliminary to the decree make no mention of II Pet. 1:20.<sup>75</sup> We may, then, conclude that the Petrine text exerted no marked influence on the Fathers of Trent. Our text could, indeed, have served as a scriptural basis for the Tridentine decree; historically, however, our verse seems to have had no direct influence on it.

#### CONCLUSION

Lost in the shadow of the Pauline *Corpus*, the seven Catholic letters were left almost without commentary in patristic times. Our *Secunda Petri* shared the lot of its companion letters. Indeed, the special difficulties attending the authorship and canonical status of this document made it the least noticed of the group. In the modern reaction toward the Catholic Epistles no opportunity to contribute, however slightly, to their elucidation may be passed over. It is to be hoped that the statement of Rufinus to which we have called attention and our notes on the charismatic doctors may throw some light on a difficult passage of the long-neglected *Secunda Petri*.

<sup>72</sup> Thus Josephus, *Antiq.*, IV, [c. 8, n. 48], 329 (ed. Thackeray, *Josephus*, Loeb Classical Library, IV, 634); cf. also Philo, *Vita Mosis*, II, c. 35, nn. 187 ff. (ed. Colson, *Philo*, Loeb Classical Library, VI, 540 ff.). On non-Hellenistic Judaism, cf. H. L. Strack-P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Vol. IV-1 (München: Beck, 1928), p. 416, 16 Exkurs, I, B, b.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, IV-1, 446, 16 Exkurs, II, B, Nr. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Neither is the conciliar text reminiscent of II Pet. 3:16, despite a similarity of subject.

<sup>75</sup> The preliminary discussions may be found in *Concilium Tridentinum*, ed. Soc. Goerres., I, 36 ff.; 436; V, 29, 82, 84-6, 92.