CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

WERE THE BOOKS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT INSPIRED?
REFUTATION OF THE OPINIONS OF GROTIUS AND SPINOZA.
CARDINAL DU PERRON’S MISTaken EXPLANATION OF THE
WORDS REFERRING TO INSPIRATION IN 2 TIMOTHY 3:16.
QUARREL ON THE SUBJECT OF INSPIRATION BETWEEN
THE JESUITS AND THE THEOLOGIANS OF LOUVAIN.
THREE JESUITS’ PROPOSITIONS CONDEMNED
BY THE DOCTORS OF LOUVAIN AND DOUAI.
DEFENCE OF THE PROPOSITIONS AGAINST
THEIR CENSURING BY THOSE THEOLOGIANS

I have already discussed the inspiration of Scripture elsewhere in general
terms:¹ but since I have only done so in passing to respond to criticisms
made of my critical history of the Old Testament, I shall now examine it
with specific reference to the writings of the Evangelists and the apostles.
That the books in the Old Testament were written by persons inspired is a
common Jewish belief which has passed from Jews to Christians, and led
Origen to say that both groups accept that the Scriptures were written by
the Holy Spirit.²

Christians extended this inspiration to the books in the New Testament.
A small minority of scholars hold that the only inspired Scripture is what
was written by prophets. They denied that the histories were inspired say-
ing that one does not need to be a Prophet to write history. Such is the view
expressed by Grotius, who says that if St Luke had been inspired by God
when writing his story, he would have followed the examples of the Prophets
and this inspiration rather than rely on the reliability of the witnesses he
quotes to support him. Nor, says Grotius, did Luke need any inspiration
to record the Acts of St Paul since he himself witnessed them. He con-
cludes that the writings of St Luke are in the canon not because they were
inspired but because the early Church considered they were written by holy
believers, and because they present matters that are fundamental to our

² Origen, Against Celsus 5.60 (3:162).
salvation. He repeats all these things in one of his works against Rivet who had described his views as irreligious. Here he also says that Esdras and St Luke were not Prophets but serious and prudent men who did not set out to deceive anyone nor were themselves deceived. He adds that St Luke did not say as the Prophets had done, “the word of the Lord was sent to Luke”; nor that the Lord said to him, “Write.”

Grotius is followed in this opinion by Spinoza who presents a more detailed discussion in his book Tractatus Theologico-Politicus. Whilst not denying that the apostles were Prophets, he asserts there is some doubt that they wrote their books as Prophets at the express command and under the inspiration of God like Moses, Jeremiah and others. He claims that a stylistic examination of the apostles’ writings shows that they wrote as individual scholars and not as Prophets because they have no prophetic qualities. His reasoning follows that of Grotius. Prophets, he says, habitually testified that they spoke on the orders of God, not only in their prophecies but even in their letters, in which are to be found revelations.

This view held by Grotius and Spinoza was recently revived in two letters contained in a book entitled “Opinions on Critical History of the Old Testament” by theologians in Holland. As there have been lengthy replies to these two letters and also to further discussion subsequently published on the matter, it would be pointless to repeat here what has already been

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3 Grotius, Votum pro pace ecclesiastica, contra examen Andreae Riveti et alios irreconciliables ... (S. l., 1642) [BnF D2–5099 pièce 1], 136.
4 H. de Groot, Rivetiani apologistici pro schismate contra Votum pacis facti discussio (Opera omnia theologica tome 723).
5 Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1679) derived his knowledge of Christianity from Protestant sects in Holland. He was a noted pantheist, and an opponent of rabbis and of Calvinist pastors: G. Rabeau declares (art. “Spinoza,” Dictionnaire de théologie catholique 14:2:2501) that, for believers, certain passages in the Theologico-politicus are as offensive as anything by Voltaire. In his Tractatus theologico-politicus (1670) he rejected the Cartesian distinction between natural and revealed religion. He questioned the “divine” inspiration of Scripture, claiming that, according to the New Testament, God revealed himself to the apostles solely through Jesus, who claimed to be neither a prophet nor the Jewish Messiah, but the “Son of Man” (see Jean-Robert Armoagathe (éd.), Le Grand Siècle et la Bible (“La Bible de tous les temps” [Paris: Beauchesne, 1989]), 6:35; on the rise of Spinozism in France, see Paul Vernière, Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution (Paris: P.U.F., 1954), 131–120. On R. Simon and Spinoza, see Gibert, L’Invention critique, 177–179 and 265–267.