

30th January 2021

Inspiration

“The knowledge of [humanity] is as the waters, some descending from above, and some springing from beneath; the one informed by the light of nature, the other inspired by divine revelation.”

Francis Bacon, The Advancement of Learning

As a teenager, testing the boundaries of behaviour, I had frequent arguments with my mother. As a growing Christian, testing the boundaries of faith, I had frequent arguments with my mother. We didn't have arguments *all* the time, but sometimes differences of opinion became heated exchanges. One argument, I remember, was about inspiration.

We were discussing a Sunday sermon. My mother believed she had inspiration from God when she needed it and that God spoke clearly and unequivocally. “You open your bible,” she said, “and poke your finger at a random verse, and there's God's Word for you, inspired and direct when required.” I countered by suggesting that inspiration comes in no such fashion. Mine wasn't a “writing-on-the-wall” kind of religion, or even a “finger-poking-at-a-verse-in-the-bible” religion. My faith was using my faculties, God's gifts, of experience, and intellect, and figuring-things-out. That was inspiration enough. God was with me in my decision-making. We couldn't agree to differ. We just disagreed – and had another argument.

If my mother was here now, we wouldn't argue, for we would both accept that we were both right. Like Francis Bacon in the 17th century, we would understand that inspiration comes in different ways. Knowledge, he suggested, is “as the waters”, some from beneath and some from above, some from the light of nature and some from divine revelation. And in my discourse with my mother, that translates into inspiration coming “some from working it out and using our faculties well”, and “some in flashes from beyond ourselves”, God moments, if you like.

The issue isn't *how* inspiration comes or what its origins might be, but whether we are open to moments of clarity, and revelation, and meaning, and insight. There's plenty inspiration around, from above *and* beneath, if only we were prepared to be more aware.

A prayer for today

“Inspire me,” I say. And God replies, “Just wait, and listen, and be aware.” Amen

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