

# With eyes unveiled

---

*Homily on Numbers 24:2-7, 5-17—Monday of the Third Week of Advent*

Thomas A. Baima  
Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, Mundelein, Illinois  
December 15, 2014

Father Barron has said a number of times that if we want to be effective evangelists, we have to listen to the criticisms of Christianity that are made by the dominant culture. From his Word on Fire ministry, he has identified several main clusters of resistance to the Christian proclamation. Specifically, he has names the problem of God, the problem of the Bible, the problem of religious violence, the problem of relativism and a few others. Now, just as Father Barron has devoted his whole priesthood to evangelization, I have committed mine to interreligious dialogue. This was not my idea, by the way, but rather an assignment from the Church. In 1985 I was sent to the USCCB's National Catholic/Muslim Consultation and have been reappointed to every round since then. At some point, in every three year round, one of the Muslim scholars notes that they have a problem with the Bible. Interestingly, it's not the problem which Father Barron encounters in his media ministry, that the God of the Bible seems unworthy of worship. Rather, the problem for Muslims is that the Bible, except for a few books, does not sound like revelation to them. It has narrative, poetry, history, and exhortation. Also, it clearly has, well, human authors. They are scandalized by this. What they are looking for is a text like the one we have today, a real revelation of God to a prophet. The

description in the Book of Numbers sounds familiar to my Muslim friends. It sounds like scripture to them.

Five times now, I have tried to explain to them that it is true that the Bible has multiple authors. In the individual books, you hear the inspired sacred author expressing all and only what the Holy Spirit has led him to write, but in such a way that he remains a true author. But in the canon of the Bible – in other words in the whole corpus – you hear the divine author and find the unified narrative of a single covenantal relationship between the God of Abraham and his people. I have not persuaded them – yet. But the idea of canon as the place to discover the divine author has proved intriguing to my Muslim interlocutors. The other thing that has been intriguing to them is spiritual interpretation. This approach – called the *sensus plenior*, suggests to them that the Bible may possess divine truth which is not at once apparent. I suspect that we will have more conversation about this in the future.

For today, however, I want to look at what is clearly a prophetic text in the Book of Numbers (a book that I am sure you have all read from start to finish for *lectio divina*) and ask ourselves what the *sensus plenior* might be. Since you have all studied the book of Numbers, you know that just because you are a prophet, does not mean that you get a pass at being faithful to YHWH. But, that’s another story for another day. For now, listen to the prophet Balaam:

The utterance of Balaam, son of Beor,  
the utterance of a man whose eye is true,  
The utterance of one who hears what God says,

and knows what the Most High knows,  
Of one who sees what the Almighty sees,  
enraptured, and with eyes unveiled:

[His] eye is true . . . he hears what God says . . . sees what the Almighty sees . . . with eyes unveiled. Is that not the goal of the disciple? What would change in our spiritual lives if we came to understand the prophetic act not solely as truth coming our way, but the sensitivity in our soul to hear, know, and see all things as God sees them?

Perhaps this is the task of Advent, to develop our spiritual senses so that we might live “with eyes unveiled.”