

Where Is Epicurus In The "School of Athens"?

Post by "Joshua" of May 17, 2021 at 11:04 PM

As for surviving writings in the Vatican Library, I'm skeptical about that as well.

The Roman Pontiffs have been a strikingly varied lot. Some were pious, and many others have been corrupt. Some popes have been scholars of the highest learning (as in the case of Sylvester II), while at least four of the "Vicars of Christ" on earth have been illiterate! (Innocent VI is notable for his mistrust of the high literary ambitions of Petrarch, or so I have read.)

Nor was the Church uniformly hostile to all criticism. Our own Lorenzo Valla (later in life a contemporary and rival of Poggio Bracciolini at the Roman *Curia*) had made a name for himself early on when he proved using philology that the so-called "Donation of Constantine" was a forgery. The Church had for centuries buttressed its own authority partially with this document. His scholarship put his life in danger—and yet when the mitre changed heads with the inauguration of Nicholas V, Valla was invited to a high position in the papal court.

It would strike me as odd if during all these centuries a major work from antiquity had been hidden away in the Vatican Library, with generations of humanists and scholars never revealing it. But it's even more unusual when I consider that in 1888 a small collection of maxims *did* emerge. I hardly see the point in letting those sayings out, and hiding the rest away; I don't suppose there can really be anything shocking or subversive in Epicurus beyond what we have record of elsewhere. Oddly enough, Lucretius was spared inclusion onto the infamous Index of Prohibited Books, supposedly by the intervention of one Cardinal Marcello Cervini.

So there's that. I certainly appreciate the work that Elli has done in developing her thesis. It would be great to see something new come to light in all of this.