

brings into a unity all the elements of the Levitical sacrifices, making a new synthesis with the person of Christ as the centre. There is no need to labour the point that the eucharistic sacrifice fulfils all the elements of the *holocaust*, nor that it corresponds to the ancient *sacrifice of communion*. It is the ritual and joyous feast in which the Christian people do more than share a common meal with their God; by partaking of the sacred species of the sacrifice they share in the very life of Christ their God. It sums up all the *expiatory sacrifices* for sin, the victim for sin not now being, as of old, some poor animal which the sinner substitutes for himself by the imposition of hands, but Christ who substitutes himself for the sinner, who is mystically identified with the divine victim through Holy Communion.

How could one understand the epistle to the Hebrews without Leviticus? As was said above, one part of scripture is the explanation of another. *Quod in veteri latet in novo testamento patet.*



THE BIBLE IN RECENT CENTURIES

BY SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

(An adaptation of the first chapter of Dom Celestine Charlier's recent book: *La Lecture Chretienne de la Bible*, Maredsous 1951)

EVERYONE who considers himself a Christian does in some way admit the divine authority of the Bible, and in some way believes in the permanent value of the message it brings to mankind. In view of this, the fact that very many Christians never read the Bible constitutes a peculiar problem. Why do they not read it? For some, the position of the Church as a teaching authority seems to stand between them and the Bible; for others, to read the Bible suggests a host of technical problems, which they feel only scholars can resolve. But these obstacles have their origin in the history of men's attitude to the Bible in recent centuries, and to explain these questions is perhaps a useful way of clearing people's minds of these hesitations.

I. THE 'JANSENISTIC' ATTITUDE

The chief obstacle is ignorance. St John Chrysostom in a well-known homily deplors the fact that many good and pious folk

did not even know how many Epistles St Paul wrote. What would he say nowadays, when many good and pious Christians hardly know who St Paul is? We might as well admit frankly that the greater number of Catholics of today know little more of the Bible than the handful of quotations in the Catechism. Most of them have never looked at a complete Bible, and a New Testament but rarely. The Gospels are perhaps a little more familiar, but Old Testament history is reduced to a few episodes such as the deluge or Jonah's whale, which are anyway regarded with much scepticism. Even among Protestants, once so devoted to 'the Good Book', the younger generation now hardly ever read it. Catholics at least have the advantage of some familiarity with the liturgical texts which come from the Bible. But even among our clergy, acquaintance with the sacred text is often confined to the daily excerpts in the liturgy. In fact most Christians of today, while fully admitting the authority of God's word, are very ignorant of what it contains.

Where did the trouble begin? We cannot simply lay the blame upon the individualistic and man-centred view of the humanistic age and the Renaissance in the XVIth century. It goes further back than that. Already at the end of the XIIIth century we can discern a disintegration of the Christian spirit, a divorce between ethical principle and practical living, between the person and the society in which he lives, and between God and man. Nominalism in philosophy and the general loosening of morals had its effect even within the Church, and during the period from the XIIIth to the XIVth centuries we find a liturgical decadence that is accompanied by an abandonment of the Bible. Thus when the storm broke at the Reformation, the Bible had long ceased to hold the place it had held in the Church until the XIIIth century, as the source of all the Church's prayer, thought and inspiration.

The reaction of the reformers in the XVIth century was fierce. In proscribing the abuses in society, degeneracy in learning and vice within the Church, and pointing to the Bible as the sole source of faith and of life, the reformers were in fact indicating the deep source of many of these ills in the abandonment of the Scriptures. But the result was far from being a return to the tradition of the early Church, for the reformers themselves were children of their age, and their creation was an essentially individualistic religious pattern. Protestantism did indeed return to

the Bible, but the principle of 'private interpretation' was a product of the humanist age.

The counter-reformation reacted violently in its turn. The emphasis was on tradition. Against the reformers' indiscriminate and individualistic use of the sacred text, the faithful must be taught to return to the Bible within the framework of the Church's tradition. Thus the Council of Trent proclaimed the authenticity of the Vulgate, and ordained that only lawful translations must be used, accompanied by suitable notes in conformity with Catholic tradition. These were indeed wise measures, for the Church had always rightly claimed that she alone had authority to expound and interpret the Scriptures. The results of these measures, nevertheless, eventually became more far-reaching than the legislators ever intended. To begin with, it was a matter of caution. But gradually that caution developed into fear and mistrust. The faithful were warned not to use the Bible as the Protestants did, and ended by not using it at all. The Catholic of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries had begun to feel that since Protestantism had begun with a return to the Bible, to read the Bible would only lead to Protestantism. Current books of piety were no longer directly inspired by the Scriptures as the sterner piety of an earlier age had been, and with this a still further decadence in liturgical practice cut off the faithful still more from the fountain-head of the Bible. Thus any Bible-reading that there was among Catholics became divorced from life and piety, and came to be regarded as a province reserved to specialists.

The battles that raged round the questions of biblical criticism in the XIXth century, questions that were fundamentally the affair of scholars, tended only to increase among Catholics the notion that the Bible as a whole was a preserve of the initiated.

It was at the opening of the XXth century that Pope Pius X finally disposed of the Jansenist error that frequent Communion was the preserve of specially elect souls. The similarity of the attitude in regard to the Bible that prevailed at the same time, namely, that the Bible was only for the initiated, is noticeable through the same period up till, and including, the XIXth century.

II. THE 'SCIENTIFIC' ATTITUDE

From the beginning the Protestants had insisted on the importance of the very words of the sacred text: the Bible was wrenched

out of its framework of the Christian revelation within the Church, and made to stand on its own merits as a document. With the gradual secularisation and dechristianisation of society, the masses, even among Protestants, were by the XIXth century beginning to abandon 'the Good Book', with the result that its nature as a mere document, studied by initiated scholars, came to be strongly emphasised. To the man-in-the-street the Bible was becoming more than ever remote, the arena of scholarly controversy.

The Catholic apologists continued to show the unbroken line of traditional interpretation through the patristic period and the whole history of the Church: this was the work of men like Baronius, Bellarmine, and that precursor of later biblical criticism, Richard Simon in the XVIIth century. But the emphasis was still, and rightly, on tradition.

Meanwhile during the XIXth century two kinds of intellectual revolution were at work, encouraged by the new freedoms engendered by the political upheavals after the French Revolution. In the first place we notice the change that was coming in philosophical thought, in particular the 'evolutionary' idea of science, deriving from the Hegelian system. Secondly it was an era of scientific discovery: the new findings of archeology were putting men in possession of facts of antiquity hitherto unknown or forgotten, and combined with an 'evolutionary' philosophy were enabling them to build new theories not only about man's origins, but also about his mental and spiritual development. At the same time the new revival of learning put men on the road of discovery in the linguistic and literary fields, and this was further assisted by the organisation of study on a world-wide basis enabling the fruits of scholarship to be exchanged, with all the advantages of modern research. Educational opportunity was also being widened, so that the world of scholarship became greatly enlarged.

These things had an immediate effect upon the study of the document which is the Bible, and the efforts of XIXth-century scholarship were soon turned to work upon the Bible. And it was particularly in Germany that these new forces came to be felt.

One may distinguish three types of this 'scientific' approach in the XIXth century. The first may be called 'philosophical', since it sprang from the subjectivist philosophy of the time and denied

the possibility of the supernatural as scientifically unverifiable. The contents of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, were reduced to the status of myths derived from the religious consciousness of those who wrote them. Such was the teaching of Strauss (†1874) and Baur (†1860), the founder of the Tübingen School. The second approach may be called 'documentary', since it was the linguistic examination of the biblical documents in the light of newly found knowledge that resulted in the dismemberment of the biblical texts to the extent that their historical value was seriously impugned if not simply denied, and thus their spiritual value obscured (especially in the New Testament), and the foundations of the Christian revelation rendered supposedly insecure. The chief leader of this school was Wellhausen, a great Hebraist, whose *Prolegomena* appeared in 1878. It is the 'documentary' approach that is usually referred to as 'Higher Criticism'. The third approach might be called the 'religious', since its method was through the newly found evidence of ancient religions of the East to attempt to place the religion of Israel in its setting among the pagan religions of the time. Delitzsch's book entitled *Babel und Bibel* shows the trend of thought: it was published long after his commentaries, which appeared first in 1852 and in a new form in 1887. A parallel argument placed the religion of the New Testament among the mythical cults of the Hellenistic age. Other writers tried to present Christianity as the natural development of Jewish national ideals. In all these types of 'scientific approach', although many of the conclusions have been shown to be false, the contributions of research and accumulated erudition have frequently remained of permanent value.

Among Protestants the 'scientific approach' soon found many followers, and it was writers such as Harnack during the first quarter of the XXth century who attempted to synthesise their own beliefs with some of the drastic conclusions of the XIXth-century scholars. The general result was the birth of 'liberal Protestantism', where Christianity became a human institution of the highest ethical order, and Christ no more than the expression of the summit of human achievement.

Among Catholics the crisis came more slowly. Until near the end of the XIXth century, most Catholics fought shy of the new scientific movement and with regard to the Bible took their traditional standpoint and a predominantly defensive position.

The appearance in 1863 of the *Vie de Jésus* of Renan placed Catholics more than ever on their guard. It was not until the last decade of the century that Catholics began to face the problem squarely; but events then moved very rapidly. In 1890, with the full approval of Pope Leo XIII, Père Lagrange, O.P., founded the Dominican school for biblical research at Jerusalem, an establishment which soon gained reputation for front-rank scholarship. In 1892 he started the *Revue Biblique*, which has ever since been placed among the foremost reviews of the learned world. In 1893 Pope Leo XIII issued his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, calling upon all Catholic scholars to equip themselves with all the panoply of modern scholarship wherewith to defend the truth of Holy Writ.

Catholics were not slow in responding to the call and applying themselves to a critical study of the sacred text. Three trends may be distinguished at the turn of the century: first we notice the narrower group who applied the new skills within the framework of traditional opinion within the Church, continuing for the most part to reject *in toto* the conclusions of the critical school: such were the great Jesuit exegete Cornely (†1908) and the Sulpician Vigouroux. Secondly we find the broader school, led by P. Lagrange (†1938), who on the foundation of an unimpeachably sound theology were able to accept so much of the technique of the scientific approach, while avoiding the dangers of rationalism and 'antisupernaturalism' into which so many of the non-Catholic scholars had fallen. P. Lagrange became the champion of what he called the 'historical method'—his book with this title was the result of a course of lectures delivered in 1902—and the term was constantly being used by Catholics for the next quarter-century. In the third place we find a small group of Catholic writers, who in their readiness to accept the new methods found themselves, through insufficient theological insight, arriving at conclusions dangerously similar to those of the liberal Protestants. The Protestant Harnack had only achieved his synthesis by divorcing faith from history, and similarly the priest Loisy, in his book *L'Évangile et l'Église* which appeared in 1902, had proclaimed that, for instance, the Resurrection was a truth of faith but could not be regarded as an historical fact. It was a false synthesis of this kind that represented the modernist movement in the field of biblical studies.

Meanwhile Leo XIII had set up in 1902 the Pontifical Biblical Commission, which was to safeguard Catholic teaching on points of biblical science. Its first decrees were issued under Pius X in 1905. Papal action in proscribing the modernist errors culminated in Pius X's encyclical *Pascendi* of 1907, and Loisy's book had been put on the Index in 1903. The foundations of Christian revelation, the only sure starting point, had been re-stated, but the decade that followed until the First World War was a troubled period: Catholic scholars and theologians were struggling to work out the relations between faith and the new biblical discoveries, and the simple faithful felt more than ever bewildered and were leaving the Bible to be the property of the learned. The Protestant solution, widely publicised, had left the masses with the impression that the Bible contained little besides untrustworthy legend, and that Christianity was no more than a noble ethical code.

Small wonder then, that in the earlier part of the XXth century, among churchgoers both Catholic and Protestant, the habit of reading the Bible was at a very low ebb.

III. THE 'PIETISTIC' ATTITUDE

Christian folk, who, when all is said and done, do ultimately believe that the Bible is in some way God's word, were not going to be content to remain thus cut off from what they knew to be God's message for them. We are emerging into the period after the First World War. Within the Church the modernist storm had blown over, and with it to a great extent mistrust of the new scientific techniques. The 'historical method' had become normal. The Biblical Commission had been discovered not to be a fetter upon thought, but on the contrary a paternal guidance and protection against danger. Yet it seemed that the very complications connected with the study of the Bible were obscuring the simple message of the word of God. In the confusion of the post-war world men were feeling the need of God's own guidance.

At the same time another important element in Catholic life, having its roots in the time of Blessed Pius X, was coming to maturity. This was the liturgical movement. Men were now once more singing the Church's own chant. They were deliberately joining in the Church's corporate worship, they were once more learning to 'pray the Mass'. The use of the missal was becoming usual. The faithful were taking part with the clergy in the Divine

Office. And they were finding that the Bible, from which most of the liturgy is taken, was once more speaking to them and forming their minds.

But in the liturgy the Bible speaks to us with no worry about the dates and composition of the books, about the legendary or historical nature of this or that account: we hear the Bible independent of the whole concern of the 'scientific attitude'. We were returning to an older patristic tradition, taking God's word as it comes to us, receiving its message in all its simplicity. The storms of the turn of the century had cleared, and the new view seemed intensely new. The approach was 'pietistic' and not 'scientific'. Thus we find that the liturgical movement was giving birth to a new biblical movement, and the interest of the faithful in the Scriptures was strongly revived.

This new movement seems to have had its origin primarily in the cry of the faithful. The clergy, looking back on their technical training in the 'historical method' in the seminary, were finding themselves re-reading the text from a new angle. It is once more to Germany that we must look for the origins, as we did for the origins of the critical school. In the period between the wars the liturgical movement made its greatest strides in Germany, so that by the time of the Second World War most Catholic young men were already strongly liturgically minded, and, for example, a Dialogue Mass was a normal thing for a group of soldiers. And significantly enough, one of the chief organs of the liturgical movement was entitled *Bibel und Liturgie*. Hand in hand with the liturgical movement went the spread of Bible-reading, in parochial groups, study circles, and so forth. In France the idea seems to have been more literary than completely popular: writers like Péguy, Claudel or Fumet were drawing their inspiration from the Scriptures. And here again it was particularly an initiative of laymen. The remarkable success at the present of the books of Daniel-Rops is further evidence. In our own country, where since the XVIth century people have been greatly concerned about the exact English words of the translated Scriptures, and where more than in any other land the very phrases of the Bible enter so frequently into our daily speech, people, Catholics and Protestants alike, have been enormously interested in the many new translations that have appeared in recent years. This is one more sign of a new attention to the Bible.

Among Protestants the revival of interest has proceeded, as it were, in the opposite direction. The reaction from the 'scientific' denial of the supernatural has been towards a deliberate seeking of the appeal to the individual soul in the message of the Scriptures. A new spiritual view was proposed by writers like Barth, and a little further back, Kierkegaard. From this we find the need proclaimed of seeing the Bible within a community, or Church, in writers like Cullmann in Switzerland. Thus among Protestants the trend has been not from the liturgical to the biblical, but from the biblical to the liturgical.

But both among Catholics and Protestants there seems to be a hunger for the strong spiritual nourishment that is found only in the word of God. And the 'pietistic' approach has been the answer.

Yet this approach is not without its dangers. Its extreme advocates may find themselves proclaiming that the 'spiritual sense' is all that matters, and that the 'literal sense', that is, the actual meaning of the words in their context and on the background of their writing (with all the problems involved), is of no true importance. Symbolism may be made to predominate to the exclusion of historical fact and dogma. But these things have not been allowed to pass unnoticed by the Holy See. Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* of 1943, while recognising the renewal of knowledge and love of the Scriptures, and expressing his confidence in the good to souls that will result therefrom, insists again on the primacy of the literal sense and the vast importance of a scientific and scholarly study of the text, especially in relation to theological doctrine contained in the Bible. Yet the spiritual and symbolic sense is by no means to be disregarded, especially when it is indicated by Christ himself in the Gospels, by the Apostles, by the tradition of the Church, and particularly by the Church's own practice in the liturgy.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE TRADITIONAL ATTITUDE

The solution lies ultimately in tradition. The history of men's attitude to the Bible, as outlined above, is a history of actions and reactions. The introduction of the 'historical method' was stimulated by the 'scientific approach' of the critical school, and during the first quarter of the XXth century the 'historical method' became firmly established among Catholics. The emphasis on the

spiritual sense that followed came in reaction to the close scientific examination of the literal and historical sense that had become the accepted technique.

But when we go back in the history of exegesis into patristic times we find nearly always that the writers stressed both the literal or historical and the spiritual or symbolic senses in their interpretation. True it is that we are accustomed to speak of the Alexandrian School with Clement (†215) and Origen (†255) as 'spiritual' interpreters or 'allegorisers', and of the Antiochene School of 'literal' interpreters with Epiphanius (†405) and Chrysostom (†407) succeeding them in reaction. Yet all these writers of the East make extensive use of both approaches though usually of one more elaborately. When we come to the Latin Fathers, especially Jerome (†420) and Augustine (†430), we find again that both methods are used but generally speaking that extremes are avoided. It is quite plain, however, that Jerome's interpretation is predominantly historical, though with frequent symbolical digressions, and that on the other hand Augustine's greater concern is with the allegorical meaning. Yet it was the scientific Jerome who said that 'the very shell of Scripture is magnificent, but the real sweetness lies within' (*Ep.* 58), and it was Augustine, the lover of symbolism, that wrote the warning that 'he is mistaken, who gives to Scripture a meaning, however truthful or however edifying, which was not intended by the sacred author' (*De Doct. Christ.* I, 35).

The traditional attitude is therefore a combination of both the literal and the spiritual interpretation: they are complementary, not in opposition. It was the atmosphere of conflict, mistrust and bewilderment especially during the XIXth century that made the revival of the 'pietistic' approach appear to be in conflict with the 'historical method'. It was possible for the advocates of the primacy of the spiritual sense to declare the minute study of biblical history, linguistic *tourneures* and textual problems to be no more than dry-as-dust technology, and the 'historical method' to be outmoded and the pursuit of exhausted argument; while scholars engaged on literary exegesis were tempted to consider symbolic exegesis mere fanciful web-spinning.

Now in the years after the Second World War it is possible to see how sound symbolic interpretation, bringing the full warmth of the message of the word of God, can only be built upon an

intimate acquaintance with the sacred text itself, which acquaintance can in turn only be made through a careful elucidation of the literal sense of the words, made possible by the resources of modern biblical scholarship. At the same time, in accordance with the instruction of Pius XII's encyclical, special attention is being paid to the doctrinal and theological content of the Scriptures, in the science still awaiting its maturity, known as 'Biblical Theology'. To this both the historical and the symbolic techniques contribute.

Even within the province of biblical scholarship, when a sound theological training is presupposed, there will be specialists: the philologists and textual critics, the symbolists and the theologians; and each has his specialised training. But all contribute to the present day need of expounding the word of God.

And the faithful, the general reader, the Christian lover of the Bible, should no longer feel bewilderment or mistrust when approaching the Scriptures. Good translations are being provided and adequate commentaries composed. It is possible now, and it is the trend, to return to the traditional attitude towards the 'Good Book' and allow it to mould our minds and raise our hearts to God.

THE SONG OF SONGS

BY RICHARD KEHOE, O.P.

MAKING a very valuable and attractive addition to the rapidly growing series called *La Sainte Bible* the Cantic of Canticles has now appeared, translated and introduced and provided with brief notes by Père A. Robert, Professor of the Institut Catholique of Paris.¹ It makes also a suitably delightful little book for the reading of such lovely poetry; and it is a pleasant and skilful translation. But with all its magic beauty everyone knows how difficult a book this is to interpret—'without parallel in the history of biblical exegesis' is how the difficulty of it appears to Père Robert. Yet after reviewing some of the principal theories of interpretation he chooses and develops his own with a masterful assurance.

Clearly he had to reject the theory that finds in the Cantic the

¹ *Le Cantic des Cantiques*. (Les Editions du Cerf, Paris; n.p.)