

The Spiritual Sense is the total sense of the Scriptures, the meaning that they have when grasped as a whole inspired work. Though it is only through their partial meanings—their Literal meanings—that this whole grasp of them is attainable; as, for that matter, the final meaning of any work of art is so thoroughly embodied in the matter that it can be only indirectly discovered. Certainly, therefore, the Spiritual Sense can never be arrived at except in and through the Literal.

The Scriptures are the divine Revelation of the work of God which is the making of the world in Christ; giving us insight into that work; showing us, therefore, the Christian significance of history. To catch their Spiritual Sense is, as St Paul tells us⁽⁶⁾, to recognize the glory of Christ shining forth from their Letter. And to miss the Spiritual Sense would be, as he also says, to treat the letter as the Jews still do: it would be to veil its true significance, to tie it down to a sub-Christian meaning—which is what so much of our Old Testament exegesis encourages us to do: a thing as foolish as it would be to dismiss the first Act of any and every play of Shakespeare as being necessarily sub-Shakespearean. If we ignore the Spiritual Sense we ignore the Mystery of the Scriptures, and though we may read in the Bible or from the Bible, quite simply we do not read the Bible itself.

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FIFTY YEARS OF SCRIPTURE STUDIES

Providentissimus Deus to Divino afflante Spiritu

THE present Holy Father wrote his biblical encyclical in 1943 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Leo XIII's great encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*, which is such a landmark in modern biblical studies. Pius XII starts with a retrospect, a review of the work done under papal ægis during that half-century, and it is with pride that we Dominicans have noticed that he calls attention to the fact that before ever Leo XIII launched his encyclical he had already in 1892 commended by Brief the Dominican Ecole Biblique at Jerusalem, founded with papal approbation two years before. This foundation was due to the efforts of Père Marie-Joseph Lagrange, O.P. (†10 March, 1938), and here the pioneer work of scientific scholarship had already begun and the famous *Revue Biblique* had already been started. Next year, in 1893, *Providentissimus Deus* appeared.

Pius XII goes on to describe the present state of biblical studies

(6) II Cor. III.

and to prescribe the equipment necessary to the modern Catholic exegete. Not only does he develop the ideas of the preceding encyclicals, but several times he gives more precise definitions of the attitude of the Catholic scholar.

He concludes with a reiteration of his predecessors' call for zeal for scriptural study, with a special urgency "in these unhappy times" when ignorance of Christ is so widespread in the world.

In this article we shall trace the development of biblical studies in the Church from Leo XIII's time, through Benedict XV's encyclical, to the present encyclical of just over two years ago. First, we shall glance panoramically at the period in the manner of the opening sections of *Divino afflante Spiritu*; second, we shall synopsise the teaching of the three encyclicals.⁽¹⁾ (I have used the Latin text of the first two, but of Pius XII's I only have the CTS English translation); and thirdly, we shall briefly analyse certain points of contact and development between them.

I

An outline of the events leading up to the present encyclical:

- 1890 Foundation of the Dominican School at Jerusalem.
- 1892 *Revue Biblique* started.
- 1892 Leo XIII's letter *Hierosolyma in cœnobio*.
- 1893 Leo XIII's encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (18 Nov.).
- 1902 Leo XIII sets up the Biblical Commission (its decrees so far are under 13 headings, issued 1905-1915).
- 1904 Pius X institutes the academic degrees of Licentiate and Doctorate in Sacred Scriptures, to be conferred by the Biblical Commission.
- 1909 Pius X founds the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome.
- 1920 Benedict XV's encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* (15 Sept.).
- 1924 Pius XI directs that none shall teach Scripture in a seminary without an LSS degree given either by the Biblical Commission or the Pontifical Biblical Institute.
- 1933 Pius XI founds the Benedictine Abbey of St Jerome in Rome, for the work of revising the Vulgate text.
- 1943 Pius XII's encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (30 Sept.).

II

Synopses of the three encyclicals:

Leo XIII: Providentissimus Deus. 18 November, 1893.

I Since God in his goodness has given us as a part of his revelation the Bible, written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and therefore having God as its author and containing no error, encouragement should be given to Scriptural study.

II For the Bible is of the greatest value for preaching the Word of God, to show God's truth, to know Christ and to guide men on the path of morality. It is a treasure-store of heavenly teaching.

III The Church has always had great solicitude for these studies: witness the scholars of the Early Church (both East and West), the middle ages, scholasticism, the renaissance and no less those of our own times.

IV At present special problems are raised by those who deny (1) all supernatural revelation in Scripture (in the name of reason) and (2) the truth of Scripture (in the name of science).

⁽¹⁾ I feel that such synopses are not out of place, since for too many of us, I think, these encyclicals cannot be 'taken as read.'

V Therefore the seminary courses in Scripture (both 'Introduction' and 'Exegesis') must be well organised. *The Vulgate should be used, but without neglecting ancient texts in difficult passages.* Much use of Scripture should be made in the teaching of Theology, and conversely Theology will elucidate certain passages of Scripture. *When the Church has laid down an interpretation of a passage, that interpretation is to be followed, as also is the unanimous interpretation of the Fathers.*

VI Further, the private studies of scholars will gradually produce the Church's mature judgment on other passages of as yet uncertain interpretation. Scholars must, as above, (1) *interpret with the Church*, (2) *according to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers*, and (3) in other passages follow the '*analogy of faith*,' i.e., interpret in a way consonant with Catholic doctrine, and reject an interpretation which involves contradictions among the Sacred Writers or goes counter to the Faith. Further they should (4) *not easily abandon the literal sense*, (5) *but not neglect the allegorical*, so frequently found in the Liturgy and the Fathers. Previous commentators (esp. in the Catholic tradition) are to be held in esteem.

VII The authority of Scripture must be defended, and for this skill is required in (1) *Oriental languages*, and (2) the *Art of Criticism* in dealing with (i) the *history of the composition of the various books* (in which, however, external historical evidence is of much greater value than internal evidence: contra the '*higher criticism*'), and (ii) *scientific matters*, when it is necessary to show that there can be *no discrepancy between Theology and the truths of Science*, since, as Scripture does not set out to teach Science but simply uses terms commonly used at the time, apparent errors (as also those in the ancient commentators) can be thus explained. (iii) It will further be helpful to *apply the above principles to other matters, especially History*, and not to reject Scriptural evidence if it at first appears not to coincide with other historical data. The scholar must bear in mind the possibility (not too easily to be supposed) of *scribal error*; but it is *wrong to limit inspiration merely to matters of religion*, or to allow that the Sacred Writers have erred. For inspiration is incompatible with error. Further, the integrity of the Canon as given in the Vulgate is to be maintained.

VIII Finally it is urged that there should be among Catholics experts in every field of scholarship, so that assaults on the Word of God may be repulsed, and the treasure of Revealed Doctrine safeguarded.

Benedict XV: Spiritus Paraclitus, 15 September 1920

I The Holy Spirit has constantly provided learned men to explain the treasures of the Scriptures, but the prince of all is St Jerome, the 1500th anniversary of whose death we celebrate this month. From his youth he devoted himself to the study of the Scriptures, and as his whole life is an example to scholars, so his own words still remain to them a timely admonishment.

II His first concern was to uphold the *absolute truth of Scripture*: for *inspiration* means that God is the chief cause, having (1) illuminated the writer's mind, (2) moved his will to write, and (3) having stood by him as he wrote the whole. This makes of Scripture the perfect defence of the Faith, and excludes any possibility of error, so that his friend St Augustine wrote to him that if he finds an apparent error, he supposes either his text or his interpretation to be wrong, or else that he himself has failed to understand.

III Wherefore the *recent opinion is erroneous by which it is claimed that only the religious and not the profane elements (including 'obiter dicta') in Scripture are inspired and therefore free from error.*

IV Leo XIII showed how the Sacred Writers used the terms current at the time to describe the *scientific phenomena*, but to apply this to history by claiming *some biblical history to be only 'relatively true'* (i.e. to be the expression of current and perhaps erroneous opinion) is a *perversion of his teaching.*

V Similarly, to maintain that certain biblical narrations are either '*implicit quotations*' of current thought, or are '*historical fictions*' not intended as serious history, although a *sound principle of interpretation, is to be used only with the greatest caution.* (Cf. *Bibl. Com.* 1905). An abuse of this principle would endanger

the whole of Revelation. Christ's own use of Scripture is our surest guide.

VI On St Jerome's example a great zeal for the Scriptures and their traditional Catholic interpretation is urged. *The Vulgate text, to be regarded as authentic, is now being revised and restored*, for the more accurate understanding of the Bible. The Bible should be a daily study, especially for the clergy, who are to be preachers and teachers of the Word of God. With this view was set up the Biblical Institute in Rome. The Bible should be the source both of preaching and of teaching Theology.

VII St Jerome's rules of interpretation: (1) *the first care should be for the literal sense*, thence (2) *the inner and deeper spiritual sense should be explored with caution and consonantly with the literal* (which last point, he says, was often neglected by the earliest commentators), when alone it can reach the summit of understanding. Again the use of the spiritual sense made by Christ and the Apostles should be our guide, for the spiritual sense is not found in all Scripture.

VIII Lastly St Jerome speaks of the benefits derived from this study, especially devotion to the Church and a close knowledge and love of Christ. Indeed one may say that St Jerome's relics, now in Rome, cry out for zeal for the Scriptures, for deliverance from the current paganism (which in his own time he fought), for the freedom of the Holy See (which he served so well) and for the union of the East (where he worked so long).

Pius XII: Divino afflante Spiritu, 30 September 1943

I Since it was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the Sacred Books were written, it is not surprising that the Church has always had a solicitude for the Scriptures, and not least in recent times.

II There follows a review of the course of biblical work sponsored by the Popes in the 50 years since *Providentissimus Deus*, beginning with the foundation of the Dominican School at Jerusalem.

III But biblical studies have advanced much during this period, notably through researches into excavated sites, papyri, ancient manuscripts, patristic exegesis, and ancient literary forms.

IV This recent development requires that the modern Catholic exegete possess special equipment and be able to determine the essential elements of modern biblical science. He must have (1) a thorough knowledge of *Oriental languages*, and (2) skill in the *Art of Textual Criticism*, i.e. especially the *restoration of the original text*.—N.B. *This does not derogate from the privileged authentic place of the Vulgate among Latin versions*—but on the contrary it calls for *modern translations to be made from the original texts*. Armed with this equipment, he must proceed to (3) the study of the *Literal sense*, and then (4) above all the *theological content* (i.e. the teaching on Faith and Morals involved in his text). Then (5) the *spiritual sense* must be determined, *provided it can be established that such meaning has been given by God*: the spiritual sense is declared first by Christ and the Apostles in the New Testament, and then by the traditional teaching of the Church and liturgical usage. The spiritual sense must be carefully distinguished from any metaphorical meaning that could be put on a text, which might, however, have its uses in preaching. (6) The distinguished commentators of the past should be studied. (7) New problems have been raised by *stricter theological inquiries into the nature of inspiration*, among which is (8) the fact of the *preservation of the individuality of the Sacred Writer*, with resultant important investigations into the *history of the composition of the books, their origins and sources*. Which brings the exegete to (9) the *Art of Literary Criticism*, so much to the fore at present, with its inquiries into *literary forms* of the time, none of which need be excluded from the Bible. This study can greatly contribute to the true and genuine interpretation, and in turn depends upon (10) a sound study of archaeology, palaeography, and ancient history.

V Many problems have been solved during these years, and the *historical truth of the Scriptures is in great part entirely vindicated*; but there remains much to be done. Catholic scholars have indeed the guidance of the Church in matters of Faith and Morals, but they must remember that the *passages of Scripture whose sense has been declared by the Church, or whose interpretation has the unanimous*

opinion of the Fathers, are very few. Consequently the Catholic scholar has a great responsibility of his own in exegesis.

VI Priests especially should know and love the Word of God, and learn thereof from the treasury of Catholic exegesis, so that through their preaching and teaching Christ himself will be better known and loved in a world submerged in an ocean of calamities. When they thus expound the literal and theological meaning of Scripture, men will say as they did of the Master: 'Was not our heart burning within us when he opened to us the Scriptures?'

III

A brief analysis of certain points of contact and development between the three encyclicals:

(1) Of especial interest is the consciousness of the *shifting of the biblical battle-ground*: for Leo XIII, the attack came from rationalists and scientists denying the very nature of biblical revelation; for Benedict XV, the focus is the attack (even from among Catholics) on the absolute truth of Scripture; for Pius XII, emphasis is rather on the need of sound textual exegesis and up-to-date literary criticism. Similarly Benedict feels that the 'scientific' battle of Leo has been won, just as Pius says that the truth of the Bible has now been vindicated.

(2) Again, *the implications of inspiration* (especially inerrancy) are almost taken for granted by Leo, whereas Benedict finds inerrancy being assailed and gives Jerome's theory of inspiration in detail. Pius now speaks of the stricter study of the nature of inspiration, and insists on the preservation of the Sacred Writer's individuality, with consequent need for a more careful investigation of origins and sources.

(3) This brings us to the *question of the text*. All insist on skill in Oriental languages and the Art of Criticism. Leo cries down the exaggerated use of internal textual evidence made by the 'Higher Critics,' merely mentioning the matter of scribal errors; Benedict distinguishes carefully between error of the Sacred Writer (not to be thought of), and possible scribal error in the text. Pius expressly desires Catholics to pay attention to the 'restoration of the sacred text' by the elimination of scribal errors, glosses, lacunæ, inversions and repetitions. This is to be the first labour of criticism.

(4) Leo indeed warned us against the exaggerations of the 'Higher Criticism,' and called for better external historical investigation; and now Pius, observing the rapid advances in precisely this external evidence (excavations, papyri, etc.) and commending the balance now achieved in textual criticism, calls on us to examine carefully the *history of the composition of the books of the Bible*, their sources and their literary antecedents.

(5) It was Benedict who, after affirming that inerrancy covers even the 'obiter dicta,' laid down the legitimacy of interpreting certain passages as belonging to literary forms classed as 'implicit quotations' or 'historical fictions.' Pius follows by urging the *necessity of studying the literary forms* current at the time of the composition of a given book, and the extent to which such a form may have influenced the Sacred Writer. He has a classic passage: 'For just as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, without sin, so the words of God, expressed in human language, became in all things like to human speech, except error.'

(6) Leo declared as the first principles of Catholic exegesis, that scholars must follow any *interpretation laid down by the Church, and also the unanimous teaching of the Fathers* on any particular text. Pius, however, gives a warning: while impressing upon Catholic scholars their responsibility, he reminds them that they only have this guidance from the Church in matters of Faith and Morals, and that the biblical passages which carry an authoritative interpretation by the Church or a unanimous exegesis by the Fathers are few.

(7) All three encyclicals have insisted on the primary importance of the *literal sense*. Leo says that the *spiritual sense* must not be neglected, especially when derived from the literal; Benedict, in Jerome's words, speaks of the inner and deeper *spiritual sense*, which must be explored with caution, but which, once found, is the 'summit of understanding.' Pius is more precise: first after the literal, the *theological meaning* must be examined, and then the *spiritual sense* determined 'on condition of its being established that such a meaning has been given by God.' Pius is also careful to distinguish the spiritual from any fanciful, metaphorical (or 'accommodated') sense. All three encyclicals give as the norms for determining the true spiritual sense the New Testament itself, the Liturgy and the constant tradition of the Church.

(8) Many will have noticed Pius's passage on *translations*: Leo laid down that the Vulgate was to be used in seminaries, with recourse to the original text in difficulties; Benedict reminds us of the authenticity of the Vulgate, and speaks of the revision of the Vulgate for the more accurate understanding of the Bible. Pius goes further: the original text is to be studied and restored, but the Vulgate is indeed authentic, is free from all error in matters of Faith and Morals, has a pre-eminence among Latin versions and has been approved for liturgical use. But this, he says, gives it a juridical rather than a critical authenticity, and this dignity in no way forbids the use of the original texts. In fact we are expressly encouraged to make translations into the vernacular from the original texts, trans-

lations to be provided for the use and benefit of the faithful. And it is not without interest here to observe that it is Pius XII who in 1945 provided the clergy with an alternative new Latin translation from the original of the Psalms, for use in their Breviary. The last attempt to replace the existing text (translated from the Greek translation) was St Jerome's nearly 1,600 years ago. He made a fresh translation from the Hebrew for the purpose, but it was never adopted into the *Liturgy*.

(9) All three encyclicals inculcate a *special love for the Word of God*, the treasure-house of heavenly teaching. Everyone can derive benefit from the Scriptures. The Theology in Scripture must be taught, and the Scripture in Theology: priests must steep themselves in Holy Writ, for their own sanctification and that of their flocks. St Jerome says that his beloved Scripture always brings 'dulces fructus'; and the chief fruit is a more intimate knowledge and love of Our Lord. When we realise that Pius XII was writing in the midst of the most disastrous war, we understand the earnestness of his appeal to Catholics to preserve the Church's age-long devotion to the Scriptures, for to know the Scriptures is to know Christ.

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NOTE ON BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

It is noteworthy that in 1943, when the whole world was embroiled in war, the Holy See issued an Encyclical letter¹ on Biblical studies and the opportune means of promoting them. Much stress is laid on new efforts, certainly, but also on new preoccupations, new investigations, new orientations, in a word, on the changed conditions of Biblical study, 'for deeper archaeological research has given rise to new questions offering occasion for a closer investigation of the subject'. Indeed, we are urged to pay close attention to archaeological findings; 'Archaeology', or its equivalent, is referred or appealed to some six or seven times and unquestionably holds a high place among the many endowments expected of those whose duty it is to make known the Biblical authors' meanings.

And so a note on some recent Biblical archaeology will not seem out of place.

Writers on Biblical archaeology like to refer to 'direct' and 'indirect' evidence about Biblical narratives; and it is usually said that very few finds bear directly on the Bible, whereas the indirect contribution is very rich. But this division into 'direct' and 'indirect'

(1) *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, September, 1943.