

"HIGHER CRITICISM."

THE POPE AND THE SCRIPTURES.

Claim of an Anonymous Writer to Represent Advanced Ideas.

The most important task of the professor of Scripture is the exposition of the Sacred Text, in which he is to avoid the two extremes of excessive brevity and diffuseness. He should give a full exposition of one—or at least a portion of one—book, to serve as a specimen and a stimulus to the students. He is to take the Latin Vulgate version as the basis of his exposition, according to the decree of the Council of Trent, (Sess. IV., Decr. de ed. et usu Sac. Libror.) which prescribes the use of the Vulgate as the authentic version "in all public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions," though he is to consult, also, other texts, and particularly the original Hebrew and Greek in cases of doubt. Having thus carefully examined the text, he proceeds to establish the meaning of the words from the context, from parallel passages and from the helps of varied eruditions; which latter, however, he should employ with moderation and discretion.

After he has thus established the meaning, he may safely proceed to the application of the text to theological truths. Herein, lest he should err, the commentator must bear in mind the declaration of the Vatican Council, interpreting the decree of the Council of Trent, that, "in matters of faith and morals appertaining to the upbuilding of the Christian doctrine, that sense of the Scriptures is to be held as the true one which our Holy Mother, the Church, has held and holds, whose province it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Sacred Writings; and therefore no one is allowed to interpret the Scriptures contrary to this sense, or contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers." (Trid. Sess. iv., de ed. et usu Sac. Libror. —*Vat. de Fide*, c. iii.)

The restraint put on the commentator, however, leaves still a wide field for his labors in establishing the meaning of those parts (forming the bulk of the Scriptures) the sense of which is not defined, and in more precisely fixing the meaning of those that are defined, whether by the sacred writers themselves, or by the Church in solemn definition or through its ordinary and universal teaching office.

Where the Church has not spoken, the interpreter must follow the analogy of faith, taking the Catholic doctrine received by the Church as a norm from which he may not depart. Hence, every interpretation must be rejected as false which either contradicts any point of the received Catholic teaching or conflicts with the manifest teaching of other parts of the Scriptures. In order to apply this rule, the professor of Scripture must be an accomplished, dogmatic theologian, and must be well versed in the Fathers.

As often as the Fathers are unanimous in the exposition of any passage, as referring to faith and morals, their authority is supreme (summa); for such unanimity is a clear evidence of apostolic tradition. Their opinion as private doctors is also of great weight, owing to their eminent sacred learning and sanctity. The commentator, however, is free to extend his researches and expositions beyond the teaching of the Fathers, provided only he observe the canon of St. Augustine: "Not to depart from the literal and obvious sense unless reason forbids him to hold, or necessity compels him to abandon, the literal interpretation." (*Gen. ad lit.*, viii., 7, 13)

The more recent Catholic commentators apart from the Fathers have also their value, and should be consulted by the student of the Scriptures. "But it is exceedingly unbecoming," says the Holy Father, "that any one should ignore or despise the excellent works left by our own commentators, and should turn with preference to the works of non-Catholics and borrow from them, to the immediate danger of sound doctrine, and not seldom to the detriment of the faith, the exposition of passages in the interpretation of which Catholic exponents have long since most fruitfully expended their talents and labors. For although the Catholic commentator may sometimes profit by the prudent use of the studies of non-Catholics, yet he should bear in mind that, even according to the numerous testimonials of the

Fathers, the genuine interpretation of the Scriptures cannot by any means be found outside the Church; nor can it be taught by those who, deprived of the true faith, are unable to reach the core, but only gnaw at the crust, of the Sacred Books." (*Greg. Mag. Moral.*, xx., 9, al. 16.)

Moreover, the Scriptures should be made the chief source of theological argument, the soul of sacred science; for although the Catholic theological tyro should be accustomed to prove and illustrate one dogma by means of another, yet "a grave theologian should not neglect the demonstration of the dogmas of faith from the authority of the Scriptures."

A no less important and difficult task of the scripturist is the defence of the authority of the Sacred Books. This cannot, indeed, be fully and completely achieved otherwise than by the living, teaching authority of the Church, which, as the Vatican Council declares, owing to her marvellous attributes, "is in herself a grand and perpetual motive of credibility, and an irrefragable evidence of her own divine mission." (*De fide Cath.*, c. 3.)

But this infallible teaching office of the Church ought first to be established on historical and apologetic grounds from the testimony of these same Sacred Books; that is, from the Scriptures taken as trustworthy historical documents, the divinity and divine mission of Christ, the institution of the Church, the primacy of St. Peter and his successors, are to be demonstrated. Hence it is of the greatest importance that a good number of the priesthood should be well versed in this manner of argument (apologetics) for the defence of the faith against the various fallacies of the enemy.

How are they to be thus equipped? In the first place, by a knowledge of the art of criticism and of the original languages of the Scriptures, which knowledge, being necessary to the professor of Scripture and becoming every theologian, should be required of ecclesiastical students, most particularly of those who aspire to academic degrees. There should be also in our universities chairs of the kindred languages and sciences, for the benefit of Scripture students. This is all the more necessary on account of the modern artifice dignified by the name of "higher criticism," which, to the great detriment of religion, pretends to solve all questions regarding the origin, integrity, and authority of the Sacred Books from what they term intrinsic reasons.

An accurate knowledge of the natural sciences will render good service to the student of the Scriptures in meeting the objections of those so-called scientists who leave nothing undone to undermine the authority of the sacred writers. There can be no contradiction between the theologian and the scientist, provided only they adhere to the rules of St. Augustine: (1) "Not rashly to propose as certain what is uncertain;" (*In Gen. Op.*, imperf., ix., 30) (2) "Whatever can be demonstrated by convincing arguments in the natural sciences we should endeavor to show to be reconcilable with the Scriptures; and whatever the students of nature assert in their writings, which is repugnant to our writings, that is, to the Catholic faith, let us by some argument prove, or at least without any hesitation hold, to be absolutely false." (*De Gen.*, ad lit., i. 21, 42.)

For while, on the one hand, the sacred writers used the prevailing popular expressions and views of their times, without any pretence to scientific accuracy, in things not appertaining to the salvation of man, as we ourselves speak of many natural phenomena in our daily intercourse, it very often happens, on the other hand, that theories proposed as certain by scientists are subsequently called in question and altogether rejected.

The same holds of historical facts, which seem to contradict the testimony of the sacred writers. It may have happened that the copyists erred in transcribing certain passages, which, however, is not to be assumed but proved in each case; or that a passage is in itself ambiguous; but it can never be admitted that the sacred writer has erred, since he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; for the inspiration of the Scriptures extends not only to matters of faith and morals, but to the entire Scriptures and to all their parts: that is, God is the author of the whole and of all its parts. But the divine

authorship necessarily excludes all error! Hence the canon of St. Augustine: "If in the Scriptures I strike any passage which seems to be irreconcilable with the truth, I shall be certain that either the manuscript is faulty or that the translator has not hit the meaning of the text, or that I am unable to understand it myself. (Ep., 82.)

The Sovereign Pontiff concludes his Encyclical with an exhortation to Catholic scholars to co-operate each in his own line of study towards the defence of the Scriptures and of the faith, devoting themselves to those special studies by which they may be enabled to repel the assaults of the enemy. For this end, His Holiness commends the establishment of scientific associations for the defence of revealed religion and the promotion of biblical studies, and briefly outlines the principles to be followed by those engaged in such scientific research. "They must hold faithfully that God, the Creator and Governor of all things, is the author of the Scriptures; therefore, that nothing can be established from the investigation of nature, nothing from monuments of history, which stands in real contradiction with them. If any such contradiction should appear to exist, therefore, the student must labor to remove it by consulting the prudent judgment of theologians and commentators as to the truer or more probable interpretation of the sacred text, and by weighing well the force of the arguments advanced against it. Nor is the investigation to cease if some contradiction still seem to remain, for since truth cannot by any means be opposed to truth, it is certain that some error has crept in either in the interpretation of the sacred text or in the scientific inquiry. If this error cannot be discovered on either side, judgment must in the meantime be suspended. For numerous objections from various sciences, once strongly and persistently urged against the Scriptures, have been altogether abandoned as of no weight, and on the other hand, not a few interpretations of passages of Scripture (not properly belonging to the rule of faith and morals) have, on closer investigation, been subsequently modified. Opinions are wiped out by time, but truth remains and endures forever."

From this brief and imperfect sketch of the contents of the Encyclical, it is plain that, while its object is avowedly a practical one—the promotion of the study of the Scriptures among ecclesiastics—it forcibly reaffirms the whole Catholic teaching on the Scriptures: their nature, their inspiration and its extent, their place in revelation, the grounds of their divine authority, the authenticity of the Vulgate and Septuagint versions, the canon of interpretation. Nay, we shall have occasion to see that in some important points, as in defining the extent of inspiration and the inerrancy of the sacred writers, it goes further than any previous ecclesiastical document.—REV. JOS. CONWAY, S. J., in *Providence Visitor*.

A TRIBUTE TO A HERO.

The Rev. Dr. Talmage writes as follows, from mid-ocean, near Tasmania, to the Brooklyn Eagle:—

The most of the world's heroes and heroines die unrecognized. They will have to wait until the roll is called on the other side of the Dead sea. Once in a while there are circumstances which thrill the world with the same story like that of the brilliant Belgian Catholic priest, Joseph Damien, who, after a week's consideration of whether he had better to do so, accepted the appointment as missionary to Molokai, the isle of lepers, for sixteen years administering to the leprous and then dying of the leprosy. When told by his physician

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that he had the fell taint upon him he showed no alarm nor even agitation, but said, "As I expected. I am willing to die for those I came to save." The King knighted him and a memorial slab designates his resting place, but Protestantism has joined Catholicism in the beatification of this self-sacrificing ecclesiastic.

That moral hero completely transformed the isle of lepers. It was before his work began a den of abominations. No law. No decency. All the tigers of passion were let loose. Drunkenness and blasphemy and libertinism and cruelty dominated. The moral disease eclipsed the physical. But Damien dawned upon the darkness. He helped them to build cottages. He medicated their physical distress. The plague which he could not arrest he alleviated. He prepared the dead for burial and dug for them Christian graves and pronounced upon them a benediction. He launched a Christian civilization upon their wretchedness. He gave them the gospel of good cheer. He told the poor victims concerning the land of eternal health, where the inhabitant never says, "I am sick," and the swollen faces took on the look of hope and the glassy eyes saw coming relief and the footless and the limbless and the fingerless looked forward to a place where they might walk with the King robed in white and everlasting songs upon their heads.

Good and Christlike Joseph Damien! Let all religions honor his memory. Let poetry and canvas and sculpture tell the story of this man who lived and died for others and from century to century keep him in bright remembrance long after the last leper of all the earth shall have felt through all his recovering and revitalized nature the voice of the Son God saying "I will. Be thou clean."

IRELAND'S RUINED INDUSTRIES.

The skeletons of a bygone era, the ruined factories of Ireland, are found by the tourist or investigator in the most unexpected places. Along the banks of her rivers they stand thickly, their broken water-wheels clanking idly to the accompaniment of the music of the ripples which once sent them flying gayly round, to give life and usefulness to the machinery, a few rusty fragments of which may still be found within the now mouldering walls of the once busy factory. Not far off is usually to be found, too, the ruined home of the once prosperous owner of the dismantled mill, as well as the roofless walls of the cottages in which were housed the workers to whom he gave employment. In these results of the thrice accursed Union many a brave and laborious heart was broken, but their monuments still stand by the rushing waters of Irish rivers, memorials of a strange folly of misgovernment, which, however, like all folly, carried its own punishment.—*Irish American*.

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