

A RECENT ROMAN SCRIPTURAL CONTROVERSY

It has apparently often been the lot of dedicated Scripture scholars to be the target of well-meaning critics who fail to comprehend their intentions and suspect their work as an undermining of Christian faith. That this is not a phenomenon restricted to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may be shown by an incident taken from the life of St. Jerome, the Church's greatest Scripture scholar. The incident is related here to serve as a background for a similar event of recent occurrence.

Between the years 389-92 Jerome translated anew the *OT* prophets into Latin from the *hebraica veritas* (as he was wont to refer to the Hebrew text). When he reached the fourth chapter of the Book of Jonah, where the prophet in distress of soul and wishing to die went out of the city of Nineveh and sat down in a hut which he had made, Jerome translated v. 6 as follows: "Et praeparavit Dominus Deus hederam, et ascendit super caput Iona, ut esset umbra super caput eius et protegeret eum." The bishop of a certain African town sanctioned the reading of Jerome's new translation in his churches. But when the people heard the familiar passage with the new word *hedera* (ivy) instead of *cucurbita* (gourd) of older Latin versions based on the Septuagint, such a tumult ensued that the bishop had to consult some Jews, who told him that *cucurbita* was the sense of the Hebrew.¹ Jerome records the reaction thus: "there took place such a commotion among the people crying out over the discrepancy of one word that the bishop almost lost his clergy" (*Ep.* 112, 22; *CSEL* 55, 392).

In 403 Augustine, already a bishop for about eight years, wrote to Jerome about this case and protested against the innovation, *hedera* instead of *cucurbita*, because of the effect that it had on the African bishop's flock. He concluded by suggesting that possibly Jerome was not always right: "And so it seems also to us that you too at times could have erred in some respects" (*Ep.* 71, 5; *CSEL* 34, 253). Jerome replied by explaining that, though the Septuagint has "gourd," other Greek translators including Aquila had used "ivy," and that the Hebrew word actually designated a plant called by the Syrians of his day *ciceion*.² "If I had wanted merely to

¹ Augustine, *Ep.* 71, 5 (*CSEL* 34, 253; translated in *Fathers of the Church* 12, 327). Even Augustine suspected the motives of the Jews who gave the African bishop this information: "Was it out of ignorance or malice that they replied that what the Greek and Latin manuscripts read and said was (also) found in the Hebrew?" (*ibid.*; our translation).

² The Hebrew word in the Masoretic text is *qīqayōn*, the name of some plant not yet identified with certainty. Modern dictionaries note that it is often identified with the castor-oil plant (*Ricinus communis*), but usually cite also the meanings given in the ancient versions.

transcribe *ciceion*, no one would have understood me; if I put down 'gourd,' I would be saying what is not in the Hebrew; so I put 'ivy' to agree with other translators" (*Ep.* 112, 22; *CSEL* 55, 392-93).³ But Augustine answered in 405 that he still preferred *cucurbita*, the meaning of the Septuagint. Since he regarded the Septuagint as inspired, he begged Jerome for a good translation of it.⁴ But he informed the exegete of Bethlehem, who was more interested in the *hebraica veritas*: "I do not wish your translation from the Hebrew to be read in the churches, for fear of upsetting the flock of Christ with great scandal, by publishing something new, something seemingly contrary to the authority of the Septuagint, which version their ears and hearts are accustomed to hear, and which was accepted even by the apostles" (*Ep.* 82, 35; *CSEL* 34, 386; tr. *Fathers of the Church* 12, 419).

The mentality of Augustine displayed in this incident is somewhat akin to that which the modern Scripture scholar meets in his attempt to set forth the meaning of certain passages. In Jerome's day it was a question of translation; today it is a question of interpretation. But the fear is the same: "ne . . . tamquam nouum aliquid proferentes magno scandalo perturbemus plebes Christi." When we read Jon 4:6 today in the Vulgate, none of us suspects the controversy which it occasioned. Yet Jerome's translation *hedera* has remained for centuries, while Augustine's story of the African bishop is recalled as an interesting incident—if not a fable—by the biographers of the learned, irascible, impatient, but saintly Eusebius Hieronymus.

The reaction to modern biblical studies has at times unfortunately been quite similar to that of Augustine, a fear that the biblical innovation will upset something. The most recent manifestation of such a reaction took place in Rome itself within the past few months. The nature of it and its consequences have been such that an attempt to recount the happenings, in so far as they can be controlled, will perhaps be of value in regions far from Rome, where the issue also becomes clouded at times. Our purpose is to recount what has ensued and not to enter into controversy with any of those involved. The account of the controversy is presented here to correct certain impressions of it which have gotten abroad and to answer some of the questions raised by current veiled references to the incident.

³ At the end of this letter Jerome comments: "At the end of my letter I ask that you do not force a retired old man and one already a veteran to do battle and to imperil his life again. You who are young and have been appointed to the episcopal dignity, teach the people and enrich the Roman house with new African crops. For me it is enough to whisper to some listener or reader in a poor little corner of a monastery."

⁴ "For the same Spirit who inspired the original Prophets as they wrote was no less present to the Seventy as they translated what the Prophets had written" (*De civ. Dei* 18, 43; *CSEL* 40/2, 337; *Fathers of the Church* 24, 156).

I

Fr. Luis Alonso Schökel, S.J., a young Spanish professor of the *OT* at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, wrote an article last summer entitled "Where Is Catholic Exegesis Headed?"⁵ In twelve pages he tried to answer the question which he put to himself in the title. A résumé of this article follows:

"Where is Catholic exegesis headed?" This is a question often asked, which reveals a certain friendly preoccupation, and which should be answered by the exegete with simplicity and clarity. To answer the question, it is well to consider the path along which Catholic exegesis has been proceeding in the period between two pronouncements of Pope Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) and his message to the Congrès International Catholique des Sciences Bibliques held at the time of the Brussels Fair (1958). In the future it will certainly stick to this path.

Such an apparently simple way of answering the question is in reality complicated. For during this period there has taken place a remarkable change of direction in biblical studies, when they are compared with the preceding fifty years—not to mention previous centuries. Consequently, one must go back to the beginning of this century to put the question in its proper light.

The first part of the article cites examples of the new direction which has been adopted in various areas of biblical studies. In each case a striking contrast is seen when one compares certain statements in the writings of Catholic scholars of the beginning of the century, such as L. Murillo, L. Fonck, and L. Billot, with statements of Pius XII in *Divino afflante Spiritu* and *Humani generis* apropos of the same subject. Billot treated with ironic disdain the knowledge of ambient cultures and languages of the ancient Near East, whereas Pius XII stressed that "all these advantages which . . . our age has acquired are as it were an invitation and inducement to interpreters of the Sacred Literature to make diligent use of this light, so abundantly given, to penetrate more deeply, explain more clearly, and expound more lucidly the Divine Oracles."⁶ Whereas Billot had branded literary genres as "genera vanitatis" and concluded that the Bible's genre was "singulare, transcendens, nullam cum aliis comparationem ferens," Pius XII imposed on Catholic exegetes the obligation of studying the genres used in the Scriptures. Murillo,

⁵ "Dove va l'esegesi cattolica?" *Civiltà cattolica* 111, no. 2645 (September 3, 1960) 449–60; the offprint bears the date August 27, 1960. The article appeared in French under the title "Où va l'exégèse catholique?" *L'Ami du clergé* 71 (1961) 17–22. The French editors note: "For the permission to translate and publish these pages we are grateful to the editorial board of the magazine [*Civ. catt.*] and to the learned author, whose studied charity is united with a competence which our readers will recognize with pleasure." Very brief summaries of the article can be found in *New Testament Abstracts* 5 (1960–61) 127 (no. 322); *Herder-Korrespondenz* 15 (§1, October, 1960) 45.

⁶ *Divino afflante Spiritu* §12 (NCWC Pamphlet, p. 10).

rejecting the possibility of popular traditions in Gn 1-11, held out for their "perfectly historical character." But while it is obvious that both Pius XII and Murillo agree on the fundamental truth of biblical inerrancy, the Pope frankly admitted in those chapters a mode of speaking adapted to the mentality of a people but little cultured which gives a popular description of the origin of the human race and the chosen people. Fonck argued that the Bible presents us with a series of historical books (as tradition attests); but history narrates facts in direct judgments. Hence the Bible enjoys a total historicity infallibly narrated; any liberty taken by the hagiographer would be irreconcilable with inspiration. On the other hand, the encyclicals of Pius XII frankly admit that the biblical narratives are not to be judged by modern critical methods nor even by those of the ancient Greeks and Romans, although they do belong to a genre of history which is to be studied and determined by the exegete. Apropos of patristic interpretations, Murillo maintained that a unanimous consent of the Fathers resulted in a *de fide* interpretation, no matter what the subject matter is (e.g., that Moses wrote the Pentateuch). Pius XII, however, clearly pointed out that there are few texts about which the teaching of the Fathers is unanimous and that "especially in matters pertaining to history" the commentators of past ages lacked almost all the information which was needed for their clear exposition. Murillo's position is, therefore, exaggerated and extremist. Finally, Fonck was most sceptical of new methods and solutions and found in them nothing solid, whereas *Divino afflante Spiritu* clearly admitted that if new problems have arisen, new methods and tools have also been discovered which aid in their solution. These comparisons are not intended as an accusation of scholars of yesterday who were *bene meriti*, but only as concrete evidence of a change of direction in the path followed by Catholic exegesis.

The second part of the article makes three observations which are necessary to fill out the picture. First, the change of direction did not come about like an unforeseen earthquake, for *Divino afflante Spiritu* merely crystallized and canonized the results of private study carried on by many exegetes. Today's positions are often the results of the work of scholars well before 1943. For instance, a century ago Catholic and Protestant commentators agreed in considering Solomon the author of Qoheleth. After Delitzsch denied the Solomonic authorship of that book in 1875, he was followed by the Catholics A. Condamin, S.J., in 1900 and E. Podechard in 1913. Though about 1920 that was a suspect opinion in some Catholic circles, A. Vaccari espoused it in 1930. Today even the most conservative Catholic scholars deny the Solomonic authorship of Qoheleth. There is thus a certain *continuity* with what preceded 1943. Secondly, many points established and defended by older exegetes are still maintained, such as inerrancy and the exclusion of "historical appearances" and of other radical positions. Thirdly, it should be remembered that before 1943 along with a "strict" school of conservative exegetes there also existed a broad-minded group. In some cases certain individuals of the latter group erred, and their errors were rejected both by the Church's authority and by the progress of biblical studies itself (e.g., "historical appearances" defended by P. de Hummelauer; certain infelicitous formulations of P. Lagrange). But others of this school legitimately

counterbalanced the "strict" school, and the continuity between the directives of Pius XII and the positions of the former is evident. Hence, that present-day Catholic exegesis follows that of fifty years ago in many points does not surprise anyone; but that it is following a new path in other matters should not surprise anyone who has followed the encyclicals. Thus an answer is given, in part at least, to the initial question.

The third part of the article attempts to explain where Catholic exegesis has been headed since 1943. When Pius XII published *Divino afflante Spiritu*, he was aware that he was opening a door to innovations in exegesis which might excite excessively conservative minds; for he dedicated a paragraph of his encyclical to the defense of the liberty of those who would work seriously in the field of exegesis. It was an act of confidence on the part of Pius XII immediately in Catholic exegetes and mediately in the Holy Spirit who guides the Church. But have not the exegetes failed the Pontiff? Have they not strayed from the path assigned to them? In fact, *Humani generis* (1950) bemoans just such deviations. But it should be noted that among the errors proscribed there, some are more "theological" than "exegetical," referring not to the interpretation of individual texts, but to principles concerning inspiration and hermeneutics (e.g., the sense of the formula "God Author of Scripture," inerrancy, relation of Scripture to the magisterium, "spiritual" interpretation). Historicity was treated in another paragraph, in which too lax an interpretation of the letter sent to Cardinal Suhard of Paris was deplored. But is not this danger of deviation still with us? For, though Pius XII had accorded liberty of scientific investigation to exegetes, he did so with certain limits and cautions (e.g., the analogy of faith, a prudence based on solid and honest scientific research). To pass judgment on the historicity of a biblical passage without sufficient evidence is a dangerous procedure, for it can compromise data important for the history of salvation and create serious doubts and trouble. Thus, whoever would affirm the entire historicity of the Book of Judith puts the reader in serious difficulties from the very first verses; whoever would deny all historicity to Mt 16 would create serious difficulties for the fact of the primacy of Peter. The present crisis stems from some exegetes who treat the problem of historicity with insufficiently grounded arguments and from popularizers who delight in launching immature and undigested results of research at the general public. But the limits of prudence and charity must be respected both in scientific research and in popularization; in fact, charity makes demands which transcend the liberty of research or exposition. Three bishops at the Brussels Congress complained of the lack of competence and prudence displayed by popularizers; the Bishop of Namur, in particular, stressed that the discussion of complex and delicate biblical questions should be left to professional exegetes, qualified to handle them. The statements of these bishops, together with *Humani generis*, indicate that there have been errors and abuses of the liberty of investigation. But there is no need to point the finger at individuals or regions; a priori, one can say that the number of errors will be greater there where the popularization has been more intense. But the Bishop of Namur emphasized: "We know that [Catholic exegetes] apply themselves to their work with good will, with fervor and even with en-

thusiasm, and we think they measure up in general very well to the Church's confidence in them. They err sometimes? . . . But are we to believe that those who never err are always *eo ipso* the best collaborators of the hierarchy? . . . They [the exegetes] offer the hierarchy their good will, their labors, and the results of their research. And we can say that the hierarchy on its side looks for this collaboration with confidence and welcomes it with gratitude" (*Sacra pagina* 1, 78-79).

In conclusion, Catholic exegesis is proceeding along the path traced for it by Pius XII in *Divino afflante Spiritu*, which was at once a beacon and a stimulus. Questions which have by now been resolved have been calmly incorporated into biblical science; new problems continue to arise and engage the exegetes. Certainly, errors and deviations have occurred. This is due to the fact that exegetes, though guided in their research by the light of revelation and aided by the methods of their science, are not endowed with infallibility. The danger of deviation from the path is always present; but the guidance of the magisterium and serious, solid scientific work are sufficient to cope with it. This was the burden of the address of John XXIII to the Pontifical Biblical Institute on the occasion of its jubilee, and also of Pius XII to the Catholic exegetes gathered at Brussels from many lands—the successors of the "strict" school in many principles, the successors of the "broad-minded" school in many questions of method.

It must be recognized that Alonso Schökel's article, calmly considered, aimed at bringing together within a few pages many things which have been known and accepted in Catholic theological and exegetical circles now for a long time. It has the merit of putting the question of modern biblical studies in a perspective which is badly needed. The only way to explain how the "new direction"—the existence of which cannot be denied—has developed is to sketch the matrix in which it had its origin. This Alonso Schökel intended to do and in general he achieved it with a laudable success. There are a few oversimplifications in the article, almost inevitable in a sketch of only twelve pages, and a place or two where a more felicitous phrasing would perhaps have been in order. But the general thesis and the details cited are valid and remain beyond cavil. The article is an effort at popularization by a competent exegete who knows whereof he speaks.

II

However, the article was not accorded a welcome reception in all quarters. In particular, Msgr. Antonino Romeo, a domestic prelate from Reggio Calabria, Professor of Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome, Aiutante di Studio of the Sacred Congregation of Seminaries and Universities, member of the Academic Council of the Pontifical Roman Theological Academy, the Pontifical International Marian Academy, and the Pontifical Academy dell'Immacolata, published a seventy-page article

entitled "L'Enciclica 'Divino afflante Spiritu' e le 'opiniones novae,'" the main part of which offers a severe criticism of Alonso Schökel's article. It is obvious to the reader of Romeo's seventy pages that the criticism was motivated by something more than the article itself, because it is treated as merely one representative of the "opiniones novae." What the real motivation was remains obscure.⁸ However, such severe criticism, coming from a person like Msgr. Romeo in such a position, certainly raised the question: Was this an official view which was being voiced? Was this a reaction of Roman congregations to the "new direction" in biblical studies of which Alonso Schökel had written?

The burden of the article is a denial that the Encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* is responsible for any new direction in Catholic exegesis, because such is impossible in an exegesis which is closely bound up with tradition. The "new" exegesis is rather opposed to the directives of the magisterium and constitutes a danger for the faith which has been handed down to us, not to mention its pernicious effect on young clerics who come to Rome for their education and formation. We have no intention of giving a detailed synopsis of the seventy pages of criticism; a few paragraphs will suffice to indicate its general lines and a few citations will reveal its tone.

According to Romeo, the very title of Alonso Schökel's article attracted much attention.

Several bishops, who represent the authentic magisterium of Catholic exegesis, have been perplexed by the question [in the title], because they know better than anyone else where Catholic exegesis should be headed; they would not wish that it be impelled by some group in a direction inconsistent with the traditional doctrine and the rich interpretation of the sacred books bequeathed to us by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and by the "illustrious interpreters of past ages," who "penetrate to the most intimate depths of the divine word," nor that it sail too near the subversive or at least adventuresome winds of the "criticism" unleashed by rationalism, which is always of its very nature "intransigent and arrogant" (p. 387).

⁷ *Divinitas* 4 (1960) 385-456. Fasc. 3 is dated December, 1960.

⁸ Romeo mentions that Alonso Schökel is the author of some "aggressive" book reviews. Perhaps he refers to the frank discussion written by Alonso Schökel of B. Mariani, *Introductio in libros sacros Veteris Testamenti* (Rome, 1958), reviewed in *Biblica* 39 (1958) 499-502; *Verbum domini* 36 (1958) 116-17. In substantial agreement with Alonso Schökel are a host of other Catholic exegetes: see *Biblica* 41 (1960) 4*; *Razón y fe* 161 (1960) 367-80. Perhaps even more pertinent would be Alonso Schökel's review of F. Spadafora, A. Romeo, D. Frangipane, *Il libro sacro 1: Introduzione generale* (Padua, 1958), in which he says of Romeo's contribution on biblical inspiration: "Tractatum de Inspiratione laicis vel alumnis commendare non possum, propter eius spiritum polemicum contra catholicos aliter sentientes" (*Verbum domini* 38 [1960] 310).

A few introductory pages are devoted to a denunciation of "il progressismo cattolico moderno," a pernicious spirit which must be understood to comprehend the tendency of Alonso Schökel's article, touching, as it does, the "essence of our religion, the legitimacy of the faith which we owe to the Word of God as supreme and immutable truth, and the validity of Catholic tradition in which is perpetuated the infallible apostolic magisterium of the Church" (p. 391).

Romeo protests that he does not "doubt the good faith and the good intentions of Fr. Alonso and of those who are engaged with him in the reform campaign in the area of Catholic exegesis. We are confreres in religion and in the priesthood. If we were to meet and speak together, we would certainly embrace each other" (p. 393). But despite such a manifestation of good will, Romeo finds it necessary to admit that his own attitude is "even annoying" (*fastidioso*), for the "matter treated, which is of extreme importance and delicacy, demands it" (p. 396).

Alonso Schökel's viewpoint in the article is explained by his background and his other writings; these are found to be "in agreement with the position which is hostile to tradition and the 'conservatives'" (p. 394). There follows a detailed criticism of many points made by Alonso Schökel in his article. This critique is so extensive that it is impossible to retail it here. The burden of it can be summed up thus: "No change of direction was perceived in 1943" (p. 409), a flat denial of the thesis of the *Civiltà cattolica* article.

An article of Cardinal A. Bea, S.J., which had been written at the time of the appearance of *Divino afflante Spiritu*, is quoted as an "official" interpretation of the Encyclical; long excerpts from it are given with footnotes to indicate to what extent Alonso Schökel disagrees with the mentality of Pius XII and of those responsible for the Encyclical (pp. 412-20).

The last part of Alonso Schökel's article is subjected to the same sort of criticism (pp. 420-42) as the first part. Apropos of it Romeo writes:

Either he [Alonso Schökel] does not know the facts, and therefore is an incompetent who should not dare to write for the public on questions treated by a lofty pontifical document, passing judgment on and contradicting affirmations of the Pope, of the great Pius XII, who lavishly endorses, at least as it is attributed to him, the . . . liberation of Catholic exegesis. Or else he knows the facts, and then we must necessarily be concerned to hinder the systematic defamation or sleight-of-hand treatment (*escamotage*) of the two great encyclicals of the great Pius XII (p. 425).

The next-to-last part of Romeo's article (pp. 443-50) is devoted to a digression, a complaint attributed to various cardinals, apostolic nuncios,

archbishops, bishops, and prelates of the Roman Curia, that at present "in various Catholic exegetical circles throughout the whole world the edge of heresy is being grazed and sometimes there is thoroughgoing disbelief." Footnotes 129 and 130 give references to articles in American and French biblical and theological magazines (among them *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* and the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*) which are, in Romeo's opinion, evidence of this tendency. This is supposed to reveal the "undeniable fact of pressure exerted on all the clergy by a group which is working indefatigably *to open* even wider breaches in the superhuman edifice of Catholic faith" (p. 444; italics his). The entire situation has its roots in the double myth of human liberty and human progress, characteristic of the "new era" (*tempi nuovi*) of the second half of the twentieth century.

The article ends with two observations: (1) Today there does not exist in the bosom of the Catholic Church any danger of obscurantism, fear, or timidity vis-à-vis science or scientific learning. (2) Today's grave and frightening danger is rather that there are manifest within the Church theories and tendencies which threaten to subvert the foundations of Catholic doctrine, over which Pope Pius XII expressed such anxiety with the very title of his Encyclical *Humani generis*.

A whole swarm of termites working away incessantly in the shadows, at Rome and in all parts of the world, forces one to take note of the execution of a massive plan of buzzing about and gnawing away at the doctrines which form and nourish our Catholic faith. Ever more numerous signs from various quarters give evidence of the gradual unfolding of a widespread and progressive maneuver, directed by very clever minds, apparently quite pious, which aims at doing away with the Christianity taught up to now and lived for nineteen centuries, in order to substitute for it the Christianity of "the new times" (p. 454).

Enough of an indication of this seventy-page article has been given to reveal its general tenor. Alonso Schökel's discussion of the question, "Dove va l'esegesi cattolica?" was clearly only an occasion for Romeo. What disturbs him is not simply that article in *Civiltà cattolica*, but the existence of *a group of exegetes* who seem to be pushing the Catholic interpretation of the Bible in a direction with which he does not agree. In addition to Alonso Schökel's article, he introduces frequent quotations from the writings and lectures of two other Catholic exegetes to substantiate his contentions. M. Zerwick, a German Jesuit and likewise a professor at the Biblical Institute in Rome, who addressed a group of some fifty Italian Scripture professors at a meeting in Padua, September 15-17, 1959, is one of these. About a hundred mimeographed copies of his talk were distributed, entitled "Liter-

ary Criticism of the N.T. in the Catholic Exegesis of the Gospels" ("Critica letteraria del N.T. nell'esegesi cattolica dei Vangeli"). In it he summarized the conclusions of three other exegetes, A. Vögtle, P. Benoit, O.P., and A. Descamps.⁹ From Zerwick's address to the Italian exegetes Romeo concluded: "The denial of the historicity of this passage of the first Gospel [Mt 16:16-18] is clear" (p. 436, n. 116). This is but one example of a number of accusations directed against Zerwick throughout the article. The other Catholic exegete frequently referred to in the footnotes is Jean Levie, a seventy-six-year-old Belgian Jesuit, Professor of the New Testament at the Collège Philosophique et Théologique S.J. de Louvain (Eegenhoven) and for many years the editor of *Nouvelle revue théologique*. Romeo finds Levie's latest book, *La Bible: Parole humaine et message de Dieu*,¹⁰ to be "tremendamente eversivo" (p. 444, n. 130). As he understands Levie, "All of Christianity is to be made over" (p. 455, n. 150). "P. Levie exerted notable influence on P. Alonso, whose professor he seems to have been" (p. 395).

⁹ See A. Vögtle, "Messiasbekenntnis und Petrusverheissung: Zur Komposition von Mt 16, 13-23," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 1 (1957) 252-72; 2 (1958) 85-103; P. Benoit, "La mort de Judas," *Synoptische Studien: Alfred Wikenhauser zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag* (Munich, 1953) pp. 1-19; A. Descamps, "La structure des récits évangéliques de la résurrection," *Biblica* 40 (1959) 726-41. The summary character of Zerwick's address is, however, passed over in silence by Romeo. The president of the Italian Biblical Association thought it wise to issue certain clarifications about the Padua meeting, which should certainly be consulted. See *Chiarificazioni sul Convegno di Padova (a proposito di un recente articolo) a cura del Presidente dell'Associazione* (Appendice al volume degli "Atti e Conferenze della Settimana Biblica 1960"; Rome, 1961).

¹⁰ *Museum Lessianum*, section biblique 1; Paris-Louvain, 1958. This book has been widely acclaimed by reviewers. See *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 20 (1959) 282-84: "Without a doubt we have here one of the finest works on Scripture to appear in the last ten years" (J. E. Bruns). *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (1959) 245-47: "If this reviewer were asked to recommend a book which would give a thorough understanding of the present stand of Catholic scholarship, he would unhesitatingly recommend this one" (L. A. Bushinski). *Angelicum* 36 (1959) 449: "We believe it to be of great value considering the purpose intended by it. And it will undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of Scripture and of the teachings of the Church relative to the interpretation of the divine word" (J. Salguero, O.P.). *Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses* 35 (1959) 824: "Few works contain such a rich mine of information and map out paths so sure for the Christian interpretation of the sacred books" (J. Coppens). *Biblica* 40 (1959) 1025: "An extremely nuanced and concrete exposé, based above all on the study of the texts and a long, mature reflection, which loyally and personally confronts the true problems of exegesis" (S. Lyonnet). See, further, *New Testament Abstracts* 4 (1959) 83-84. For a non-Catholic reaction see the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79 (1960) 173-75: "... an excellent 'compte rendu' of the state of biblical studies in the Roman Catholic Church, while offering at the same time a splendid instance of the best fruits of these studies. In both respects this book is a most worthy representative of the 'biblical movement' in the Roman Catholic Church... an outstanding contribution to biblical and theological studies and to the ecumenical dialogue" (J. Míguez Bonino, Facultad Evangélica de Teología, Buenos Aires).

But Alonso Schökel, Zerwick, and Levie are not the only "religiosi" who make up the group, for in the course of the footnotes such names occur as C. Spicq, P. Teilhard de Chardin, D. Stanley, and "un intimo collaboratore di P. Alonso," who has been identified as S. Lyonnet.¹¹

The follow-up of Romeo's seventy-page article is also noteworthy. Immediately after his lengthy critique the same issue of *Divinitas* carries an Italian translation of two chapters which Prof. William F. Albright contributed to the volume edited by H. H. Rowley, *The Old Testament and Modern Study: A Generation of Discovery and Research*.¹² The translation is, however, preceded by a preface of six pages in italics, which was written to introduce Albright to Italian readers, but which ends with a series of references to ecclesiastical documents and is signed by Romeo. The last footnote of this preface quotes the *finis* of the Biblical Institute as set forth by Pius X.¹³ The burden of the six-page preface thus becomes apparent: it is an indirect comparison of what a non-Catholic biblical scholar and archeologist has to say about the Bible with what the Biblical Institute is supposed to be teaching about it. Such a use of the Italian translation of these chapters was completely unauthorized. The separate printing of the offprints of Romeo's article, which has been widely circulated, even goes so far as to put the names of Romeo and Albright together on the cover with the title only of Romeo's article.

¹¹ Lyonnet, who is also a professor at the Biblical Institute, faced a milder form of criticism in the same magazine. His interpretation of St. Paul's teaching on original sin in Rom 5:12 (see "Le péché originel et l'exégèse de Rom. 5, 12-14," *Recherches de science religieuse* 44 [1956] 63-84; "Le sens de eph' 'θ en Rom 5, 12 et l'exégèse des Pères grecs," *Biblica* 36 [1955] 436-56 [cf. *Theology Digest* 5 (1957) 63; *New Testament Abstracts*, May, 1956, pp. 28-32]) was scrutinized by F. Spadafora ("Rom. 5, 12: Eseggesi e riflessi dogmatici," *Divinitas* 4 [1960] 289-98) and judged "scientificamente infondata, per non dire insostenibile" (p. 298). Indirect criticism of it is also found in B. Mariani, "La persona di Adamo e il peccato originale secondo San Paolo: Rom. 5, 12-21," *Divinitas* 2 (1958) 486-519.—Also representative of this "group of exegetes" are the Associazione Biblica Italiana and the Italian biblical magazine *Rivista biblica*, both of which are attacked by name in Romeo's article.

¹² Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951. "The Old Testament and the Archaeology of Palestine" (pp. 1-26); "The Old Testament and the Archaeology of the Ancient East" (pp. 27-47). In Italian dress they appear under the title "La Bibbia illustrata dall'archeologia," *Divinitas* 4 (1960) 457-505.

¹³ "Instituti sine continetur ut sanam de Libris sacris doctrinam, normis ab hac S. Sede Apostolica statutis vel statuendis omnino conformem, *adversus opiniones, recentiorum maxime, falsas, erroneas, temerarias atque haereticas defendat, promulget, promoveat*" (italics supplied by Romeo; see *Acta apostolicae sedis* 1 [1909] 448).

III

There ensued, naturally enough, a lively reaction on the part of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. The Rector, Fr. Ernest Vogt, a Swiss Jesuit belonging to the Southern Brazilian Province, wrote to the editor of *Divinitas*, Msgr. Antonio Piolanti, asking for a retraction and for equal space to answer the critique in that magazine. This was refused and there subsequently appeared in *Verbum domini* a fifteen-page reply, signed P. I. B., entitled "The Pontifical Biblical Institute and a Recent Booklet of Msgr. A. Romeo" ("Pontificium Institutum Biblicum et recens libellus R.mi D.ni A. Romeo").¹⁴ In this article the Biblical Institute complained of the grave violation of charity involved in the damage done to its reputation through the "very serious . . . accusations leveled against two professors of this Institute, and this not in private (as has occurred for years now against the Institute), but publicly, and indeed not in an obscure place, but in a magazine which glories in the name *Divinitas* . . ." (p. 3).¹⁵ The article proceeds to indicate the occasion and source of the accusations, Romeo's methods of "interpreting" his sources, the most serious accusations (that the professors are opponents of tradition and the magisterium, enemies of the Catholic faith, corruptors of young clerics, teachers of a double "biblical truth," hypocrites, and conspiring to destroy the ancient faith). Each of these points is taken up and answered by "quoting chapter and verse."

This controversy has taken place in Rome itself—fortunately, for the rest of the Catholic *biblical* world—and the subsequent developments in such a spot are always important to watch. As we indicated earlier, the article written by Romeo, who is associated with one of the Roman congregations, might have been judged to be an indication of some official Roman view of modern biblical scholarship. However, at the beginning of February the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Studies and Universities let it be known that the article was published without the knowledge either of himself or of the Secretary of the Congregation, that it represented exclusively

¹⁴ *Verbum domini* 39 (1961) 3–17.

¹⁵ "A Directore periodici 'Divinitas,' Praelato Romano admodum noto, reparationem gravissime laesae famae petivimus. Sed cum id praestare recusaverit, coacti sumus publice reclamare et lectores monere de incredibili methodo qua Accusatores utuntur. Etenim non de sola fama Pontificii Instituti Biblici agitur; res in grave damnum verti potest totius exegesis catholicae et timendum est ne haud parvum obstaculum constituat in praesenti condicione relationum inter Ecclesiam Romanam et non-catholicos" (*ibid.*, pp. 3–4).

the ideas of the writer, and that, since its tone was so personal, it could in no way be regarded as an official view.

On March 2, 1961, the *Osservatore romano* carried the news in its column, "Nostre Informazioni," that the Rector of the Biblical Institute, Fr. Ernest Vogt, S.J., had been named a consultor to the Pontifical Theological Commission of the coming Vatican Council II.

Finally, a letter was sent by Fr. Athanasius Miller, O.S.B., the Secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, in the name of all the Consultors of the Commission who had assembled in the Vatican on March 5, 1961, to the Rector of the Biblical Institute, deprecating the attacks of Msgr. Romeo (mentioned by name) and reaffirming publicly their unshakable solidarity with the Biblical Institute.¹⁶

IV

Reactions to the controversy are beginning to appear in cautious form in various journals throughout the world. *Herder Korrespondenz* (15, 6 [March, 1961] 287) is dismayed at the insulting tone of the polemics directed against a biblical confrere, whose orthodoxy is questioned, at the appeal for a censure (as if Rome and the episcopacy were asleep), and at the casting of suspicion on other scholars like J. Levie and P. Teilhard de Chardin as well as on American, French, and German exegetical magazines. "It can scarcely fail to be noted that this article [of Romeo], which is by now certainly known to theologians within and without the Church, is arousing the worst fears of a *rabies theologica*; one would have thought that such a thing did not exist any more. At the present moment this is most regrettable, especially since it originates in Rome itself."

Etudes ("Rome: ombres et lumières," 308, 3 [March, 1961] 401) contrasts an optimistic article of C. Boyer ("Il Concilio e l'unità cristiana," *Osservatore romano*, January 21, 1961, p. 3), in which the author stresses that thanks to the Council "Protestants who are nourished on the Bible will see better how the Roman Church is bound to Sacred Scripture and how it is assured of the assistance of the Holy Spirit to interpret it correctly," with the attack conducted at Rome at present by "tout un clan" against the biblical movement and its scientifically assured results. "If this attack were to succeed and if Catholic exegetes were to lose a sane liberty of research, all hope of useful dialogue with Protestantism would be ruined, perhaps for

¹⁶ We do not make public the text of the last two documents, since we have no authority to do so; though they were not *published* in Rome, they have been widely circulated throughout the world. Interested readers should contact an active member of the Catholic Biblical Association.

several decades" (p. 401). J. M. LeBlond in the following issue of *Etudes* takes up a point for which Romeo had severely criticized J. Levie.¹⁷ LeBlond regrets the concern for "security" which has been openly substituted for that of truth.

This is the normal mark of integralism; an unquestionably sincere attachment to the Church is compromised by fear, as if the Church had to be afraid of scientific research and the impartial quest for truth. Such "pragmatism" can become very serious and in addition can scarcely offer any confidence to those of our separated brothers whom the proclamation of a council has been leading to look in our direction with greater attention (p. 85).

But LeBlond is much more concerned about the position which the Church is expected to adopt vis-à-vis the "new times" according to Romeo. He takes some of his statements (such as "The Church has never accommodated herself to what Levie calls history" [p. 456, n. 152]) and contrasts them with statements of Pius XII (Christmas Message, December 23, 1956; *AAS* 49 [1957] 12) and of John XXIII (Allocution to the students of the Greek College at Rome, June 14, 1959). The latter said:

The Church must adapt herself, since there has been so much evolution in the modern world among the faithful and in the manner of life which they must lead. . . . When she realizes that, she will then turn to her separated brothers and say to them: "See what the Church is, what she has done, how she presents herself." And when the Church appears thus modernized, rejuvenated, she will be able to say to our separated brothers, "Come to us."

The *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, in a note written after the arrival of the news about the Biblical Commission's reaction to the controversy, "heartily seconds" the warm support given to the Biblical Institute, which "has come not only from the rank and file, but from important leaders in the Church." "Perhaps the most salutary effect of all this will be to highlight the need of many to inform themselves concerning scholarly methods and principles involved in the understanding of Sacred Scripture."¹⁸

Msgr. E. Galbiati, of the Theological Faculty of Milan,¹⁹ finds Romeo's article "una riposta polemica," and since some of the readers of *Scuola cattolica* have been disturbed (*disorientati*) by the controversy, he shows how both sides have been trying to remain faithful to the demands of the

¹⁷ "L'Eglise et l'histoire," *Etudes* 309, no. 4 (April, 1961) 85-88.

¹⁸ "The Close of a Controversy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961) 269.

¹⁹ "Un dissidio tra gli esegeti? A proposito di una recente polemica," *Scuola cattolica* 89 (1961) 50-53.

faith. Since it is only in recent times that our understanding of inspiration and inerrancy has been deepened, a completely satisfying systematization of these notions has not yet been achieved. There are for this reason two dangers. One is speculative, based on a few revealed data, deducing its conclusions from them, and inclined to consider any progress or advance from the positions assumed as impossible. The other is positive, beginning either with an admission that we do not know to what extent the dogma of inspiration commits us or with an act of faith that what emerges from a sincere examination of the facts cannot contradict the dogma, and proceeding to analyze the Bible in an effort to collect the data; it thus develops the tendency of a practical neglect of the dogmatic aspect. The latter danger is greater in the case of the public at large and the nonexperts, who do not have the necessary preparation or background and are inclined to minimize the real notion of inspiration. Reconciliation of the two positions comes only in the case of individuals who unite in themselves the speculative finesse of the theologian and the unprejudiced outlook of the scholar who loyally and prudently makes use of the historical method. The crisis of 1870-1920 is responsible for much of the present attitude. Alonso Schökel would have done better to explain the intrinsic dialectic at work in the change which has taken place since that time rather than merely contrast the two positions. Romeo is like Eusebius of Dorylaeum, the champion of orthodoxy, who on two occasions denounced persons in high positions—a possibility which exists in the Church, where everyone shares the responsibility of preserving the faith. But *how* did he do it? One might have expected it to be done by discussions and clarifications based on the assumption that both sides were interested in the same basic principles.

If at times his [Romeo's], so to speak, adversaries have given the impression of an excessive security, devoid of any concern about clarifying how their unusual exegesis is nevertheless in accord with or not openly in discord with revealed principles . . . then let it be shown how their security is without foundation and how it cannot be reconciled with the principles admitted by all. The scholarly world expects nothing more than this. But such a hope has been disappointed, for as a result of the violently polemical tone the heart of the matter was never touched, nor was any new light shed on the point at issue (p. 53).

V

The reaction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission—which has always been looked upon as a guardian of the faith in matters biblical—to the Romeo-Biblical Institute affair is, to say the least, significant. The fact that it has sided with the Biblical Institute against the accusations of a Roman

monsignor with important connections in various curial circles and congregations is of much more importance in giving an indication of a Roman view than any critique of seventy pages.

It must be noted, of course, that the Biblical Commission has come out in favor of the Biblical Institute in this controversy *in globo*; it has reaffirmed its confidence in the professorial staff of that Institute. That does not mean, however, that it agrees with every detail of what was written by the professors of the Institute in the articles criticized. We note this, not to imply that we have found something to criticize in those writings, but to present the reaction of the Biblical Commission for what it is.

Much less should that reaction be interpreted as a blanket approval of everything which is passed off as the exegesis of the "new direction" of which Alonso Schökel spoke—not to mention the caricatures of such exegesis by popularizers, professional *enfants terribles*, etc.

But, on the other hand, it must be noted that Romeo's article was not just an attack on Alonso Schökel, Zerwick, or the Biblical Institute, but much more on a whole movement spread widely throughout the Church today. Dedicated Scripture scholars are working seriously in many quarters to further that movement, but their aim is not the destruction of the foundations of Christian faith or of the traditions of the Church. Exegetes throughout the world sighed with relief at the news of the reaction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to the controversy, for it indicated to them that official Roman views have not changed since the issuance of the statements of the Secretary of the Biblical Commission and its Under-Secretary in 1955 apropos of its own decrees.²⁰

In this whole controversy there is a legitimate cause for concern. Though it ensued between two groups of professional exegetes, it is but another manifestation of the regrettable chasm which exists between popular piety and scholarly theology. Some years ago J. Lebreton devoted a lengthy article to a third-century manifestation of this chasm and its effect on the Church of that time.²¹ It would be well to reread that article, even though it is devoted to an entirely different problem, as a background for the understanding of the recent Roman controversy. The professional Catholic exegete of today is aware of that chasm and of the effect it may in time have on the life of the Church. But should he abandon the pursuit of his science as such to yield to the temptation that "the scholar must talk to the people"?

²⁰ See E. F. Siegman, "The Decrees of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: A Recent Clarification," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 18 (1956) 23-29.

²¹ "Le désaccord de la foi populaire et de la théologie savante dans l'église chrétienne du III^e siècle," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 19 (1923) 481-506; 20 (1924) 5-37.

This account was begun with an episode taken from the lives of Jerome and Augustine to illustrate how the study of Scripture has at times been fraught with misunderstanding. We do not wish to imply that the reactions of the great Doctor of Hippo and those of the Roman monsignor are in all respects comparable. But the *fear* that the Scripture scholars of the world are undermining the faith—"ne magno scandalo perturbemus plebes Christi"—has appeared before in the history of the Church. The fears of the period of Modernism, however legitimate they may have been, are still known to an older generation of living Scripture scholars today, fears which actually cast a dark cloud over much of Catholic biblical scholarship of the first part of this century. That day has passed. But the recent Roman controversy should teach us all a salutary lesson. It gives us an added reason to recall the celebrated paragraph of *Divino afflante Spiritu*, of which Alonso Schökel made much in his original article:

Let all the other sons of the Church bear in mind that the efforts of these resolute laborers in the vineyard of the Lord should be judged not only with equity and justice, but also with the greatest charity; all moreover should abhor that intemperate zeal which imagines that whatever is new should for that very reason be opposed or suspected. Let them bear in mind above all that in the rules and laws promulgated by the Church there is question of doctrine regarding faith and morals; and that in the immense matter contained in the Sacred Books—legislative, historical, sapiential and prophetic—there are but few texts whose sense has been defined by the authority of the Church, nor are those more numerous about which the teaching of the Holy Fathers is unanimous. There remain therefore many things, and of the greatest importance, in the discussion and exposition of which the skill and genius of Catholic commentators may and ought to be freely exercised, so that each may contribute his part to the advantage of all, to the continued progress of the sacred doctrine and to the defense and honor of the Church.²²

POSTSCRIPT

As an aftermath of the Romeo affair, rumors circulated about the preparation by the Holy Office of a *monitum* on biblical matters. It was published on June 20, 1961 and appeared in *Osservatore romano* on June 22.

Suprema S. Congregatio S. Officii

Biblicarum disciplinarum studio laudabiliter fervente, in variis regionibus sententiae et opiniones circumferuntur, quae in discrimen adducunt germanam veritatem historicam et obiectivam Scripturae Sacrae non modo Veteris Testamenti (sicut Summus Pontifex Pius XII in Litteris Encyclicis "Humani Generis" iam

²² Par. 47 (NCWC Pamphlet, p. 22).

deploraverat, cfr. A. A. S. XLII, 576), verum et Novi, etiam quoad dicta et facta Christi Iesu.

Cum autem huiusmodi sententiae et opiniones anxios faciant et Pastores et christifideles, Em.mi Patres, fidei morumque doctrinae tutandae praepositi, omnes, qui de Sacris Libris sive scripto sive verbo agunt, monendos censuerunt ut semper debita cum prudentia ac reverentia tantum argumentum pertractent, et prae oculis semper habeant SS. Patrum doctrinam atque Ecclesiae sensum ac Magisterium, ne fidelium conscientiae perturbentur neve fidei veritates laedantur.

N.B.—Hoc Monitum editur consentientibus etiam Em.mis Patribus Pontificiae Commissionis Biblicae.

Datum Romae, ex Aedibus S. Officii, die 20 iunii 1961.

Sebastianus Masala, *Notarius*

It is important to keep in mind the historical antecedents of this *monitum*, which are related in the foregoing sketch, and not to isolate it from this context. Its first paragraph describes in sober terms the situation: views and opinions are circulating in various regions which call into question the genuine historical and objective truth of Scripture, not only of the OT, but also of the NT, specifically in regard of the words and deeds of Christ.

The document is a *monitum*, a warning, not an instruction or a decree advocating or condemning any specific view. The first and last clauses of its second paragraph clearly express its predominantly pastoral concern, a legitimate concern for the anxiety created among the clergy and faithful by indiscriminate views on Scripture. So important a subject is to be treated with due prudence and reverence and all should keep in mind the teaching of the Fathers, the mind of the Church and its magisterium, lest the faithful be disturbed and truths of faith take harm.

It must be emphasized that such a *monitum* should not be regarded as a condemnation of the so-called "new direction" in biblical studies of which Alonso Schökel wrote. It would be an error to equate modern biblical studies, which are praised in the first clause, with the circulating "views and opinions"; the caricatures and popularizations of the serious study are far more responsible for the pastoral problem than solid exegetical work itself. Nor is the *monitum* an accusation leveled specifically against *exegetes*, much less against a "group of exegetes" (Romeo's phrase), not to mention the professors of the Biblical Institute, with whom the Biblical Commission earlier expressed its solidarity. It is a warning addressed to "all those who deal with the Sacred Books either in writing or in speech."

It would likewise be an error to isolate the expression *germana veritas historica et obiectiva Scripturae Sacrae* and argue that the Holy Office is advocating a fundamentalistic approach to the Bible. In using this expression, it has not said that *germana veritas* is to be identified with fundamental-

istic literalness. The word *germana* ("genuine, proper") is obviously an attempt on the part of the Holy Office to express its recognition of the character of the truth involved in Scripture and to allow for its formulation according to the various literary genres employed by the sacred writers. It is but another way of saying what Cardinal A. Bea, S.J., once wrote: "Sua cuique generi literario est veritas" (*De scripturae sacrae inspiratione* [2nd ed.; Rome, 1935] p. 106, §90). It is but a brief formulation of what Pius XII wrote about the genres in *Divino afflante Spiritu*. The excesses which call such a truth into question are the object of the Holy Office's warning.

The *monitum* also inculcates respect for the teaching of the Fathers, the *sensus ecclesiae* and its magisterium. The intention of the Holy Office is clear. However, it does not intend to negate or qualify what Pius XII stated in *Divino afflante Spiritu* about the fewness of the "texts whose sense has been defined by the authority of the Church," nor of those "about which the teaching of the Holy Fathers is unanimous" (see full text above).

Finally, it is apparent that though the Holy Office warns about the circulating "views and opinions which call into question the genuine historical and objective truth of Scripture," its *monitum* is not to be regarded as a confirmation of Romeo's position. At the end of the text it is made clear that the *monitum* has been issued with the agreement of the Cardinals of the Biblical Commission; the same Commission sided earlier with the Biblical Institute against Romeo. Consequently, there is no reason to look on the *monitum* as an attempt to change the "new direction" in biblical studies. It is a warning to *all* to treat the subject of the Scriptures with the prudence and reverence required and to respect the usual sources of the Church's teaching authority.

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