

CURRENT THEOLOGY

THE STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Leo XIII undoubtedly lives in the memories of most men because of his many pronouncements on social and economic questions (especially the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*). Still, his activity in promoting the intellectual life of the Church has left a permanent mark on the generations after him. His encyclical *Aeterni Patris* was largely responsible for bringing new life into the study of philosophy and theology through a return to St. Thomas. His opening of the Vatican archives to research students, with its complementary encyclical on the study of history, in which he asserts that the Church has nothing to fear from the truth, gave a new impetus to Catholic scholarship. In the field of science he distinguished himself by founding the Vatican observatory. In the field of classical studies he merits praise for his founding of the Appolinare College.

But one who follows the history of the Church for the last fifty years will find that no act of his had more far-reaching effects on the intellectual activity of the Church than the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* issued on Nov. 18, 1893. Notices and articles commemorative of its fiftieth anniversary have already appeared in Catholic periodicals.¹ Other studies will doubtless appear in the near future. All of these studies are excellent. It is not our purpose here to repeat what they have said so well. Rather it is to show that the inspiring document was never meant to be a mere exhortation to an ideal but was intended by Leo and understood by his successors to lay down purposes and norms for Scripture studies binding on all Catholics. Even a brief glance at the encyclical and subsequent acts and pronouncements of Leo and his successors shows this. Hence the outstanding modern Catholic accomplishments in Scripture are more than just a vague result of Leo's letter. They are a consistent and necessary growth from the directions he put down.

¹ Among others we may note the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, IV (1943), 115-19, in which Anthony C. Cotter, S.J., Richard T. Murphy, O.P., and Stephen Hartdegen, O.F.M., respectively discuss the antecedents, the contents, and the effects of the encyclical; the *Clergy Review*, XXIII (1943), 114-20, in which E. F. Sutcliffe, S.J., has a discussion of the historical background and fruits of the encyclical; the *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, XIII (1943), 179-94, in which Donat Poulet, O.M.I., has a further discussion (really a detailed commentary); cf. also John J. Collins, S.J., "Providentissimus Deus," in the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, XLIV (1943), 112-17; and J. Volckaert, S.J., "A Biblical Anniversary: *Providentissimus Deus* and the Revival of Catholic Exegesis," in the *Clergy Monthly*, VII (1943), 129-39.

In the introduction to the encyclical Leo shows how grave a view he took on what he was writing: "For we are moved and even compelled by the solicitude of Our Apostolic office, not only to desire that this excellent source of Catholic revelation should be made accessible to the flock of Jesus Christ with greater security and abundance, but also not to suffer it to be in any way defiled."² Thus Leo reminds us that it is his duty to promote the knowledge of the Scriptures among all the faithful, since the Scriptures are God's own words "transmitted by the sacred writers to the human race."³ Though it is primarily his duty to bring knowledge of God's words to the faithful, and though all the faithful should feel a corresponding duty to cultivate a knowledge of the Scriptures, the task of properly opening the Scriptures to the faithful can only be accomplished by the clergy. Hence it is to the bishops and clergy that the encyclical is principally directed.

OBLIGATIONS OF CLERGY IN SCRIPTURE STUDY

The clergy must be devoted to study of the sacred text first of all because God is its author, and the divine mysteries its subject matter, and thus Scripture is a branch of sacred theology that is "excellent and useful in the highest degree."⁴ Hence, though he praises those who are meritoriously working in this field, he cannot refrain from urgently exhorting others to enter it, and especially those who are in holy orders to "expend ever greater energy and effort in reading, meditating and explaining the Sacred Scriptures, as they should."⁵

In the following section of the letter, after proposing the example of Christ Himself and the apostles in using Sacred Scripture to prove doctrines or in giving moral instructions, he concludes that all, especially students for the priesthood, must realize that, "For those whose duty it is to treat of Catholic doctrine with learned and unlearned alike, there is nowhere to be found . . . a more abundant or ample supply of matter for preaching." And since the priest must preach Christ, he insists that only through the Scriptures can Christ be known, quoting Jerome's "Ignoratio Scripturarum ignoratio Christi est."⁶ He further urges that for illustrations and force in preaching nothing is better than the use of Scripture (for there is a singular spirit and power in the words of Scripture) and he condemns those preaching only "human science and prudence, trusting to their own reasonings" as

² *Enchiridion Biblicum*, n. 67.

⁴ *Loc. cit.*

³ *EB*, n. 66.

⁵ *EB*, n. 68.

⁶ *EB*, n. 71. It is to be noted that St. Jerome says this with regard to the study of Isaias (*Prolog. in Is.*).

producers of "feeble" and "cold" utterances.⁷ He supports the lesson with quotations from the Fathers, who continually repeated that the Christian preachers and teachers must know the Scriptures. For example, he makes his own the words of St. Jerome: "Often read the divine Scriptures; yea, never put aside holy reading out of thy hand; study that which thou thyself must teach. . . . Let the speech of the priest be ever seasoned with what he has read in the Scriptures."⁸

Leo further emphasizes this necessity for the clergy to know the Scriptures in the following paragraphs in which he shows that throughout the history of the Church, from the patristic age on, "all who have been renowned for holiness of life and sacred learning have given deep and constant attention to Holy Scripture."⁹ He recalls also the fact that the Church obliges the priest to read "a considerable portion of the sacred text daily" and he repeats the regulations of Trent for the priestly study and preaching of the Scriptures.¹⁰ Here we might add a further reason which makes it imperative that the priest should know the Scriptures. Leo refers frequently to the dangerous inroads of modern rationalism, and, in a later section, says this: "Should not this, Venerable Brethren, stir up and set on fire the heart of every pastor, so that to this 'so-called knowledge' (I Tim. 6:20) may be opposed the ancient and true science which the Church through the apostles has received from Christ, and that the Holy Scriptures may find the champions that are needed in so momentous a battle?"¹¹ And again in speaking of the Church's duty to defend the Scriptures, he says: "For this purpose it is most desirable that there should be numerous members of the clergy well prepared to carry on the fight also in this field, and to repulse the attacks of the enemy, armed principally with the 'armor of God' which the Apostle recommends (Eph. 6:13-17), but also not untrained with regard to the modern weapons and attacks of the enemy."¹² It is clear, then, that Leo put a twofold obligation squarely on the Catholic clergy, to study the Scriptures to bring their vigor and force into the lives of the faithful, and to know how best to defend them against modern attacks. For without this zealous activity of the clergy no papal plan can succeed.

⁷ *EB*, n. 72; cf. the forceful repetition of these points in the Circular Letter on preaching issued to the hierarchy of Italy by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, under orders from Leo XIII, July 31, 1894. The text is to be found in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, XV (1894), 1044-50.

⁸ *EB*, n. 73.

⁹ *EB*, n. 76.

¹⁰ *EB*, n. 75; the references to Trent are to sess. 5, cap. 1 et 2 de reformatione.

¹¹ *EB*, n. 87.

¹² *EB*, n. 102.

PROGRAM OF SCRIPTURE STUDIES FOR CLERGY: TRAINING OF PROFESSORS

Naturally then, a large part of the encyclical (practically all of nn. 88–117 in *EB*) is devoted primarily to norms for training the clergy in Scriptures. After emphasizing the necessity of preparing to meet the modern attacks of rationalism (for he saw clearly the dangerous trends of his day), he outlines a broad and complete program of Scripture studies. This program would naturally begin in seminaries and Catholic schools. Hence he declares that professors of Sacred Scripture are not to be chosen haphazardly but with great care. They should be men who have had long familiarity with the Bible. This necessitates care in preparing the young men in time (“prospiciendum mature est”) to be sure that properly trained professors are always available. Younger men of good promise should be set apart and given suitable time and opportunity to prepare.¹³

Supposing such preparation, Leo next puts down the necessity of deep learning for the adequate handling of modern questions. This leads him to prescribe that professors of Scripture be conversant with the Oriental languages; and that all candidates who aspire to theological degrees should study such languages. The art of criticism, too, is to be part of the professor’s equipment. Hence chairs of Semitic languages and criticism are to be established in all academic institutions for the training of those who are to teach Scripture and theology.¹⁴ He desires, moreover, that the professor of Scripture should have a good knowledge of the natural sciences and history.¹⁵ But, realizing the breadth of this program, he appeals for the stimulation of specialized Catholic studies in these fields of science so that men well trained can come to the aid of the Church in these matters.¹⁶

THE SEMINARY SCRIPTURE COURSE

Supposing a well-prepared professor, Leo puts down norms for his teaching. We give here but a summary (all too brief) of what he puts down as to aim, content, and method of the Scripture course.

The aim is to enable the future priest to penetrate the meaning of the Scriptures so that he may defend them and use them properly in his work.¹⁷ For this he should receive an orderly and thorough course. The content of the course is next put forward briefly but exactly.¹⁸ An introduction is to be taught, a course which contains, according to Leo’s description, all that is today contained in General and Special Introduction. Exegesis fol-

¹³ *EB*, n. 88.

¹⁴ *EB*, n. 103–4.

¹⁵ *EB*, n. 105.

¹⁶ *EB*, n. 113–16.

¹⁷ *EB*, n. 89–90.

¹⁸ *EB*, n. 89–112.

lows (a "more fruitful" study). Here the future priest learns to use the Scriptures in his works of religion and piety. Detailed exegesis of all the books is impossible, and so the professor must avoid a superficial treatment of everything on the one hand, and, on the other, delaying too long on a given section. The students should see important parts and learn the method of using the sacred text themselves. (The Vulgate is to be the text, corrected, however, with the help of the variant versions.)

After the literal sense is established the professor should discuss the theological import of the text. He warns that the professor here must make due allowance for the peculiar idiom and style of the original, not forgetting that Scripture is inspired and that it contains mysteries. Moreover, it is to be remembered that there are other senses than the literal. Here especially the teaching of the Church and the unanimous consent of the Fathers in matters of faith and morals is to be a positive guide. And where neither of these two norms binds the Catholic interpreter, the *analogia fidei* is to be a guide. Where, however, none of these are in question "a wide field is left" where the exegete is free and can help to bring the judgment of the Church to maturity. The exegete should also apply himself to clarifying the Church's stand on texts whose interpretation is already fixed.

Leo later insists on this freedom of interpretation when he discusses questions of apparent contradiction between the natural sciences and the Scripture. He says interpretations of Scripture are not to be bound to any particular theory of science, and points out that the testimony of the Fathers is based (as was the original Scripture) on the external appearances of things and the consequent popular way of speaking in such matters. So, following Augustine, he is ready to assert that in these matters an accepted understanding of a text may be wrong. He adds wisely that theories of science also change. To the other directions for the exegete he adds the important section on the Church's doctrine of inspiration.¹⁹

Much of this program was not new. Examples of what was being done in the Church even before the encyclical can be found in the decrees of the Second and Third Councils of Baltimore on the study of Scripture in the seminaries of the United States.²⁰

LEO'S SUBSEQUENT PRONOUNCEMENTS

But Leo's desire, as he states in the beginning of his letter, was to give an impulse (*excitare*) to the study of Scripture. It would require too great space to trace here all the advances Scripture studies have made since this

¹⁹ *EB*, n. 109-12.

²⁰ *Concilii Plenarii Balt. III Acta et Decreta*, Tit. V, Cap. II, nn. 167 et 171.

encyclical was issued. Hence, though all of them owe something to Leo's encouragement, I shall restrict myself to those papal acts and pronouncements which can be said to stem by direct line from *Providentissimus Deus*.

That Leo meant the directives of this letter to be seriously translated into action is clear from a statement in his letter *Nostra Erga*²¹ to the Minister General of the Friars Minor. After saying that safety in scriptural studies is to be found in following what the Church desires, he refers to what he has put down in *Providentissimus Deus*, adding, "Praescripta vero et documenta Pontificis Maximi negligere, Catholico homini licet nemini." And he repeats the same warning in his encyclical *Depuis le jour* (Sept. 8, 1899) to the bishops and clergy of France.²²

But Leo returned to the subject again in a most practical way in his Apostolic Letter *Vigilantiae* (October 30, 1902). Referring to *Providentissimus Deus* as a document written in keeping with his apostolic duty to further Scripture studies and to show the Church how to meet the new and sometimes dangerous questions that were arising, he again insists that the directives of *Providentissimus Deus* are to be followed especially by those in holy orders.²³ He remarks that the results of the letter were most gratifying, but urges increased attention to the encyclical since the dangers from without have increased.

Since the objectives to be attained in the study and defense of Scripture are so broad and varied that students working by themselves cannot properly attain them, Leo wishes to have a body of outstanding men whose task it will be both to further and to moderate Scripture studies. The duty of this body is: "omni ope curare et efficere, ut divina eloquia et exquisitiorem illam, quam tempora postulant, tractationem passim apud nostros inveniant, et incolumia sint non modo a quovis errorum afflatu sed etiam ab omni opinionum temeritate."²⁴ He intends that the first task (*primum omnium*) of the Biblical Commission should be to survey the whole modern field of Scripture study, and whatever it finds to be of use to Catholic students "id sine mora assumant communemque in usum scribendo convertant." The Commission is to cultivate also the cognate sciences (such as philology and Oriental studies), since from these sources the attack on Scripture is being waged.²⁵ Secondly, the Commission is to see that the divine authority of the Scriptures is safeguarded according to *Providentissimus Deus* ("quae fusius alias Ipsi revocavimus") and the teaching of the Vatican Council.²⁶ Finally the Commission is to see to it that in inter-

²¹ *EB*, n. 127-28.

²² *EB*, n. 129.

²³ *EB*, n. 130.

²⁴ *EB*, n. 132.

²⁵ *EB*, n. 133.

²⁶ *EB*, n. 134-35.

pretation the authority of the Church and of the Fathers, as well as the analogy of faith, is followed as a rule of solid exegesis, and where there is freedom of discussion they shall see to it that charity and moderation are observed, else true progress in Scripture study would be endangered. They are to encourage the study of these questions, however, so that the Church may maturely judge on them.²⁷

The membership of the Commission is to consist of Cardinals and "claros nonnullos alios ex alia gente, viros, quorum a doctrina sacra, praesertim biblica, est commendatio." Moreover, a special Scripture section, equipped with ancient and modern writings, is to be instituted in the Vatican Library for the use of the Commission.²⁸

He declares that Catholics should give obedience to the Commission.²⁹ In view of the whole document it is clear how seriously Leo intended the legislation of *Providentissimus Deus* to be taken, and how anxious he personally was to reduce it to practice.

PIUS X

Pius X was not long in carrying forward the movement started by Leo. On February 23, 1904, he issued the Apostolic Letter, *Scripturae Sanctae*,³⁰ in which, after stating it to be his duty to promote Scripture studies, especially in view of current dangers to this font of revelation and faith, he refers to the *Providentissimus Deus* and *Vigilantiae* of Leo. He repeats the threefold purpose of the Biblical Commission and asserts that he wishes to follow his predecessor in promoting biblical studies. Leo's desire, he tells us, was to found an institute for higher studies in Scripture to supply Catholic schools with properly trained professors of Scripture. He also has that desire, but since the means are lacking, "interea quantum ratio temporum sinit," he wishes to make provisions for such professors.³¹ Hence he empowers the Biblical Commission (after due examinations) to grant the degrees of *prolyta* and *doctor* in Sacred Scripture. He puts down the general regulations for such examinations, which are to be heard ordinarily by consultants of the Commission.³²

He then exhorts the bishops to profit by this arrangement, by choosing from the clergy those who are apt for such studies and encouraging them to gain those degrees, especially if they are to teach in seminaries.³³ On the 19th of April of the same year a Rescript gave the right to the regular clergy to obtain these degrees.³⁴

²⁷ *EB*, n. 136.

²⁸ *EB*, n. 138-39.

²⁹ *EB*, n. 140.

³⁰ *EB*, n. 142-50.

³¹ *EB*, n. 143.

³² *EB*, n. 144-49.

³³ *EB*, n. 145.

³⁴ *EB*, n. 151.

But Pius' solicitude did not stop at carrying forward Leo's desire to have proper Scripture professors. In his Apostolic Letter *Quoniam in Re Biblica* (March 27, 1906) he makes his own the words of *Providentissimus Deus*: "Prima cura sit, ut in sacris Seminariis, vel Academiis sic omnino tradantur Divinae Litterae, quemadmodum et ipsius gravitas disciplinae et temporum necessitas admonent."³⁵ He then lays down as legislation the course to be taught in seminaries, going into detail as to content and method. He tells the professor to be guided by *Providentissimus Deus* in his teaching.³⁶ He shows how serious this subject is in the eyes of the Church by declaring that no student may be promoted to a higher class or to holy orders without first passing the proper examinations in Scripture.³⁷

Pius returned again to the subject of Scripture in the encyclical *Pascendi* (Sept. 8, 1907), where he condemns the attitude of Modernism towards Scripture. But especially in his *Motu Proprio Praeantia Scripturae Sacrae* (November 18, 1907) did he underline the importance of *Providentissimus Deus*. In it he says that Leo in this encyclical "leges descripsit, quibus Sacrorum Bibliorum studia ratione proba regerentur." And he definitely rules that the decrees of the Biblical Commission, when approved by the Holy See, bind all Catholics to submission.³⁸

On May 7, 1908, Pius X was finally able to take the step which Leo and he himself had both desired to take. By the Apostolic Letter *Vinea Electa*,³⁹ he founded the Biblical Institute in Rome, according to his desire of "following in the footsteps of his predecessors," and bringing the fruit of "the choice vine of Holy Scripture to pastors and faithful." Especially was it his desire to give such help as he could to those Catholics who would study Scripture and to provide lest they should be forced to get their knowledge from heterodox sources.⁴⁰ He outlines the purpose and, in a general way, the curriculum of the new Institute, and the duties of the faculty to teach, write, and lecture publicly. He makes provisions for a fully equipped library. The Institute is to be directly dependent upon him, and governed according to the principles and decrees set down by the Holy See and the Biblical Commission.⁴¹ An appended document gives more detailed rules for the make-up and program of the Institute. The *Praeses* is to be appointed by the Holy See from three candidates proposed by the General of the Society of Jesus. The ordinary professors are to be appointed by the same General with the approval of the Holy See.⁴²

³⁵ *EB*, n. 155; the whole document runs through nn. 155-73.

³⁶ *EB*, n. 168.

³⁷ *EB*, n. 170.

³⁸ *EB*, n. 276-84; the quotation is from n. 276.

³⁹ *EB*, n. 293-331.

⁴¹ *EB*, n. 295-306.

⁴⁰ *EB*, n. 293-294.

⁴² *EB*, n. 307-31.

A further example of the far-reaching effects of *Providentissimus Deus* is found in the oath prescribed by Pius X (June 29, 1910) to candidates for the doctorate, binding them to observe the prescriptions of *Providentissimus Deus* and *Vinea Electa*.⁴³

BENEDICT XV

Benedict XV, in the midst of the first world war (August 15, 1916), issued the Apostolic Letter *Cum Biblia Sacra*, clarifying the spheres of activity of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, the Pontifical Council for revising the Vulgate, and the Biblical Commission.⁴⁴ In this letter he recalls that Leo in *Providentissimus Deus* put down definite principles for defending the Scriptures against modern rationalism ("quibus parere omnes oporteret") and that the same Pontiff instituted the Biblical Commission which has labored with good results.⁴⁵ He recalls also that Pius X continued the work for Scripture by erecting the Commission for revising the Vulgate, and founded the Biblical Institute, amply providing it with every means for its work and entrusting it to the members of the Society of Jesus, "praeclare de disciplinis sacris deque clericorum institutione meritis . . . qui Pontificis bonorumque omnium ita expectationem explevere, ut jam, haud longo intervallo [seven years], complures eosque peritissimos in Ecclesiae campum horum studiorum cultores dimiserint."⁴⁶ He gives the Biblical Institute the right with certain restrictions to grant the decrees of baccalaureate, and *prolytatus*, which formerly only the Biblical Commission could grant.

In his encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus* (September 15, 1920), commemorating the fifteen-hundredth anniversary of the death of St. Jerome, Benedict XV draws upon and develops and defends the teaching of *Providentissimus Deus* in treating of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture⁴⁷ and the authority of the Church as interpreter of Scripture.⁴⁸ In this letter also he enjoins upon the bishops the duty of seeing to it that their clergy are well trained in the Scriptures, and warns them: ". . . sciant igitur [clerici] sibi nec studium Scripturarum esse negligendum, nec illud alia via ingrediendum ac Leo XIII Encyclicis Litteris *Providentissimus Deus* data opera praescrispsit." And he continues that the best way in which this can be fulfilled is by attendance (at least of selected candidates destined to work in Scripture fields) at the Biblical Institute, "quod secundum Leonis XIII optata, proximus decessor noster condidit permagna quidem cum Ecclesiae sanctae utilitate,

⁴³ *EB*, n. 348-49.

⁴⁵ *EB*, n. 435.

⁴⁴ *EB*, n. 435-49.

⁴⁶ *EB*, n. 437.

⁴⁷ *EB*, n. 465; in n. 457 Benedict asserts that he is but following in the footsteps of Leo XIII and Pius X.

⁴⁸ *EB*, n. 487.

ut est horum decem annorum experimento testatissimum."⁴⁹ And later in the Letter, discussing the purpose of Scripture reading and study (along with principles and methods of exegesis), he draws on Leo again.⁵⁰ In the conclusion of his Letter Benedict lays down the rule that all must abide by those principles "quae litteris encyclicis *Providentissimus Deus* et hisce Nostris praescripta sunt."⁵¹

PIUS XI

Of Pius XI we need say little. His history is recent. In his *Motu Proprio*, *Bibliorum Scientiam* (April 27, 1924),⁵² he continues the solicitous care of his predecessors for the training of professors of Scripture. Here he decreed that biblical degrees enjoy the same canonical rights as other ecclesiastical degrees. A biblical degree (at least baccalaureate) is required of those who hold canonical offices which require them to explain the Scriptures. No one is to teach Scripture in a seminary who has not made special studies in Scripture and regularly obtained his degree from the Biblical Commission or the Biblical Institute. Further, the Pope desires that heads of religious institutes send at least some of those who show themselves "ad divinarum litterarum studia aptiores" to the Biblical Institute for studies, and the bishops are likewise asked each to send one or more of their clergy to the same Institute. He personally founds two complete scholarships to help two of such priests who may need the help.

Again on May 3, 1934, in his letter on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Biblical Institute, he expressed joy, "concepta enim spes laetissimum fructuum, qui in ipso Athenaei exordio profecturi inde expectabantur, Apostolicam hanc sedem Ecclesiamque universam, minime fefellit," either in the number of students or the "copiosa ac mirifica librorum scriptorumque seges ex Instituto orta . . .," which he praised for their genuine and solid doctrine, and added, "Optimo ergo jure dicere possumus Nostrum istud ac dilectum Institutum Biblicum . . . feliciter respondisse Sanctae hujus Sedis propositis ac votis, et de religione, deque scientiarum profectu egregie meruisse."⁵³

The legislation of Pius XI which followed his *Constitutio Apostolica, Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, has further established the place of Scripture in the theological faculties that Leo XIII and Pius X said that it should have.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *EB*, n. 494.

⁵¹ *EB*, n. 508.

⁵⁰ *EB*, n. 495-500, explicitly in 499.

⁵² *EB*, n. 518-25.

⁵³ *Biblica*, XV (1934), 562-63.

⁵⁴ *AAS*, XXIII (1931), 241-46, with the added norms laid down on pp. 247-84, both for the Biblical Institute (tit. III, sect. IV, p. 272) and for special courses leading to theological degrees (Appendix, I, p. 281).

Several examples will now suffice to show the practical encouragement Pius XI gave Scripture studies. He followed with eagerness the work of the Jerusalem house of the Roman Institute, and personally encouraged the excavations undertaken at Teleitat Ghassul.⁵⁵ When Cardinal Bisleti, Prefect of the Congregation for Seminaries and University Studies, died, Pius XI reserved that office for himself, and in that office presided (in Sept., 1937) at a session of the *Settimana Biblica* held for the Scripture professors of Italy under the auspices of the Biblical Institute, where he spoke fervent words of encouragement.⁵⁶

And again he presided at the doctorate examination of a student of the Biblical Institute on May 19, 1938. On that occasion, he said, "Quamvis non semel gratum Nostrum animum erga Nostrum Institutum Biblicum ostenderimus, gratissimum est in praesentiarum id iterum praestare. . . ." He added that he was glad to have the opportunity to state again, "quo in pretio habemus Institutum illud in quo pretiosissima studia excoluntur; 'Biblicum' scilicet, quo uno nomine omnia dicuntur." And he expressed the hope "ex animo" that zeal for theological and scriptural studies would not slacken. He warned that much remained to be done. He summed up his feelings on this matter, characteristically, with the words, "Nil actum, si quid agendum." He continued on this strain making a plea for more Doctors in Sacred Scripture, and said there should be at least one Doctor of Sacred Scripture in every diocese of the Church.⁵⁷

PIUS XII

And here it was my intention to end this sketch of some of the direct effects of *Providentissimus Deus*, which are clearly discernible in papal pronouncements that followed it. But Pius XII has already made it clear that even amidst the clash of arms—in fact as an antidote to war—the Scriptures must be ever more seriously cultivated and deeply understood.

On the 20th of August, 1941, the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued a letter⁵⁸ to the hierarchy of Italy in response to an anonymous letter that had been addressed to the members of the same hierarchy and to the Holy

⁵⁵ For this fact, cf. A. Bea, "Pontificii Instituti Biblici prima quinque lustra," *Biblica*, XV (1934), 170-71. This article (pp. 121-72) gives a full history of the interest of the Holy See in the Institute from its beginnings up to 1934. For the sake of the chronological record we should insert here the spirited defense of the Old Testament which Pius XI included in his encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, AAS, XXIV (1937), 150-52.

⁵⁶ Reported in *Verbum Domini*, XVII (1937), 367-78.

⁵⁷ Reported in *Verbum Domini*, XVIII (1938), 187-90.

⁵⁸ The text of this letter is found in English in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, IV (1942), 63-67; and in the original Italian in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, LXXII (1943), 352-56.

See. This letter was an attack on modern Catholic Scripture scholars for not accepting as final the Vulgate text and, by meditating on this text ("una certa esegesi detta di meditazione"), being content with the result. The reply insists on the labor and care that must be expended in establishing the literal sense of the original text, and underlines the obvious truth that the Vulgate, being a translation, cannot be superior to the original. It further points out that the decree of Trent with regard to the Vulgate did not wish to preclude scholarly study which would correct the Vulgate, for it called for a revision of that text; and the same Council further revealed its mind by calling for the publication of critical editions of the Septuagint, as well as of the original Hebrew and Greek. This letter vigorously rejects the attack on Oriental studies made by the anonymous author and asserts their necessity for the right understanding of the sacred text. And it is again mainly to the encyclicals of Leo and Benedict on the study of Scripture that the Commission turns in its refutations.

And again on the 22nd of August, 1943, the same Commission published a Response⁵⁹ with regard to the use of versions made from the original texts. Ordinaries may recommend the use of such to the faithful if the translations are approved by men outstanding in biblical and theological knowledge. Though selections of the Gospels and Epistles read in the vernacular to the people at Mass must be translated from the Vulgate, this Response seems to allow quoting translations from the originals, and even reading such translations after the version from the Vulgate is read, as an aid in explaining the text to the people.

Finally, on the feast of St. Jerome, September 30, 1943, Pius issued a new encyclical to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Leo's great document. Since but a summary⁶⁰ of this encyclical has reached us to date we must be satisfied with merely pointing out what Pius XII has underlined in the matter of the study of Scripture. In the first part of the encyclical Pius reviews the accomplishments of the past fifty years. Then he proceeds to indicate the task for the future. He insists, as Leo had already insisted, that the modern interpreter must make use of critical texts in the original language, and himself make use of modern methods of textual criticism. He points out that this procedure in no wise contradicts Trent but is in keeping with the mind and spirit of that Council.

And again he insists on the necessity of understanding the literal sense before proceeding with any further study of the text, especially with regard

⁵⁹ Cf. *The Clergy Review*, XXIII (1943), 524 f.

⁶⁰ This summary of the encyclical, *Divino Aflante Spiritu*, is taken from the N.C.W.C. News Service release of October 10, 1943.

to the typical sense. And here he warns that the typical sense can only be known from revelation. This section also warns against an unwise use of the "accommodated" sense which might seem to make such an interpretation the sense intended by the sacred authors. Furthermore, he recalls that, though the consensus of the Fathers and the judgment of the Church can fix the meaning of a text, relatively few texts are so fixed.⁷ In discussing the meaning of any text the manner of thought and expression of the ancient Orient must always be a guide to those who would reach the real meaning of the text.

Speaking of the many questions of a more difficult nature, Pius exhorts the biblical student to attempt to solve them; and he bespeaks the respect of all the faithful for such solutions, especially where their novelty might frighten some, as long as such solutions are not contrary to Catholic principles. Naturally Pius puts upon Scripture scholars and priests the duty of bringing the results of modern study to the faithful by voice and pen, a worthy apostolate.

The writer finds that by following the papal documents he was led naturally to emphasize by repetition the manner in which the Holy See has always been solicitous for the preparation of professors and priests skilled in the scriptural sciences, and for giving clear and encouraging directives for their teaching and writing. One wonders after a study of the documents whether we have yet completely caught the spirit of these documents. Surely a sincere carrying out of the Church's legislation will lead both to a multiplication of outstanding Scripture scholars among the Catholic clergy, and to an increased fervor of Catholic life among the laity.

More might have been said in this discussion of the work of three religious families: of the Dominicans and their unsurpassed work at the *École Biblique* in Jerusalem, of the Franciscan school in the same city, of the Benedictines and their monumental task of revising the Vulgate. Space and the plan adopted at the beginning of this article precluded it. It is hoped that all three of these subjects will receive their meed of notice in connection with this anniversary.

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