

rule (the 'hagu'), e.g. in the 'Manual of Discipline', perhaps, too, in the Damascus Document. Finally, the 'common blessing' consisted in praising God by the singing or recital of Psalms and Canticles from Scripture, together with canticles of their own, such as the Thanksgiving Canticles.

G. GRAYSTONE, S.M.

Mount St Mary's, Milltown, Dublin.

## PRACTICAL SCRIPTURE INTERPRETATION—EXTRACTS FROM A 'MEDITATION'

**I** MUST ask excuse for the somewhat personal and autobiographical nature of what I here put forth ; but in my title there appears the word 'practical', and practice one may presume is often based upon personal experience.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century I read for the Cambridge Theological Tripos, with great reverence for my professors, but a definitely catholic trend of mind. In regard of Scripture teaching the sound tradition of Lightfoot and Westcott was still powerful in my university, and that tradition was nobly carried on by the admirable H. B. Swete, then principal lecturer on the New Testament. Old Testament teaching was dominated (at least in my eyes) by the masterly lectures of a scion of the distinguished Ryle family (afterwards, I think, the second Ryle Anglican Bishop of Liverpool) whose views were moderate. On the other hand more subversive theories were much in evidence, and in Old Testament exegesis the Wellhausen reconstruction of Jewish religious history was fast gaining ground. Towards the close of my triennium—largely owing to the influence of a learned and devout 'scholastically-minded' clergyman, I revolted seriously against the anti-supernaturalist tone (the tone rather than the critical conclusion) of much Scriptural exegesis that was not only in the air, but more and more was being proclaimed in the lecture rooms. At the same time—as I have just hinted—I felt deeply the impossibility of setting aside the evidence of facts which had been brought into light by historical research and literary criticism.

It was during a year at an Anglican Theological College (Ely) that I settled down into an attitude towards the Sacred Scriptures which has lasted, which is, I hope, fundamentally catholic, and which is my excuse for putting forth the present reflexions:—a great devotion to

the Written Word of God—as such in the fullest sense—combined with a cheerful conviction (if I may so say) that all honest modern exploration and research must be generously pursued, and all assured results of the same assimilated. But by this time I was furnished with two root principles which have survived into my catholic life. The first of these occurred to me one day during my last tripos year when I was reading a summary of the Wellhausen theory of the origin of Jewish religion (I cannot remember where, but I half think the words were Wellhausen's own). 'Basically', I said to myself, 'this is a brilliant effort of imagination, a saga: the imaginative reconstruction of Jewish religious history *on the assumption that miraculous intervention does not occur*', and I went on, with the happy self-confidence of youth (though in this case not, I hope, wrongly) to infer that the same was true of a vast amount of modern writing on Old Testament history and that it involved a monstrous begging of the question. The other principle was arrived at by what might be called 'devotional' study of the New Testament while at Ely; viz. that the clue to all interpretation of Scripture was to be found in *the treatment of the Old Testament by the writers of the New*, in regard of which only the most sparing resort should be had to 'Jewish ideas of the day' and so forth.

I returned to Cambridge four years later in order to read up the 'Roman Question', but while there I naturally made and renewed many contacts and I had many long talks with an orientalist (then a Jew in religion as well as in race, but later an Anglican clergyman) and though he and I had much in common and I think I learnt a good deal from him, reaction away from a statement of his gave me a new light. 'I do not know how it is', he said, 'but it seems to me that actual contact with oriental life'—I think he included archæological research—'seems to have a fatal effect on a man's Biblical scholarship. 'So much the worse for ordinary Biblical criticism', was my inference; 'it is at home only in the study and the lecture room; it is in fact what Carlyle used to call dry-as-dust.' This notion took its place in my mind side by side with my earlier labelling of the Wellhausen theory as above.

I have now nearly finished with the autobiographical matter of my reflexions, my excuse for which is twofold. I am no scientific theologian or exegete and so am driven to say what I have to say with diffidence; and my objective at the moment is realism: the practical problem which is presented to every devout Scriptural student by the pressure exercised on him from all sides by the findings of present day historical research—pressure which often tends to confuse and disturb devout meditation. But I am now able to put down briefly certain solutions and easements which I have found most helpful to myself and seem to me entirely in accord with Catholic theology and official pronouncements of Ecclesiastical Authority.

'God is the Author of Holy Scripture'—at every point this official definition of the church must be our guide and must underlie all partial suggestions and explanations, but of course, the word 'author' must be taken in the wide sense given to it by theologians. Nothing has more helped to clear my mind on the whole question of Scripture interpretation than the teaching of St Thomas in the *Summa* and elsewhere, where the Angelic Doctor first defines the 'literal' sense of Holy Scripture and then places his definition in connexion with the different 'senses' which are commonly, and indeed must be, assigned to the inspired word. The 'literal' sense, says the Saint, is the sense principally intended by the author of a book, and as God is the Author of Holy Scripture, the 'literal' sense of the Inspired Book is the sense principally intended by the Holy Spirit. And he goes on to say that as God embraces and comprehends all things together in His mind, therefore even the 'literal' sense of inspired writing contains many meanings. Thus the literal meaning of Holy Scripture according to St Thomas is not limited to what the human writer had immediately in his mind, or to the first and most obvious meaning which can be given to his words—however much this chronologically first meaning was most intended by the Spirit of God and was perhaps entirely sufficient for the time. It certainly seems to me extraordinary that any Catholic commentator should find difficulty in allowing that the chief meaning of the prophecy of *Isaiah* vii, 14, is the Virgin Birth of our Lord and the chief reference of the 'Suffering Servant' passages in the same prophetic book is to the events of the original Holy Week, seeing that both passages are so applied in the New Testament and that the discovery of a definitive chronologically first meaning is still a worry to many exegetes.

I would, however, emphasize that I speak here of Catholic commentators writing for Catholics, since it is in my view important always to bear in mind that we cannot in controversy or discussion with non-Catholics adduce as conclusive proof of Catholic doctrine passages in the Bible which can be reasonably interpreted in non-supernatural fashion, even though we ourselves are convinced that such interpretation does no justice to the full meaning of the words; words to which there may belong a hierarchy of meanings emanating from the Divine Author. Possible fantasies of devout commentators are another matter, and in this connexion I would like to say that it is not my intention to deny that there is to be found in standard Catholic ascetic and mystical authors and even in the writings of saints interpretations or applications of the inspired text which can scarcely be said to be contained in the words themselves. Does St Gregory the Great, for instance, even intend that all the rich and graceful riot of his mystical comments and exhortations should be regarded as more than teaching of his own which he likes to express in the words of the inspired text, and in fact, had been suggested

to him by it? Even here, however, we have perhaps to remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit may have foreseen and allowed for—and so far intended—many of the interpretations and applications of saints and doctors.

Through my Catholic life, again, I have been supported and aided by applying generously for my own benefit the principle enunciated in Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* as to the inspired writers having adopted in regard of secular matters (e.g. physical science) language used to express notions current in their own day; and I think I half-unconsciously extended this principle to that consideration of literary forms and oriental mentality which is urged in the present Holy Father's *Divino Afflante*. I have at the same time never found serious difficulty in understanding the caution of some pronouncements of the Biblical Commission—the meaning and significance of which, moreover, has sometimes I think been misconstrued and unduly extended by some good Catholics who were justly apprehensive of the danger of the identification of Catholic theology with 'fundamentalism'.

I cannot refrain from saying here how utterly mistaken and entirely deplorable I regard a tone of depreciatory patronage which is sometimes adopted by exegetes when dealing with these questions of the orientalism and so forth of the inspired writings. The intention of Holy Scripture is always to teach religion: and the ancient books were written originally for the instruction and edification of the contemporaries of the human authors of the inspired books, and to me at any rate it has always seemed that there is even a kind of impropriety in supposing that mere scientific or historical facts should have been supernaturally communicated to the inspired writers when these facts have no bearing upon things spiritual. Instead of this, we Catholics have been placed in a Society which is divinely guided as to interpretation of the Sacred Text. That Spirit of God which inspired the sacred writers dwells ever in the church. We can go forward with courage and confidence. It follows from this that Catholic scientific exegesis and research can and should be first-rate in the order of such study and research, even if Catholic scholars have normally to walk more gravely and more often to suspend judgement than do such others as are not under any obligation to look all round the matter in hand and consider all possible implications of questions that may arise. But this, surely, involves no question whatsoever of suppression or distortion where assured facts are concerned. I hope I am not presumptuous if I say that I have watched with much joy how during the past thirty or forty years Catholic scriptural scholarship has been catching up non-Catholic scholarship; while at the same time I nourish the strongest possible conviction that, for us children of the church, textual, historical and literary criticism can never be anything more than introductory (albeit valuable introduction) to

the real study of the Written Word, the true essence of which study is the reverent endeavour to ascertain precisely what the Divine Voice has said and is saying to us. Needless to say, however, even critical research designed to ascertain the correct text of the inspired books is of the highest possible value, as also—perhaps even more—is critical establishment of the species of literature which the inspired writers are employing, and careful investigation into the extent to which the ancient conception of historical narrative differed from that which is now in vogue—a matter upon which perhaps a good deal more has, by qualified investigators, yet to be said.

I would repeat and slightly enlarge upon the opening sentence of this article—such as it is. I have no claim to be considered either a trained theologian or a scientific exegete; and I want everything that I have said to be corrected by such if need be. I have thought, however, that there might be some, even readers of *SCRIPTURE* (a periodical for which I am deeply grateful) who would be interested to some small extent in learning how an amateur student of the Written Word, who has felt difficulties, has to his own satisfaction resolved the bulk of them. The great Bishop of Hippo felt many difficulties and in various of his writings—e.g. in his book on the Harmonization of the Gospels, in *De Civitate Dei* and in *de Genesi ad Litteram*—outlined adequately perhaps for ever—so to me it seems—the principles upon which the problems must be solved. St Thomas seems to have in the main followed and relied upon St Augustine. It is of course true that St Augustine's difficulties do not always coincide precisely with our difficulties, and that some of his solutions are in detail too much coloured by the mentality of his age to be entirely acceptable to us of the twentieth century; but this is a subsidiary question merely.

Perhaps I may emphasize here that my rather discursive paragraphs represent only a selection and compression of what I have written elsewhere—perhaps never to be polished and published.

SENEX.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*How do we know that Quirinius was consul in 742 A.U.C. (12 B.C.)?*

We know it because his name occurs in that year in the consular list. By comparing together a number of imperfect lists which have come down to us, we have now got a complete and reliable list from about 250 B.C. to the end of the Roman Empire. It is accepted by all scholars, and there can be no reasonable doubt about the date of Quirinius's consulship.