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OUR ALLEGED DEBT TO ROME FOR THE BIBLE

I

ROME DID NOT PRODUCE THE SCRIPTURES

IT is Rome's claim that she did. The Church, it is insisted, produced, composed them—under Divine inspiration, of course. The Church was in being well-nigh a quarter of a century before a line of the New Testament (that portion of the Bible which matters) was written. "The Bible is the child of the Church." To the Church—*i.e.* to the Roman Church, which alone is the true church—belongs therefore absolute control and authority as to the authenticating or the interpreting or the distributing of the Scriptures.

Well, first of all, how is Rome, in keeping with her own axioms, going to prove that she is the true Church, or, for that matter, that there is at all such an entity as a Church, true or false? From the Scriptures, will she say? But it is her axiom that to get the sense and meaning of Scripture we need, and must go to, the true Church, which is the very thing we are out to find and identify! Furthermore, an honest and unfettered historical examination readily convinces us that Romanism, as the world eventually came to know it, is no more identical with Apostolic Christianity than the ivy is concorporate with the noble oak which it has tended to overgrow and smother. But even when we hold in view as the Church the entire Christian community of those earliest days—the whole, as distinct from the part with which alone Rome is here and in general concerned when she speaks of "the Church," viz. the ministerial part—even then, it quite plainly emerges that it was not "the Church" that produced Holy Writ.

From its own very outset the Christian Church was nurtured upon a Bible—the *Old Testament*. The O.T. was the Bible so constantly appealed to and quoted by our Lord and Saviour. The O.T. Books were "the Holy Scriptures" which, along

with the single but significant addition of "faith in Christ Jesus", were extolled by the Apostle Paul as being "able to make wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. iii. 15). Respecting them it was that the Apostle Peter asserted that prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. i. 21). And the relation of the Christian Church to the N.T., as and when it came, is exactly parallel to that of the Jewish Church to the O.T.

As for the *New Testament Word*, it is quite true that the Christian Church existed before *it* took on its written form. But anterior to both its written form and the Church there came the *spoken* New Covenant Word, communicated through Christ and His Spirit-taught Apostles after Him. That Word of God, proclaimed and brought home by the Holy Ghost, accepted by one hearer after another, created the Church: the Church was simply the body of those that believed in that Word. As to that, the Nicene Creed, by the way, can testify: which is it—Scripture or Church—that gets first place there, as to order of mention, and as to date of insertion as well?

It is not that we would stickle imperatively, as Romanist and Unitarian sometimes represent, for paper or binding or characters or ink. If that original spoken N.T. word had come to be permanently made available to mankind by any other method—say, by voices from the skies, or by the flashing of ideas upon each or some one particular mind—with a correctness Divinely attested, it would have, as God's Revelation, precisely the same claim on our homage as it has now in its written form.

But to proceed. Suppose some savant or reformer were to deliver a course of lectures, and a society sprang into being for the purpose of propagating their teaching, and, twenty or thirty years later, published them in book form, could it be properly said that they were the offspring of the society?

Moreover, the motives that prompted the primary penning of some at least of the portions should be looked at. Take 2 Corinthians: therein Paul is obliged to assert, and that vehemently, his Apostolic status: it is self-evident that he has to breast the tide of a strongly hostile opinion throughout the Church; yet, forsooth, the Church it was that produced that Epistle!

II

ROME DID NOT DIFFERENTIATE THE SCRIPTURES

The need soon made itself felt for securing correctness as regards the list of books Divinely inspired and intended for men's spiritual guidance. Now if Rome was consistently emphatic in preferring the foregoing claim, of being producer, she would have to be rather chary as to this. To pronounce that only such and such writings ever had the Divine imprimatur, and therefore were to be accepted by and in the Church, would amount to acknowledging that those Scriptures had their Divine sanction and origin already, prior to and independent of any Church's motion. Consequently we meet with less immodest statements, also, than those given above, such as that of the Vatican Council as to the canonical books: "Written as they were under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, they have God as their author, and, as such, have been handed over to the [Roman] Church."

Let us take first the New Testament, after the Apostles (the primal authorisers as they must have been of each separate book as it appeared) had passed away. Alongside of those which we all now account canonical books, there were several other compositions to which some were disposed to assign a place, whilst on the other hand some of the less prominent of the books now accounted canonical were not accorded a universal recognition for long. And years, generations, aye centuries, passed before a precise and definite adjudication of the matter, of any authoritative nature, was made. What took place was a more or less imperceptible trend towards unanimous acceptance and inclusion of *this* book, and unanimous disregard and exclusion of *that*, among the general aggregate mass of the Church's widely scattered members. Such turned out to be the Divine Spirit's sovereign mode of appointment. The Canon (as it is called) eventually adopted was, as it has been expressed, "not an authorised collection of books but a collection of authorised books."

This is the account of the matter given by the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*; "The Canon of the New Testament, like that of the Old, is the result of a development, of a process . . . retarded by certain obscurities and natural hesitations, which did not reach its final term until the dogmatic definition of the

Tridentine Council." That is, not till A.D. 1547! We naturally ask, What kept the infallible guide at Rome silent all the while, throughout this protracted period of diversity of judgment? The present R.C. Bishop Graham, in Scotland, in a pugnacious book published under the aegis of an Archbishop and a Lord Abbot, and entitled, *Where We Got Our Bible: Our Debt to the Catholic Church*, gives a feeling description of the situation of the Christians in the Diocletian persecution when on pain of death they were ordered to surrender their sacred books; and his words regarding these plain ordinary Christians are: "It was a most perplexing and harrowing question they had to decide—what really was sacred Scripture?" They might, he says, condemn themselves to the stake for what was, unknown to them, an uncanonical book. And yet the indispensable oracle on the Tiber kept dumb! We are often told that there were then no Protestants, but these all might just as well have been, for all the guidance pontifical they got.

The great Athanasius (365) seems to have been the first to set forth a list precisely identical with the present agreed N.T. Canon; then Epiphanius (370) did the same. Following them, Cyril of Jerusalem, Amphilochus, and Gregory Nazianzus published lists in agreement, excepting the Book of Revelation.

Meanwhile at Rome, and in the West generally, a list which omitted Hebrews, James, and 2 Peter obtained, according to the *Catholic Encyclopædia*, and "perhaps" canonical standing, on the other hand, was enjoyed there by the spurious Apocalypse of Peter and the "Shepherd" of Hermas. This in the very abode of infallibility! The present N.T. list did indeed receive sanction at a local synod in Rome held by Bishop Damasus ultimately in 382, in co-operation with the great scholar Jerome. Nevertheless, African councils, held repeatedly, from 393 to 419, kept up the discussion of the subject, even though the oracle (as now understood) had already spoken. Bishop Graham blandly represents these as dutifully sending their officious findings to the Pope for confirmation, the fact being that they had the simple courtesy to intimate their conclusions on the subject to the rest of the Western Church authorities, of whom the bishop of the capital city was the foremost; and the precise terms of their resolutions, which we have, speak for themselves: "Let it be notified to our brother and co-priest Boniface and to the Bishops of that region."

In the case of the *Old Testament*, Rome's list or Canon differs from ours, inasmuch as she superadds the books commonly known as Apocrypha, not merely as a secondary accompaniment but as occupying an equal place with the canonical books. But it is quite needless, for our purpose of the moment, to dilate upon the variety of reasons which impel us to assign the two to different categories. The special point is while, even down through the pre-Reformation era, a continuous succession of the most learned mediaeval teachers and theologians, following Jerome, maintained a similar distinction with us between Canonical and Apocryphal, the Papal see was never known to make any serious intervention to resolve the thorny problem, one way, or the other, prior to the Council of Trent in 1547, or at the earliest, in a less definite fashion, that of Florence, 1439. What renders such a long inaction all the more amazing is that any disenthroning of the Apocrypha makes our present-day Bishop Graham "shudder," as being a default calculated to "incur the anathema" pronounced through the Apostle upon those who take away from the words of life.¹

It was the Church Catholic—not the Roman Church—which, informally and unofficially was Divinely used, under a genuine inspiration, to establish the Canon of Scripture. We can cordially endorse that utterance of Augustine, so frequently brandished: "I would not believe the Gospel unless the authority of the Catholic Church moved me thereto." He is confuting the Manichaeans who taught an amalgam of Christianity and Zoroastrianism. They preferred to give him a downright demonstration of their doctrine on its internal evidence; he replies that they are unable to satisfy a more immediate requirement, to adduce the immemorial external evidence for it which the orthodox Christian can advance for the genuine Gospel. He held it to be an all-important credential to Scripture as embodying the Gospel that it came down to him and his compeers through the historic Christian Society as that Society's rule of faith, that it stood attested by the unbroken evidence of the universal Church from the beginning. We have repeated assertions of his to the effect that the tests of canonicity were Apostolic origin and acceptance by the bulk of the churches, with no reference whatever to Papal adjudication.² "Authority" in its primary sense signifies weight assigned to opinion (or

¹ p. 52.

² "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers," ii, 538; iv, 180, 343.

example) of seemingly competent judges (or reporters) in any matter; the sense of power or dictation is secondary. Likewise, to be "moved" is to be induced, *com-movere*, not to be authorised or licensed. Augustine, also, in his time opposed local Church appeals to Rome.

III

ROME DID NOT CONSERVE THE SCRIPTURES

In so far as we are beholden to any Church, unofficially, for the conserving of the Scriptures, it would be to the Eastern, certainly not to the Roman. Take the oldest extant MSS copies of the original Greek (or Hebrew), Rome did literally nothing in the preservation of these. They remained in the East till the capture of Constantinople by the Turks, whence Eastern refugees carried them to Western Europe, where they contributed to the bringing about or the furthering of the Renaissance, the precursor of the Reformation. The famous Codex Vaticanus did not find its harbourage in the Vatican till after 1475. Yea, the original texts, after they became available, were disparaged by Roman officialdom. When the Complutensian Polyglot Bible was published in 1522, with the Latin flanked on either side by the Hebrew and Greek, the Cardinal and his co-adjutors who edited it compared the collocation to that of Christ between the two thieves!

It might well be supposed that such official unconcern for the original texts would be sure to spell a concentrated care bestowed on the Latin form, to which, even if as a product of private Christian zeal, those originals had from so early a date given place. On the contrary, when Jerome tackled his Latin Vulgate version, about 383, he found himself faced with a welter of corrupt copies which almost drove him to despair. His venture was no case at all of a stitch in time to save nine. In handling the O.T. portion, too, he was immensely relieved in his difficulties by the aid afforded to him by a compilation drawn up, a hundred and fifty years before, by a heretic Eastern scholar, the famous Origen.

How, again, did Jerome's Vulgate version itself subsequently fare, as regards the preservation of its textual purity? We are treated to at least implications nowadays that godly monks saw to its perpetuation and propagation with jealous care.

But the hard fact remains that "even by the middle of the sixth century the text of Jerome's version had become corrupted"; "a style of text very far removed from the original purity emerged in the course of centuries," editions continued to be "the undertakings of private individuals, and neither Church nor pope had given to any one the full sanction of their authority." We quote Hasting's *Dictionary of the Bible*. Shame forced the Council of Trent to make provision for a standard text. The ludicrous episode of the Sixtine and Clementine Bibles affords the high-water mark of authoritative Papal control of the Scripture text. And not till this twentieth century had dawned was a Vatican commission at last entrusted with the task of revision of the Vulgate.

A stern and efficient turnkey of Holy Scripture the Roman Church has certainly proved herself to be, since the later Middle Ages, but she cannot claim to have ever been its conservator.

IV

ROME HAS NOT INTERPRETED THE BIBLE

The claim she makes is not that she is always ready officially to do her share alongside other Christian communities, under God's guidance, in that holy task. This we would rejoice at exceedingly. Nay; she asserts that, in the words of the Council of Trent, to her "it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures"—to her "alone," according to the more modern "Profession of Faith prescribed for converts upon their reception into the Church." Were they not Divinely "handed over" to her, and did not she "give" them to us? We have seen ample reason to say No to that challenge, but even supposing we had to answer Yes, we should ask in return if the postman who delivers to us a letter¹ has the sole right to decide the meaning of its contents, as well as authority to embellish them from alleged additional knowledge possessed by him. Equally, though it is insisted on that the (Roman) Church occupies a position tantamount to that of witnesses to a will, we must point out that no court would concede to these the sole right to interpret it, nor adjudge them entitled to adduce alleged verbal communications of the testator which

¹ Had the most-excellent Theophilus or Philemon or Gains to wait for some functionary to interpret to them the Scriptures addressed to them?

had not been embodied in the written document; and the same may be said when the sophism takes the form of a contention that their "true church" is the Lord's Bride and executive.

The Jewish priests and scribes in Christ's day were as much entitled to claim that their church had been anterior to the then Scriptures (the O.T.), and had "given" them to the receivers, and that therefore *they* had sole control over their interpretation; and, assuming that such a pretension on their part were valid, our Lord would stand condemned for all time for having dared to appeal to those writings, and that against those very church authorities themselves!

The Church of Rome makes a further claim. She has forsooth been Divinely endowed also with a special knowledge and inspiration for the discharge of her function as sole Bible interpreter. "The Apostles delivered both the book and the true meaning of it" to the Church, the annotated Douay Version informs us relative to the N.T.¹ According to Cardinal Manning, Infallibility, as embodied in the Pope, is concerned with "declaring the canon and authenticity and true interpretation of Holy Scripture."²

None, again, have been so insistent on the Bible's dire need of being interpreted as are Romish exponents. It is the most difficult book in the universe to understand, in the pensive judgment of Cardinal Wiseman.³ And, long before his day, counter Reformation champions such as Lindanus and Pighius had felt themselves constrained in their writings to characterize the Bible as "a nose of wax," so liable in their view was it to be twisted whatever way any one liked.

But in the face of all this, and after all, what do we find to be the outcome? This Divinely appointed, this sole and unique, infallible interpreter has never yet, down the centuries, provided a detailed exposition of one whole chapter of the Bible! The talent has been left idly hidden away in a napkin up to this very hour. "There are *very* few passages the interpretation of which is decided by authority," Canon Bagshawe tells the new recruit, in 1925 (*italics his*)⁴. And when Pope Leo XIII published his encyclical "Providentissimus," in 1894, on the study of Holy Scripture, he simply advised the student to have

¹ Note on 2 Tim. iii. 16.

² *Vatican Decrees*, p. 166.

³ *Catholic Doctrine on the use of the Bible*, p. 13.

⁴ *Threshold of the Catholic Church*, p. 231.

recourse to the wise judgment of theologians and interpreters to ascertain what is true and likely in any debateable passage and to exercise patience before attempting to define its sense.¹

Up to the time of the Reformation the Scriptures had been left to the tender mercies of the allegorical method of exegesis. Comparatively few but official ecclesiastics in those ignorant pre-printing days had access to them, and "the Church" could make plausible many pretensions and institutions of hers by means of that system, which Scripture's plain and literal sense not only did not warrant but clearly ruled out. When at long last the question had to be somewhat practically and definitely faced up to, the Council of Trent (1546) shifted the onus of interpretation back upon the Fathers, primitive and post-primitive indiscriminately. The Scriptures were not to be interpreted otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers. Fifteen centuries' enjoyment of the Faith had, forsooth, so enfeebled and depraved the judgment of Christendom that Christians found themselves at that stage less capable of apprehending the message of the Bible than fellowmen of theirs in the second or sixth or eighth century had been! These latter, certainly, had been nearer the Gospel fount, but they had been nearer still to the Pagan cesspool. That they were inspired exegetes was the very last thing the Fathers would have claimed for themselves in their day. Expressly or implicitly, they gave all men to understand that their teachings were subject to the test of Scripture. Nor do we ever find any of the (shall we say?) junior ones of them during their maturing years careful to ascertain, and defer to, the Biblical exegesis of those who had gone before—Ambrose and Augustine, say, before they had themselves graduated as Fathers, subordinating their Biblical findings to the recorded conclusions of Ignatius or Irenaens. To-day the plain Christian man who would desire to gather the Fathers' consensus on a Bible passage, though far better furnished for his task than those that went before him up to 1856, has no handier means for doing so than Migne's Greek and Latin Fathers, a series running into nearly 300 volumes—which brings to mind the doubtless well-known tag, that he would need the wealth of Cræsus to buy it, the longevity of Methuselah to read it, the wisdom of Solomon to grasp it, and the patience of Job to "stick" it. Happily for such a one, if he keeps an alert

¹ English transl., *Universe office*, p. 22.

ear or eye, there are occasional forewarnings sounded by individual Romanist authorities that his quest is likely to be unavailing. Alphonsus Liguori, *e.g.*, speaks of "the great diversity of interpretations which the Fathers and Catholic commentators have given of the same texts."¹ And Canon W. Barry owns that "diversities make the unanimous consent of the Fathers in an identical exegesis rare."² Even the much affected "Peter the rock" text bids fair to become unworkable with them on such a principle. And it is instructive to note that from the revised Creed of Pope Pius IV, which has just lately been prescribed, instead of the original version, as "the Profession of Faith for Converts upon their reception into the Church," the Fathers and their "unanimous consent" have been quietly dropped overboard.³

Following upon that elusive subterfuge of the Tridentine Council, naturally, the course of official Romanist interpretation of Scripture has been one of unredeemed stagnancy and indifference. Some of their more scholarly spirits have been painfully conscious of this fact. A letter is extant which was addressed to Cardinal Baronius by an erudite German ecclesiastic, before the sixteenth century was out, regretfully pointing out that nearly all the Lexicons, and so forth, connected with Biblical study at that date, were published by Protestants.⁴ Though the Vatican has had its splendid polyglot printing press, no Greek N.T. was ever set up there for a scholar's help till 1858, and up to 1880 at any rate no Hebrew O.T. had been printed. A century ago, Cardinal Wiseman penned this lament: "We are utterly unprovided with even elementary and introductory works upon Biblical studies, whether intended for the education of our clergy or for the instruction of our people. We possess not a commentary suited to the wants of the times, . . . and are obliged to seek information either in voluminous, rare, and old writers, or in the productions of men whose religion differs essentially from ours."⁵ The *Catholic Encyclopedia* goes further when it affirms, in the account of the Galileo case by Father Gerard, that the Pope and Inquisition on that occasion "sanctioned an altogether false principle as to the proper use of Scripture."

¹ *Expositions of the Council of Trent* (Dublin, 1846), p. 42.

² *Tradition of Scripture*, p. 15.

³ Bagshawe, *Threshold of the Catholic Church*, p. 231.

⁴ Baronius' *Epistolae* (Rome, 1759), I. p. 473.

⁵ *Dublin Review*, April 1837.

The safeguarding notes in vernacular versions which, like the Douay, have to a degree been authorised involuntarily, have gone on speaking of "some" finding this meaning and "others" that meaning in a passage, and of an exposition somewhere else being "probable," or one that "seems" to give the sense. Then, lest some measure of confidence might haply be attached to any unqualified explanation of a text, the public was long ago apprised that these notes "carry no weight" by Bishop Doyle (the same prelate who declared that Pope Boniface's exposition of the "two swords" passage in St. Luke was one at which "a Christian is forced to blush.")¹ And his archbishop, Murray of Dublin, before the same auditory, expressed regret for the persecuting spirit that up to then pervaded them. So much for our obligation to Romanist Biblical exegesis.

V

ROME HAS NEVER UPHELD THE SCRIPTURES

(A) She never upheld their *doctrinal paramouncy*, not to say *sufficiency*. It is the direct reverse that she has done, notoriously and avowedly.

The clerocracy (*alias* "the Church") can set aside at its own sweet will what has been enjoined or bespoken in the Scriptures. Scripture, for example, records that, as the Council of Constance acknowledged, "Christ instituted the venerable sacrament after supper"; "yet, notwithstanding," that Council determined to impose fasting reception. That post-supper celebration was continued by the Apostles, Canon Bagshawe admits, yet now "it would be a mortal sin," which is followed if unabsolved by hell.² The Council of Trent likewise owned that "the Redeemer in His last supper instituted the Sacrament in two kinds and thus handed it on to the Apostles"; "nevertheless," etc., etc. Yea, one of the greatest Tridentine divines declared, the R.C. Lord Acton³ states, "that a doctrine must be true, if the Church believes it, without any warrant from Scripture."

Generally speaking, as regards tradition, Scripture is permitted to occupy the same level with it. But numerous Romanist authorities have given to tradition a quite definite

¹ Evidence before the House of Lords Committee, 1825, and *Essay on Catholic Claims*, 1826.

² *Threshold*, pp. 13, 119.

³ "Essays", on Freedom, etc., p. 514.

precedence over Scripture. In Pope Pius's Creed certainly a precedence of order is accorded. According to Card. Baronius, tradition has the same advantage over Scripture which the foundation has over the superstructure.¹ Bishop Melchior Canus, who attended at Trent, considered tradition far and away more effective against heretics than Scripture.² Tradition is indispensable, too, as contrasted with Scripture, in the judgment of the Jesuit Father S. Hunter, in his *Outlines of Dogmatic Theology*.³ In Di Bruno's *Catholic Belief* the palm is awarded to Tradition,⁴ for much the same reason as that advanced by Baronius.

Then, pronouncements of Popes have often been credited with equal and even superior authority. Archbishop Arundel, when condemning Lollard doctrines at the Lambeth Council in 1408, could see no distinction in culpability between disputing a Bible statement and a Papal decretal. A long while before, in 970 a Bishop of Verona had lumped together Law, Prophets, Psalms, Gospels and Apostles, with Papal decretals as alike Divinely inspired;⁵ whilst again, later, in 1517, as Lord Acton also records,⁶ Prierias, writing in defence of Indulgences, pleaded: "We have not the authority of Scripture, but we have the higher authority of the Roman Pontiffs." It may be added that for edificatory reading the Lives of Saints afford better reading than the Scriptures, in the judgment of St. Alphonsus Liguori.⁷

That the Scriptures are quite *unessential and dispensable* as a doctrinal guide has been asserted boldly by many of Rome's leading post-Reformation spokesmen. If the contention be sustainable, the wonder at once arises why she should ever have wasted her efforts at the producing and differentiating and conserving of them, which she is so disposed to claim to her sole credit! And Cardinal Hosius might very fairly opine (as quoted by Bishop Jeremy Taylor)⁸ that "perhaps it had been better for the Church if no Scriptures had been written." Especially so, seeing one finds Newman moved to protest: "We are told that God has spoken. Where? In a Book. We have tried it and it disappoints."⁹ But be that as it may, Bishop Milner affirmed:

¹ Annals, liii, tom. i. p. 395.

² De Locis, III, ch. 3.

³ p. 197.

⁴ p. 20, f.

⁵ R. L. Poole, *Illus. of Mediaeval Thought*, p. 72.

⁶ Essays, on Freedom, etc., p. 514.

⁷ *True Spouse of Jesus*, p. 469 (Benzinger, N. York).

⁸ Works, Vol. x. p. 214.

⁹ *Development*, p. 87. He goes on indeed to explain that "that blessed gift" was not given for such a purpose, but forbears to state for what purpose.

“The Christian doctrine and discipline might have been propagated and preserved by the unwritten Word or Tradition, joined with the authority of the Church, though the Scriptures had not been composed.¹ Father S. Hunter, S.J. has just been referred to: his words are: “The Church could dispense with the Holy Scriptures.” These statements are calm and decorous—as much so as was the historic action of omitting the presentation of the Bible at the coronation of James II. Others however have expressed themselves in a style somewhat less courtly. Monsignor John S. Vaughan, in a publication backed with the imprimatur of Cardinals Bourne and Logue,² blurts out: “We do not care two straws whether the doctrine is bound up between the covers of a book or no.” And Bishop Graham, in that brochure of his endorsed by his Archbishop and a Lord Abbot:³ “We are independent of it, and would be just as we are and what we are, though there were no Bible at all.” We pause just to interject a query: Did our Lord and his Apostles ever disclose any such hoity-toity and disdainful attitude towards the Old Testament, the Bible of their day? In the Press report of a R.C. Congress held at Cambridge in July 1921, a recruiting cleric cheerily stated that their English converts “did not care twopence” for the Bible, and was corroborated by one of them with an “I jolly well think not”. When we have all been won over, and imbued with this spirit, who will be left to voice the gratitude and credit which Rome, when in another mood, claims to have earned by her services in connection with the Bible?

John x. 33 gives us the Jews' explanation of their attitude towards Christ the Incarnate Word. And Romanist teachers might well adopt it to account for their attitude to the Word Written. They have no objection to its general good things, but to its claim to be Divinely paramount.

It can only be a dread, readily understandable, of the recognition and acceptance of Scripture's doctrinal paramouncy (not to say sufficiency) that accounts for utterances outrageously derogatory of Scripture that have been indulged in by more or less representative Roman Catholics, in the course of the times, and, sad to say, more specially so, perhaps, in our own days. By Scripture here, it is important to add at once, we do not mean renderings of its text to which in detail Romanist scholars could

¹ “End of Controversy”, p. 57.

² *Where we got our Bible*, p. 55.

³ *Concerning the Holy Bible*, p. 90.

not conscientiously assent. Archbishop McHale of Tuam a century ago stigmatised as "poison" the Scriptural "Lessons" which the State-aided Irish School Board had appointed with the sanction of his less illiberal (or ingenuous) fellow arch-prelate, Murray:¹ since then throughout the British Empire a chorus has been kept up against "Bible-religion", to use one of the mildest of the terms in vogue. Twice over in a Commons Speech on the 1906 English Education Bill, John Redmond, the Irish Nationalist leader, called simple Bible teaching a "bad" provision.² In Pope Pius X's Larger Catechism³ the direction is given that should a "Christian" be offered a Bible [not necessarily a Protestant version] by a Protestant, and have thoughtlessly forborne to spurn the offer, he should pitch it into the fire.

Roman apologists' proneness to adduce infidel arguments against the Bible is repeatedly adverted to by Salmon, in his notable book on *Infallibility*. One of these would be the familiar Ingersoll allegation, which can be traced back to Emperor Julian the Apostate, that it is morally dangerous. Cardinal Wiseman asserted that reading of the Bible had "transformed a mild and promising race [the British] into a pack of lazy, immoral infidels".⁴ According to Canon Bagshawe, "a large part of the Bible" furnishes "far from edifying reading".⁵ This imputation may also have been part of what lay behind the recent slogan utterance of a prominent priest which was deemed worthy of circulation in the *Universe* paper: "The open Bible has been the curse of England."⁶

(B) Rome has not upheld the textual correctness of the Scriptures. Very much to the contrary. It is, in fact, her quasi-infidel arguments on this particular topic that Salmon has chiefly in mind. He cites Bishop Milner in 1818 as challenging: "How do you know that the [Bible] text has been preserved rightly?" That prelate was not indeed a pioneer in that destructive "Higher Criticism" which has since come to a head. But "the critical movement commenced among non-Protestant and unbelieving scholars", as the sympathetic Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* candidly states.⁷ The French Oratorian priest, Richard Simon (1678), was "the forerunner of modern Biblical

¹ *Patriot* (newspaper), Aug. 9, 1838.

² Hansard, Vol. 156, p. 1508.

³ p. 201.

⁴ *Catholic Doctrine of the Use of the Bible*, p. 25.

⁵ *Threshold*, p. 218.

⁶ Jan. 12, 1923.

⁷ III. 603.

criticism", according to the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*.¹ And Dean Milman notes² that he quoted several Jesuit writers who had preceded him along that track, and that "his object was to dethrone the Bible and to secure ultimate authority for the Church". The palm is disputed for with him, it would appear, by the French Romanist physician writer, Jean Astruc, who, the same authoritative Encyclopaedia states, "occasioned the modern critical theories" by his *Conjectures*, published in 1753, "his self-declared purpose being to shift belief from the Bible on to the Church". Like the bogus mother at Solomon's tribunal, Rome would prefer to have the "child" divided into pieces, rather than that a neighbour should possess it sound and whole. Destructive criticism of the Bible does not seem to occasion worry to any Roman Churchman, for all the grand services their Church is, at times, alleged to have rendered to it, adown the ages. Newman serenely declares: "The plenary inspiration of Scripture is peculiarly a Protestant question, not a Catholic. . . . Supposing, for argument's sake, that it could be proved that some passage in the Pentateuch about Egyptian history were erroneous . . . it would not affect a Catholic."³ This lavish flinging from the right hand while the left keeps an undergrip is Newman all over. He will not say what kind of passage, if distrusted, *would* 'affect a Catholic'; presumably only such as his Church's sophistry can most readily utilise for partisan purposes. The ingenuous Bishop Graham is less qualified in the sweep of his unconcern: "It is no matter to us whether there are a thousand or a million variations in texts and passages of ancient copies, out of which our modern Bibles are compiled. We do not hazard our salvation on such a precarious and unreliable support."⁴

VI

ROME DID NOT TRANSLATE THE SCRIPTURES

How was it with the Primitive Church in this regard? Eusebius could proudly state that the Apostles' writings had been translated into all the languages of the then known world.⁵ How emphatically Chrysostom, who followed him, expressed

¹ IV. 492.

² "Essays", p. 302.

³ Letter to Sir A. Clerke (1861), *Observer*, Sept. 9, 1929.

⁴ *Where we got our Bible*, p. 68.

⁵ Theophania, III, 28.

himself on the matter is well-known. And Theodoret, of the next generation, is no less explicit.¹ It is to the credit of the Eastern Church that it supplied the Armenians and Copts and Goths with their Bible versions, as also later the Slavs.

But Rome did not follow along that noble track. It was in North Africa, not there, that even Latin versions first made their appearance. The request of Bishop Damasus, of Rome, to Jerome to undertake the "Vulgate" version was prompted by the inconvenient textual diversity of unofficial Latin translations already in currency. When the Vulgate emerged it obtained local church sanction in Gaul a good while before it was authorised for use in Rome.

The common plea in defence of the suspension of translation work during the early Middle Ages is that most Western national dialects were then in a state of flux and unformed. Yet Protestant missionaries to-day can manage to furnish the most backward of the black tribes with Testaments that are usable. And might not ecclesiastics then have better fed the lamp of elementary knowledge than they did, if for that object alone, seeing that the Jews up and down Europe during that era, amid all their tribulation, maintained an educational proficiency within their own community and underwent no "dark age" whatever?

In the later mediaeval period random translations here and there appeared in the West, but there is no evidence whatever of any of them having been composed at the instance of the central authority (which then at length the Vatican might be said really to constitute). An odd prelate, less formalistic than the average, might countenance or sanction the pious production of some zealous individual or brotherhood, within his own domain. And we must never lose sight of the fact that, in the pre-Reformed Church all along, there persisted a Protestant element, till the sifting process transpired in the sixteenth century. This, coalescing with the rising spirit of nationalism, amply accounts for the stray and scattered pre-Reform versions that came into being.

We can spare ourselves the trouble of canvassing Cardinal Gasquet's egregious allegation that the supposed Wyclif and Lollard translations were really pirated, after being composed under and issued by the co-temporary English episcopate,

¹ *Graec. Affect. Cur. v.*

now that, after over thirty years of an airing, it has been cast clean overboard by the "Catholic Truth Society" (of which each successive English Cardinal is permanent president).¹ It is just as audacious still for the familiar modern Romanist polemic, "Question Box Answers" to claim as official all pre-Lutheran versions of the Bible, of which, according to G. G. Coulton,² 21 are known, and not one "duly approved by the Church".

When the Reformation came to a head, the successful circulation of Protestant versions, and the welcome accorded to them, among the spiritually hungry peoples, forced the hand of the Roman Church. The translators of the Douay, or Rhemish Bible explain to the reader in their preface that they have been spurred on to their task by the existence of heretical translations. The translation work was done without the knowledge of the prelates of the Church, according to Bishop Doyle,³ and Newman states that it has never had any episcopal imprimatur, much less any formal approbation from the Holy See.⁴ In Poland, when the Reform movement seemed to be gaining the ascendant, the Romish Church authorities, the *Catholic Encyclopædia* tells us,⁵ adopted this and that counter-measure, "and it was even decided to translate the Holy Scriptures". "Even"! It has been a similar policy down to our own day. Fifty-five of the French bishops in 1870 petitioned the Pope to authorise a Romanist French version of the O.T., urging as their motive the need for counteracting the circulation of Protestant versions.

Ireland, so far as she is, professedly or genuinely, Gaelic, has had latterly her own illuminating little history in this regard. Mr. W. P. Ryan, as a Roman Catholic, had written in 1909 in abashed vein: "We owe our Irish translation of the Old Testament to a Protestant Bishop (Bedall), and that of the New to a Protestant archbishop (Daniel)";⁶ and the *Irish Rosary* periodical, in its account of the output of the Catholic Truth Society had noted how in the Celtic list there was a complete absence of Scriptural publications;⁷ and even the more virulent *Leader* paper had raised its voice to like effect; when the Gaelic League at its annual gathering (*oireachtas*) in 1913 (Aug. 1) passed the resolution: "That we call the attention of the Irish Catholic Bishops to the fact that there never has existed an

¹ "Catholic Truth", 1927, p. 159.

² *British Weekly*, 6.10.32.

³ House of Lords 1925 Commission, minute 237.

⁴ *Tracts Theol. and Eccl.* p. 410.

⁵ XII. 185.

⁶ *The Pope's Green Isle*, p. 104.

⁷ Nov. 1912.

authoritative translation of the Sacred Scriptures for Irish Catholics in the Irish language; and we respectfully ask their lordships to authorise a translation of the Bible in Irish, and to publish it as soon as possible." Accordingly in deference to this frank behest of the laity, an Irish version of the Four Gospels by Canon OLeary, with the imprimatur of Archbishop Walsh, made its appearance in 1915, and other portions have since followed. The "Westminster" version or edition of the Scriptures was heralded in 1913 as having been undertaken by the British Jesuit Order, that mighty brotherhood of reputed savants, but the passage of a quarter of a century has not brought about its completion.

VII

ROME HAS NEVER POPULARIZED THE SCRIPTURES

The thesis just foregoing may, if proven, be said to establish this, too. Still the phenomenon is conceivable of an undesigned lethargy in the promoting of translation work alongside a tolerable degree of goodwill towards the circulation of such Scripture as might prove available in approved translations to hand. (We leave out of purview Protestant versions, for argument's sake.)

The Bereans and the Ethiopian eunuch are approvingly introduced to our notice in the N.T. as studious readers of their O.T. Scriptures. Some N.T. portions were definitely addressed to lay individuals, and no doubt were delivered to them by hand in the first instance—Theophilus, as regards the Third Gospel and the Acts (two-sevenths of the whole), Philemon, Gaius, the 'elect lady'. In the primitive Church "Evangelists vied with each other in distributing the Scriptures", Eusebius records. Harnack's book on this topic of Bible-reading in the early Church tempts to voluminous documented quotation. "I trust you exercise yourselves well in Holy Scripture," Polycarp writes to the Philippi Christians. Clement and Tertullian advise married couples to read it together. Chrysostom is signally insistent on the duty. "Ye believe that Bible reading is purely a matter for monks, whereas ye need it far more than they" is his pulpit remonstrance. Aristides urges the heathen to start and read the Bible. A Jew, if he wished for one, was given a N.T., Epiphanius states. Justin, Tatian, Theophilus of

Antioch (like Hilary and Victorinus of later date) ascribe their conversion from heathenism to their reading of the Bible, in keeping with the appeals to do so made to them by Christian leaders. The first Latin versions must have been designed for the use of the uneducated, since every educated Roman knew Greek. "Artisans had them in their shops; travellers and soldiers carried them with them", according to Abbot Fleury, the ecclesiastical historian; and when the Diocletian persecution broke upon the Church, "the laity possessed the Scriptures and were careful readers of them".

All this the Roman advocate says that he is quite ready to acknowledge; but that, even so, in or about the twelfth century, the Church saw she had justification for introducing and establishing a restriction of the use and circulation of the Bible.

Perhaps the first question such an allegation starts in the average mind is: Are the laity, after all, part of the Church, or no? If they are, when did they ever explicitly join in a consensus with the clerical portion for surrender of this their former right? Is the so-called "Church" of theirs, when all is said, simply the "clerocracy" thereof? But, further, there is One infinitely beyond laic or cleric. The inspiration behind the utterance and composition and distribution of the Word could not, by common Christian consent, have been other than celestial and Divine. Can even a Romanist insist that the decision and determination arrived at in the Middle Ages, to snaffle It could not possibly have been of anything less or lower than celestial prompting, as well?

And what was, and has been, the alleged justification? The rise of heresies, is the reply. But, we ask again, were there not heresies in plenitude in the preceding centuries, their originators, too, having been clerics virtually to a man? Had not the Church's paladin against them been this selfsame, broadly dispensed, "sword of the Spirit"? Had God the Holy Ghost waxed decrepit in the passage of the centuries, so as to be unable to use and to safeguard that sword after His former manner? (The question is no more profane than Numbers xi. 23.)

And yet Rome's answer is absolutely correct. Her action *was* due to the rise of heresies—*her own heresies!* And her continued action has been due to her continuance in those heresies. If the Bible is the child of the Roman Church, how did she ever become so abnormally averse to "showing off her baby"? It was because the lack of family likeness between it

and the bogus parent came to be too painfully apparent. There had to be some delay, to be sure, about adopting this course of repression. The leaven—distinctive Romanism—required time to work sufficiently in the Church before so presumptuous a principle could be espoused; and also the centralised church government had to reach the proper pitch of despotic efficiency, which was not till Hildebrand's day.

Lecky, the historian, is led to make the challenging inquiry: "Who could have imagined from a perusal of the N.T. that Christianity was intended to be a highly centralised monarchy, governed with supreme divine authority, by the Bishop of Rome? that the figure which was to occupy the most prominent place in the devotions and imaginations of the millions of Christian worshippers was to be the Virgin Mary, who is not so much as mentioned in the Epistles? that graven images were to be employed in devotion as conspicuously as in a pagan temple?"¹ Cardinal Wiseman himself pictures the situation equally accurately, when he describes as one class of seceder from his Church the individual who by some chance or other has become possessed of and has perused the Bible, and "could not find in it transubstantiation or auricular confession", "could not discover in it one word of purgatory or of venerating images", with the result that he becomes a Protestant.² A priest, writing to the *Catholic Times*,³ dreads the effect on the more brainy school-children of "the apparent discrepancies between the Gospel narrative and much of the common teaching of the Church. Thus our children are generally taught that our Blessed Lady . . . knew all things about the scheme of redemption, and the mission and personality of her Divine Son; but in the Scriptures we find it often asserted that 'she understood not', 'she knew not'." Besides, the frequent references throughout the Bible to the not uncommon arrogance of the religious functionary are rather risky and over-candid for the subjects of an institution in which the priest must needs be all-dominant.⁴ Erasmus did not hesitate to assert that "the theologians are careful that the Holy Scriptures shall be known to few, lest their authority and their gains should be affected".⁵ Under Edward VI the W.

¹ "Essays", p. 89.

² *Lectures on the Catholic Church* (1847 edit.), p. 19.

³ 19/6 03.

⁴ 1 Sam. ii. 15, 16; 1 Kin. xxii. 24; Jerem. xx. 2; Hosea vi. 9; Acts xxiii. 2; 2 Cor. xi. 20; 1 Pet. v. 3; not to mention passages in the Gospels.

⁵ *Epistolac* (1641), p. 1041.

England Romanist rebels put forward as the tenth of their tabulated demands that vernacular Scriptures should be suppressed, because the priests would otherwise be unable to confute the heretics. And the lately Papally "sainted" Thomas More frankly explained that, whilst possession of Scripture might be risked among the clerical order whose members could readily be brought to heel if need be, it was another matter with the less manageable laity.¹ And so the Bible had to be shut away, like a dangerous bull in a compound—that Word of God which was meant to be, and that richly, every Christian man's abiding heart-guest and indweller (Coloss. iii. 16)!

It has been blandly propounded that a substantial compensation and substitute was provided in the chiselled and painted representations in sundry cathedrals such as Amiens; and some art-critics like Ruskin and W. Morris have designated these "the poor man's Bible" of the Middle Ages. But, as it was only in cathedrals that these were to be seen, what proportion of the villagers and rustics had easy access to them? Besides, the great majority of them were limited to the legends of non-Biblical "Saints". Of the remainder a large percentage were bare figures of prominent Bible personages, which could convey mighty little teaching. Of Gospel scenes there were few outside the Crib and the Cross and Tomb.² We have already noted that there were many things Christ was responsible for, which the Pharisees were quite ready to commend, if only He would keep back other things. Furthermore, the poor are still, as they will be always, with us: and who maintains that in the present-day Roman Churches the "stations" and the saint-statues amount to a Bible?

Frequently, again, it is asserted that multitudes keep coming forward who fulfil the appropriate qualifications that govern restriction, and become Bible readers, so that in reality the number of Roman Catholic Bibles in circulation must be immensely great. Well, we have Cardinal Wiseman's word for it: "We do not encourage them to read them,"³ and accordingly

¹ *English Works* (1557), ch. xi. If, to-day, it be maintained that the unreformed Church was wholly assured of the truth of her doctrines and practices, and was simply and rightly apprehensive that private Bible reading would foster in the layman a natural lust for taking a line of his own heretically and differing from everybody else, how is it to be explained that no well-established Evangelical communion, to whom cohesion of membership must be equally precious and important, is ever found showing a tendency quietly to discourage and slacken Bible-reading within its ranks so as to safeguard itself from schisms?

² See G. G. Coulton, *Five Centuries*, I, p. 46; *Art and the Reformation*, pp. 292-318, 483.

³ *Lectures on Use of Bible* (1856), p. 26.

the use of the Bible is a superfluity, at the best—whatever it may become at the worst—so that he would need to be an ardent Bibliocist, indeed, who would start even, not to say persist, in seeking to get one. He would, by orders, be limited to an officially approved version, and that with notes. If he were to follow the Trent Council rule he must apply for his bishop's license; nay, by Clement VIII's further order,¹ it is to the formidable Inquisition he should apply. Those applied to moreover, must hold him to be a "worthy" reader—or an "honest" one, according to Sir T. More: in Bishop Milner's view, he should know Greek and Latin.² He who can clear all these hurdles becomes, after paying a stiff purchase price, the proud possessor of a Roman Bible.

Periodically, too, the Christian world, or a section of it, receives a thrill in the shape of a proclamation, from the central or local Roman authority, in commendation of Bible-reading by the faithful, and simple, short-memoried Protestants can be trusted duly to dissolve into ecstasies of optimistic expectancy. We bethink particularly of Pope Leo's 1894 Encyclical. The Irish Cardinal O'Donnell in his 1926 Lenten pastoral said something which evoked long-continued pæans of utopian joy from our Bible Societies. Later still, in 1929, the Bishop of Killaloe, by a pastoral of his, set English Evangelical weeklies agog with buoyant anticipations. When the Jerome Society was instituted in 1902 with Papal blessing for the publication of Italian New Testaments, the sanguine hopes of Protestants were dashed again within five years by Pius X's closure as soon as the dread Epistles were reached.

What has been and still is the actual condition of things, as touching the commonalty, broadly? Lord Acton, the historian, wrote from Rome in 1870: "Here you may find a lottery dream-book in almost every house, but never a New Testament."³ Father Curci, in the preface to his Italian version of the Gospels in 1879, corroborated him: "The greater part of the laity, even such as are instructed and practising believers, do not so much as know that such a book exists." Nearer home, Mr. Hugh Law, Southern Ireland Dail deputy (and a recruit to Romanism as well), stated a while ago without contradiction in that legislature that in tens of thousands of houses in the then

¹ Jesuit Azor, *Moral Institutes*, I. 8. C. 26. ² Quirinus on the Vatican Council, p. 142.

³ *Tour in Ireland*, ch. 18.

example) of seemingly competent judges (or reporters) in any matter; the sense of power or dictation is secondary. Likewise, to be "moved" is to be induced, *com-movere*, not to be authorised or licensed. Augustine, also, in his time opposed local Church appeals to Rome.

III

ROME DID NOT CONSERVE THE SCRIPTURES

In so far as we are beholden to any Church, unofficially, for the conserving of the Scriptures, it would be to the Eastern, certainly not to the Roman. Take the oldest extant MSS copies of the original Greek (or Hebrew), Rome did literally nothing in the preservation of these. They remained in the East till the capture of Constantinople by the Turks, whence Eastern refugees carried them to Western Europe, where they contributed to the bringing about or the furthering of the Renaissance, the precursor of the Reformation. The famous Codex Vaticanus did not find its harbourage in the Vatican till after 1475. Yea, the original texts, after they became available, were disparaged by Roman officialdom. When the Complutensian Polyglot Bible was published in 1522, with the Latin flanked on either side by the Hebrew and Greek, the Cardinal and his co-adjustors who edited it compared the collocation to that of Christ between the two thieves!

It might well be supposed that such official unconcern for the original texts would be sure to spell a concentrated care bestowed on the Latin form, to which, even if as a product of private Christian zeal, those originals had from so early a date given place. On the contrary, when Jerome tackled his Latin Vulgate version, about 383, he found himself faced with a welter of corrupt copies which almost drove him to despair. His venture was no case at all of a stitch in time to save nine. In handling the O.T. portion, too, he was immensely relieved in his difficulties by the aid afforded to him by a compilation drawn up, a hundred and fifty years before, by a heretic Eastern scholar, the famous Origen.

How, again, did Jerome's Vulgate version itself subsequently fare, as regards the preservation of its textual purity? We are treated to at least implications nowadays that godly monks saw to its perpetuation and propagation with jealous care.