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RECENT BIBLICAL WORK IN FRANCE

"*Les Editions du Cerf*" have just begun publication of their new French translation of the Bible. Four of the projected forty parts have so far appeared.¹ The event is a noteworthy one in Biblical production. Both clergy and laity are being drawn more and more to the reading and study of the Scriptures—but the existing French Catholic translations are admittedly defective, even that of Crampon. Without denying their merits, we must recognize that in many places the original text (which is far better known today than fifty years ago) is not translated as exactly as we should like. The translations have not the flow or the colour which seem to be called for by the particular genius of the French language. And finally, the notes shed insufficient light on the meaning of the text.

For these reasons an elaborate work has been planned with the co-operation of the Dominican Fathers of Jérusalem. The work has been entrusted to Biblical experts; the translation of each is submitted first to another Biblical scholar to be checked for its technical accuracy and then to a Catholic writer of recognized standing, to have the literary quality revised. The importance of the undertaking may be judged from some of the names of those on the committee: of the clergy, we may mention the Rev. Fathers, de Vaux, Benoit, Huby (+), Robert, Osty, Cerfaux—among writers, we may cite Mm. Gilson, of the French Academy, Gabriel Marcel, and Marou. When the whole Bible has been published in parts, the work will then be revised in the light of readers' comments and criticisms and the whole published in one volume. The presentation and format of each fascicle is worthy of its sacred contents. Each contains clear though brief notes—but numerous enough for a good understanding of the text—and a substantial introduction. As an example we may quote the following translation of Lk. i, 34-5, with its notes:—

"Mais Marie dit à l'ange: 'Comment cela se fera-t-il, puisque je garde la virginité?' L'ange lui répondit: 'L'Esprit-Saint viendra sur toi, et la puissance du Très-Haut te prendra sous son ombre'; aussi l'enfant, le saint enfant, sera-t-il appelé Fils de Dieu . . ."

¹ *Je garde la virginité*. Après avoir longtemps hésité, nous avons adopté cette traduction, qui nous a paru la moins mauvaise. Le sens du texte original est clair: il affirme l'absence de relations conjugales comme un fait et comme résolution déjà arrêtée. "Je ne connais pas d'homme" (Buzy et Lagrange) est insuffisant. "Je ne connais pas l'homme (Crampon, Joüon, Pernot) est d'un goût douteux."

² Expression empruntée à l'A.T., où elle désigne la nuée lumineuse, qui accompagne la présence de Iahvé. Voir Exode, 40, 35. Comparer Luc, 9, 34.

¹ *La Sainte Bible* traduite en français sous la direction de l'Ecole Biblique de Jérusalem: Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1948.

Aggée, Zacharie, Malachie (traduits par A. Gelin), pp. 71. Les livres des Maccabées (trad. par F. M. Abel), pp. 172. L'Évangile selon saint Marc (trad. par J. Huby), pp. 84. L'Évangile selon saint Luc (trad. par E. Osty), pp. 146.

In a work of this kind, the synoptic problem could evidently not be passed over in silence. M. Osty in particular gives us a summary of what he has said at greater length in his work *Les Évangiles Synoptiques*,¹ where we find a faithful yet elegant translation, preceded by fifty-seven pages of a deeply interesting introduction. Instead of tracing the formation of the synoptic Gospels back to their beginnings, the author has chosen to start from the preaching of Jesus—a method which attracts and stimulates, though possibly opening the door to a greater degree of surmise than would otherwise be the case. But the author's extensive knowledge of the first century of our era assures us of an authoritative guide. This is briefly the position he takes up. The Gospel was at first oral, following the plan laid down by St. Peter (Acts ii, 22–5). Later it was developed with the aid of comparisons and contacts (for example, with the Old Testament); it recalled words and acts of Jesus which had not been understood or which had been forgotten (cf. Acts ii, 15–16). The number of catechists grew with the Church and they got hold of or made for themselves, written accounts, first in Aramaic then in Greek, which they adapted to their different audiences. They wrote down everything they could remember of Christ. Thus there came into existence those various documents which Saints Matthew and Luke were to come across later on during their journeys in search of materials for their Gospels.

But the Apostles were growing old—the Christian communities had an increasing desire to fix in writing, as exactly as possible, the oral Gospel which they had received from them. So it was that the synoptic Gospels came to be written: Matthew, the first, between the years 50 and 60, in Aramaic: he used the Jerusalem catechesis of Peter, as well as his own recollections and such written or oral information as he could obtain. It is possible that the Apostle himself translated his Gospel into Greek, not long afterwards.

Saint Mark, about the year 60, set down in Greek the catechesis of Peter adapted to his Roman audience, with such explanations and alterations as might be necessary to make it more easily understood by them. Finally, St. Luke, about A.D. 62 and perhaps at Rome, wrote in Greek an historical and literary record of the life of Christ, making use of Mark and many other sources, several of which had already been used by St. Matthew.

Canon Cerfaux follows the same method in *La Voix vivante de l'Évangile*² a penetrating and suggestive work, the fruit of personal investigation. He reaches similar results. We should however notice two divergences of opinion. St. Mark, he asserts, was familiar with Aramaic Matthew;

¹ *Les Évangiles synoptiques*. Traduction nouvelle avec introduction et notes, par le Chan. E. Osty, Paris 1948, pp. lxx–315.

² Chan. L. Cerfaux: *La voix vivante de l'Évangile au début de l'Église*, Tournai-Paris 1946, pp. 189.

while Greek Matthew has "borrowed something" from Mark (many writers of course hold that there was a still greater influence of Mark on Greek Matthew). M. Osty, on the other hand, explains the likenesses between the first two Gospels on the sole grounds of the catechesis of Peter.

In any case, these two authors are agreed on the literary *genre* of the synoptic Gospels. They are not books of history in the strict meaning of that word, but collections of religious testimony, put together to satisfy the needs of the first Christian communities. Hence we do find historical accounts, but fragmentary ones, often a mere selection of events.

The Rev. Father Braun, in ch. i of his *Jésus, histoire et critique*¹ shows conclusively that we cannot invoke as explanation the creative power of the primitive Christian community. The Gospel is not a figment of their imagination, as advocates of the Formgeschichte would have us believe. The first community was not an abstract entity, but a living group, well placed for getting full information: a group moreover which required its tradition to be solidly based on the testimony of eye-witnesses.

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GENESIS RECONSIDERED²

THE first challenge to the older ideas of biblical inspiration and inerrancy came with modern discoveries about the constitution of the universe. Until it became patent that biblical cosmology does not represent the world as it is in fact, it was taken for granted that the divine origin of Scripture guaranteed its freedom from error in matters of purely physical science, though it has long been recognized that the sacred writers often speak according to appearances. It is now universally admitted that in scientific matters they speak as the men of their time spoke. On such problems, the solution of which does not help man to lead a good life, it was not God's purpose to forestall the workings of the human mind. Thus, as the late regretted author of this new commentary points out, both light and darkness were conceived as two separate and independent entities, each succeeding the other over the face of the earth. This is nowhere explicitly asserted in the Bible, but is the conception which lies behind what is said of light and darkness and is the key to its understanding. As he also points out, it was supposed that the domesticated animals were created such from the beginning (Gen. i, 24). He asserts, as many have done before, that according to

¹ F. M. Braun, O.P.: *Jésus. Histoire et critique*, Tournai-Paris, 1947, pp. 257.

² J. Chaîne, *Le Livre de la Genèse* (Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf) 1948. Pp. 526 600 fr., paper back. (Lectio Divina, 3.)