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# Scripture

THE QUARTERLY OF THE CATHOLIC BIBLICAL ASSOCIATION

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## SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH O.P. 1910-1967

I first made the acquaintance of Sebastian Bullough at the annual Easter Conference of Ecclesiastical Studies in 1938. It would have been difficult not to have made contact with him. His commanding presence enhanced by the attractive Dominican habit, his resonant voice, his warm and friendly personality, his intelligence and readiness to speak on a wide variety of subjects inevitably made him a person to seek out. A particular reason for contact between us was our common interest in Biblical studies; and the friendship begun then endured to his death. Halley Edward Duse Bullough, as he was called at baptism, was the son of Edward Bullough, professor of Italian at Cambridge and on his mother's side the grandson of the celebrated Italian dramatic actress Eleonora Duse, a parentage which helps to explain his outstanding scholarly gifts and histrionic abilities. Bearing in mind too his recent prominence in ecumenical activities it is interesting to recall that as a boy he lived next door to the present Archbishop of Canterbury. On one occasion as we were walking round the garden of his former home, now Blackfriars, the Dominican house in Cambridge, he pointed out a shallow grassy bank down which the two future ecclesiastics used to roll.

He took the Oriental Languages Tripos (as it was then known) and graduated B.A. in 1931, having had as his teachers such men as S. A. Cooke, R. H. Kennett, A. A. Bevan, N. McClean and H. Loewe. He then entered the Dominican Order, studied in Rome where he took his degree of *Sacrae Theologiae Lector et Licentiatus* and was ordained in 1937. It will come as no surprise to readers to learn that he was then destined to go to the Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem "for specialized studies" which would doubtless have led to a professorship. But the war came and instead he went to teach boys the elements of learning at Laxton School. Speaking to one of his former pupils I gathered that he was, needless to say, loved by all. When teaching his favourite subject, Holy Scripture, he was inclined at times to take the boys out of their depth; and then realizing the lack of contact, he would enliven and illustrate the lesson by acting the part of the various characters about whom he might be speaking. One of the minor mysteries of

course is why he was not sent back to Biblical studies and a possible professorship after the war. But Sebastian was a man of many parts and had made himself indispensable at Laxton. In 1954 he became Prior of Woodchester and in 1957 was appointed lecturer in Theology at Blackfriars, Oxford. Only in 1960 at the age of fifty did he return to Cambridge and undertake once more the work for which he had the greatest attraction and ability. He then began lecturing and supervizing in Hebrew at the Faculty of Divinity—a work which he continued until his death. It was abundantly clear that he had great teaching ability and he rapidly became one of the most popular members of the Faculty. In the matter of published work his output was inevitably small in quantity owing to his long assignment as a schoolmaster and as Prior of Woodchester. He published "Five Minor Prophets", i.e. introduction, translation and notes, in the *Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures* and six parallel articles on Minor Prophets in the *Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*—all these appearing in 1953. More recently he wrote a number of articles for the new *Catholic Encyclopedia*. In 1960 he was invited to take part in the preparation of a new critical edition of the Syriac Peshitta Version of the Old Testament, by an international team of scholars under the direction of Professor P. A. H. de Boer of Leiden University, Holland, and was assigned the Book of Judith. His work was nearly complete at the time of his death. About the same time he began to take part in a new "Translators' Translation" of the Bible under the auspices of the British and Foreign Bible Society and shortly afterwards to contribute to the new edition of Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, by Professor D. Winton Thomas, Regius professor of Hebrew in Cambridge University, one of the editors of the new work. All this makes one regret that such activity could not have taken place in 1938 instead of 1960. Father Sebastian undoubtedly had the makings of a great professor. I have enlarged on his Biblical undertakings because I think they are not as well known as they should be, but it would give a distorted view if I ended here.

He had joined the Order of Preachers and a great preacher he became. There must be few who have been more devoted to preaching, giving missions and retreats. Moreover his activities recently were by no means confined to this country. He would take off at the end of term and fly to California where he would spend the summer months preaching, giving courses of lectures at various summer schools, and giving retreats to priests and religious. Latterly too he had preached in a number of Protestant pulpits and this year he had been chosen to preach the Cambridge University sermon in great St. Mary's.

But the understanding and friendship which he manifested never led him to adopt "advanced" views either in theology or in the liturgy. His "Pelican" edition on "The Catholic Church" is sufficient evidence of the former and his membership of the Latin Mass Society is testimony to the latter. Indeed those near to him will have no difficulty in saying that the new liturgical developments caused him real pain because he sincerely believed that the Church was in danger of abandoning her heritage. However as time passed he was able to see more clearly the advantages of the evolution, even if not entirely approving. All through his life as a priest and religious his loyalty to the Church and Order to which he belonged was outstandingly conspicuous. His Faith was in some respects like that of a child and this coupled with his extraordinary capacity for making friends must have done incalculable good—all the more for being unconsciously performed.

It is no exaggeration to say that the news of his death came as a stunning blow. Only a few days before he had been present at the summer meeting at York of the Society for Old Testament Study and those present will testify that he was at his scintillating best, especially in the conversation between lectures which is always perhaps the best part of such meetings. It was characteristic of his devotion to duty that he should have gone on his motorcycle to the Priory at Stone where his sister is a Dominican, in order to help with a week-end supply when he was not feeling fit even before he started. It was a merciful disposition of Providence that he was able to die in a house of his Order with his sister present and after saying his Sunday Masses. He died as he lived, a devoted priest and religious. The large attendance at his funeral in the Catholic Church, Hills Road, Cambridge testified to the feelings of friendship and indeed of obligation which so many felt towards him. Among the crowd one noted a number of professors and lecturers in Cambridge.

Throughout the years, Father Sebastian was a regular member of the Catholic Biblical Association, had lectured under its auspices and assisted with his advice. Finally in 1961 he was elected Chairman and at once took steps to organize something that was quite new—an annual two-day meeting of all those interested in the teaching of Scripture. The meetings held since then at Southwell House, London are eloquent testimony of the need for such an occasion and equally of his own skill in making such events a success.

There will be at least one important posthumous work of his, namely a commentary on the Psalms which he prepared for the forthcoming second edition of *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*—a piece of work carried out with the meticulous scholarship characteristic of all he wrote.

God saw fit to take him at a time when he appeared to have many years of fruitful scholarly activity before him. If it appears that through circumstances the full harvest of his Biblical talent was not able to be reaped, the same cannot be said of him as a priest and a preacher; and that vocation after all was the one which he prized above everything else and responded to with all his heart. He could have said with St. Paul, "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ", Phil. 3,7.

R. C. FULLER

*Cambridge*