


*at usum
h. M. Louis*



ROME AND THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE



A GRAIL PUBLICATION

ROME
AND
THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

A Collection of Papal Enactments
on the Study of Holy Scripture together with the
Decision of the Biblical Commission

Fourth Edition
Newly Revised and Enlarged

1946

"Optamus nimirum et cupimus, ut plures patrociniū divinarum Litterarum rite suscipiant teneantque constanter; utque illi potissime, quos divina gratia in sacrum ordinem vocavit, maiorem in dies diligentiam industriamque iisdem legendis, meditandis, explanandis, quod acquirissimum est, impendant."

LEO XIII.

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ST. MEINRAD

INDIANA

IMPRIMI POTES

✠ IGNATIUS ESSER, O. S. B.
Abbot of St. Meinrad.

September 11, 1945

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Censor Deputatus.

IMPRIMATUR

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Archbishop of Indianapolis.

October 28, 1945

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who have acquired great reputation. From that time downwards the labor and solicitude of Catholics has never been wanting; for as time went on, eminent scholars have carried on biblical study with success, and have defended Holy Scripture against *rationalism* with the same weapons of philology and kindred sciences with which it had been attacked. The calm and fair consideration of what has been said will clearly show that the Church has never failed in taking due measures to bring the Scriptures within reach of her children, and that she has ever held fast and exercised profitably that guardianship conferred upon her by Almighty God for the protection and glory of His holy Word; so that she has never required, nor does she now require, any stimulation from without.

II PLAN FOR THE STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

A OUR ADVERSARIES

We must now, Venerable Brethren, as Our purpose demands, impart to you such counsels as seem best suited for carrying on successfully the study of biblical science.

But first it must be clearly understood whom we have to oppose and contend against, and what are their tactics and their arms. In earlier times the contest was chiefly with those who, relying on private judgment and repudiating the divine traditions and teaching office of the Church, held the Scriptures to be the one source of revelation and the final appeal in matters of faith. Now, we have to meet the Rationalists, true children and inheritors of the older heretics, who, trusting in their turn to their own way of thinking, have rejected even the scraps and remnants of Christian belief which have been handed down to them. They deny that there is any such thing as revelation or inspiration or Holy Scriptures at all; they see, instead, only the forgeries and the falsehoods of men; they set down the Scripture narratives as stupid fables and lying stories: the prophecies and the oracles of God are to them either predictions made up after the event or forecasts formed by the light of nature; the miracles and the wonders of God's power are not what they are said to be, but the startling effects of natural law, or else mere tricks and myths;

circumstances of the time demand. With this view, the first thing which requires attention is the wise choice of professors. Teachers of sacred Scripture are not to be appointed at haphazard out of the crowd; but they must be men whose character and fitness are proved by their love of, and their long familiarity with the Bible, and by suitable learning and study.

It is a matter of equal importance to provide in time for a continuous succession of such teachers; and it will be well, wherever this can be done, to select young men of good promise who have successfully accomplished their theological course, and to set them apart exclusively for Holy Scripture, affording them facilities for full and complete studies. Professors, thus chosen and thus prepared may enter with confidence on the task that is appointed for them; and that they may carry out their work well and profitably, let them take heed to the instructions We now proceed to give.

2. PREPARATORY STUDIES. At the commencement of the course of Holy Scripture let the professor strive earnestly to form the judgment of the young beginners so as to train them equally to defend the sacred writings and to penetrate their meaning. This is the object of the treatise which is called "Introduction." Here the student is taught how to prove the integrity and authority of the Bible, how to investigate and ascertain its true sense, and how to meet and refute objections. It is needless to insist upon the importance of making these preliminary studies in an orderly and thorough fashion, with the accompaniment and assistance of theology; for the whole subsequent course must rest on the foundation thus laid and make use of the light thus acquired. Next, the teacher will turn his earnest attention to that more fruitful division of Scripture science which has to do with interpretation, wherein is imparted the method of using the Word of God for the advantage of religion and piety. We recognize, without hesitation, that neither the extent of the matter nor the time at disposal allows each single book of the Bible to be separately gone through. But the teaching should result in a definite and ascertained method of interpretation—and, therefore, the professor should equally avoid the mistake of giving a mere taste of every book, and of dwelling at too great length on

seldom of great value, except as confirmation. To look upon it in any other light will be to open the door to many evil consequences. It will make the enemies of religion much more bold and confident in attacking and mangling the sacred books; and this vaunted "higher criticism" will resolve itself into the reflection of the bias and the prejudice of the critics. It will not throw on the Scripture the light which is sought, or prove of any advantage to doctrine; it will only give rise to disagreement and dissension, those sure notes of error, which the critics in question so plentifully exhibit in their own persons; and seeing that most of them are tainted with false philosophy and rationalism, it must lead to the elimination from the sacred writings of all prophecy and miracles, and of everything else that is outside the natural order.

b. *Natural Sciences.* In the second place, we have to contend against those who, making an evil use of physical science, minutely scrutinize the sacred book in order to detect the writers in a mistake, and to take occasion to vilify its contents. Attacks of this kind, bearing as they do on matters of sensible experience, are peculiarly dangerous to the masses, and also to the young who are beginning their literary studies; for the young, if they lose their reverence for the Holy Scripture on one or more points, are easily led to give up believing in it altogether.

It need not be pointed out how the nature of science, just as it is so admirably adapted to show forth the glory of the Great Creator, provided it be taught as it should be, so, if it be perversely imparted to the youthful intelligence, it may prove most fatal in destroying the principles of true philosophy and in the corruption of morality. Hence, to the professor of sacred Scripture a knowledge of natural science will be of very great assistance in detecting such attacks on the sacred books, and in refuting them. There can never, indeed, be any real discrepancy between the theologian and the physicist, as long as each confines himself within his own lines, and both are careful, as St. Augustine warns us, "not to make rash assertions, or to assert what is not known as known."⁴⁰ If dissension should arise between them,

⁴⁰ *In Gen. op. Imperf.* ix, 30.

here is the rule also laid down by St. Augustine for the theologian:

Whatever they can really demonstrate to be true of physical nature we must show to be capable of reconciliation with our Scriptures; and whatever they assert in their treatises, which is contrary to these Scriptures of ours, that is to Catholic faith, we must either prove it as well as we can to be entirely false, or at all events we must, without the smallest hesitation, believe it to be so.⁴¹

To understand how just is the rule here formulated we must remember, first, that the sacred writers, or to speak more accurately, the Holy Spirit "who spoke by them, did not intend to teach men these things (that is to say, the essential nature of the things of the visible universe), things in no way profitable unto salvation."⁴² Hence they did not seek to penetrate the secrets of nature, but rather described and dealt with things in more or less figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time, and which in many instances are daily used at this day, even by the most eminent men of science. Ordinary speech primarily and properly describes what comes under the senses; and somewhat in the same way the sacred writers—as the Angelic Doctor also reminds us—"went by what sensibly appeared,"⁴³ or put down what God, speaking to men, signified, in the way men could understand and were accustomed to.

The unshrinking defense of the Holy Scripture, however, does not require that we should equally uphold all the opinions which each of the Fathers or the more recent interpreters have put forth in explaining it; for it may be that, in commenting on passages where physical matters occur, they have sometimes expressed the ideas of their own times, and thus made statements which in these days have been abandoned as incorrect. Hence, in their interpretations, we must carefully note what they lay down as belonging to faith, or as intimately connected with faith—what they are unanimous in. For "in those things which do not come under the obligation of faith, the saints were at liberty to hold divergent opinions, just as we ourselves are,"⁴⁴ according

⁴¹ *De Gen. ad Litt.*, i, 21, 41.

⁴² *S. Aug. ib.* 9, 20.

⁴³ *Summa Theol.* p. i, q. lxxx, a. 1, ad 3.

⁴⁴ *In Sent.* ii, Dist. q. i, a. 3.

to the saying of St. Thomas. And in another place he says most admirably:

When philosophers are agreed upon a point, and it is not contrary to our faith, it is safer, in my opinion, neither to lay down such a point as a dogma of faith, even though it is perhaps so presented by the philosophers, nor to reject it as against faith, lest we thus give to the wise of this world an occasion of despising our faith.⁴⁵

The Catholic interpreter, although he should show that these facts of natural science which investigators affirm to be now quite certain are not contrary to the Scripture rightly explained, must, nevertheless, always bear in mind, that much which has been held and proved as certain has afterwards been called in question and rejected. And if writers on physics travel outside the boundaries of their own branch, and carry their erroneous teaching into the domain of philosophy, let them be handed over to philosophers for refutation.

c. *History.* The principles here laid down will apply to cognate sciences, and especially to history. It is a lamentable fact that there are many who with great labor carry out and publish investigations on the monuments of antiquity, the manners and institutions of nations, and other illustrative subjects, and whose chief purpose in all this is too often to find mistakes in the sacred writings and so to shake and weaken their authority. Some of these writers display not only extreme hostility, but the greatest unfairness; in their eyes a profane book or ancient document is accepted without hesitation, whilst the Scripture, if they only find in it a suspicion of error, is set down with the slightest possible discussion as quite untrustworthy. It is true, no doubt, that copyists have made mistakes in the text of the Bible; this question, when it arises, should be carefully considered on its merits, and the fact not too easily admitted, but only in those passages where the proof is clear.

3. *INERRANCY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.* It may also happen that the sense of a passage remains ambiguous, and in this case good hermeneutical methods will greatly assist in clearing up the obscurity. But it is absolutely wrong and forbidden either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture or to ad-

⁴⁵ *Opusc. x.*

mit that the sacred writer has erred. As to the system of those who, in order to rid themselves of these difficulties, do not hesitate to concede that divine inspiration regards the things of faith and morals, and nothing beyond, because (as they wrongly think) in a question of the truth or falsehood of a passage we should consider not so much what God has said as the reason and purpose which He had in mind in saying it—this system cannot be tolerated.

a. *Extent of Inspiration.* For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; and so far is it from being possible that any error can coexist with inspiration, that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and unchanging faith of the Church, solemnly defined in the Councils of Florence and of Trent, and finally confirmed and more expressly formulated by the Council of the Vatican. These are the words of the last:

The books of the Old and New Testament, whole and entire, with all their parts, as enumerated in the decree of the same Council (Trent) and in the ancient Latin Vulgate, are to be received as sacred and canonical. And the Church holds them as sacred and canonical not because, having been composed by human industry, they were afterwards approved by her authority; nor only because they contain revelation without errors, but because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their Author.⁴⁶

Hence, because the Holy Spirit employed men as his instruments, we cannot, therefore, say that it was these inspired instruments who, perchance, have fallen into error, and not the primary author. For, by supernatural power, He so moved and impelled them to write—He so assisted them when writing—that the things which He ordered, and those only, they, first, rightly understood, then willed faithfully to write down, and finally expressed in apt words and with infallible truth. Otherwise, it could not be

⁴⁶ Sess. III, cap. ii, *de Rev.*

APOSTOLIC LETTER OF PIUS X

QUONIAM IN RE BIBLICA

ON THE STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE IN CLERICAL SEMINARIES

The Biblical Question has, perhaps, never been of such importance as it is today, and it is therefore absolutely necessary that young clerics should be assiduously trained in the knowledge of the Scriptures, so that they may not only know and understand the force and character and teaching of the Bible, but that they may be skillfully and rightly trained in the ministry of the Divine Word, and able to defend the books written by the inspiration of God from the attacks of those who deny that anything has been divinely handed down to us. To this end Our illustrious Predecessor in his encyclical *Providentissimus* decreed: "Let our first care be to see that in seminaries and academical institutions the study of Holy Scripture be placed on such a footing as its own importance and the circumstances of the time demand." On this same subject, then, We now lay down the following rules which We regard as of the greatest utility:

1. The instruction in Sacred Scripture to be imparted in every seminary should embrace, first, the principal ideas concerning inspiration, the canon of the Scripture, the original text and the most important versions, the laws of hermeneutics; secondly, the history of both Testaments; and, thirdly, the analysis and exegesis of the different books according to the importance of each.

2. The curriculum of Biblical studies is to be divided over the entire period during which ecclesiastical students pursue their course of sacred studies within the walls of the seminary; so that when the course is finished each student may have gone through the entire curriculum.

3. The chairs of Scripture shall be organized according to the condition and the means of the different seminaries, but always in such a way that no student shall be deprived of the means of learning those things of which a priest may not lawfully be ignorant.

4. Since, on the one hand, it is not possible to have a detailed exposition of the whole of Scripture given in school, and, on the other, it is necessary that the whole of Scripture should be in some sense known to the priest, the professor shall take care to have special treatises or introductions for each of the books to prove their authority, and, when occasion requires, to teach the analysis of them; but he will, at the same time, dwell at greater length on the more important books and parts of books.

5. With regard to the Old Testament, he will make use of the latest results of research in illustrating the history of the Hebrew people and their relations with other Oriental nations; he will treat of the main features of the Mosaic Law; and he will explain the principal prophecies.

6. He will take special pains to imbue his students with zeal to study and understand those Psalms which they recite daily in the Divine Office; he will select some of those Psalms for interpretation in order to show by way of example the method to be followed by the students in their private studies to interpret the others.

7. Treating of the New Testament, he will explain briefly and clearly the special characteristics of each of the four Gospels, and the proofs of their authenticity; he will also illustrate the general characters of the entire Gospel story, and the doctrine in the Epistles and the other books.

8. He will pay special attention in treating of those parts of both Testaments which concern Christian faith and morals.

9. He will always remember, especially in treating of the New Testament, to conform to the precepts he explains to those who are afterwards by their words and their example to teach the people the doctrine of salvation. He will, therefore, in the course of his instruction explain to his students the best way of preaching the Gospel, and will stimulate them, as occasion may offer, to observe diligently the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles.

10. The more promising students are to be instructed in the Hebrew tongue, in Biblical Greek, and whenever possible, in some

other Semitic language, such as Syriac or Arabic. "It is most proper that Professors of Sacred Scripture and theologians should master those tongues in which the sacred books were originally written; and it would be well that ecclesiastical students also should cultivate them, more especially those who aspire to academic degrees. And endeavors should be made to establish in all academic institutions chairs of the other oriental languages, especially the Semitic" (*Providentissimus Deus*).

11. In seminaries which enjoy the right of conferring academic degrees it will be necessary to increase the number of lectures on Sacred Scripture and consequently to go more deeply into general and special questions, and to devote more time and study to Biblical exegesis, archaeology, geography, chronology, theology and history.

12. Special diligence is to be shown in preparing select students for the academical degrees in Sacred Scripture according to the rules laid down by the Biblical Commission—a matter of no small importance for securing suitable professors for Scripture for the seminaries.

13. Every doctor in Sacred Scripture will be most careful never to swerve in the least in his teaching from the doctrine and tradition of the Church; he will of course make use of the real additions to our knowledge which modern research supplies, but he will avoid the rash commentaries of innovators; so, too, he will confine himself to the treatment of those questions which contribute to the elucidation and defense of the Sacred Scriptures; and finally he will be guided in his plan of teaching by those rules, full of prudence, contained in the Encyclical *Providentissimus*.

14. Students should endeavor to make up by private study what the schools fail to supply in this branch of sacred learning. As lack of time will render it impossible for the professor to go over the whole of Scripture in detail, they will by themselves devote a certain portion of time every day to a careful perusal of the Old and New Testaments—and in this they will be greatly helped by the use of some brief commentary to throw light on obscure passages and explain the more difficult ones.

15. Students are to undergo an examination in Scripture, as well as in other parts of theology, to show the profit they have derived from the lessons, before they are allowed to pass into another class or to be initiated in sacred orders.

16. In all academies every candidate for academical degrees in theology will be asked certain questions on Scripture relating to the historical and critical introduction as well as to exegesis; and will prove by examination that he is sufficiently acquainted with the Hebrew tongue and has knowledge of Biblical Greek.

17. The students of Sacred Scripture are to be exhorted to read not only interpretations of the Scripture, but good authors who treat of subjects connected with this study—for instance, the history of both Testaments, the life of Our Lord and the Apostles, and books of travel in Palestine—from all of which they will easily acquire knowledge of Biblical places and customs.

18. To further this object efforts will be made to supply each seminary, as far as circumstances will permit, with a small library in which books of this kind will be at the disposal of the students.

This is Our will and Our command, everything to the contrary notwithstanding.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's on the 27th day of March, 1906, the third of Our Pontificate.

A. CARDINAL MACCHI.

Jan. 21, 1907, Letter, *Qui piam*, of Pius X to Cardinal Cassetta, commending the work of the Society of St. Jerome, *Acta S. Sedis*, XL, 134-136.

April 30, 1907, the Biblical Commission addresses, through Cardinal Rampolla, a letter to the Abbot Primate of the Order of St. Benedict, commissioning the Benedictines to gather and collate the various codices and readings of the Vulgate, preliminary to a publication of an amended official text. *Acta S. Sedis*, XL, 446-448. Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XV, 515-520.

July 3, 1907, the Syllabus, *Lamentabili*, contains a number of propositions referring to Sacred Scripture. *Acta S. Sedis*, XL, 470-478.

September 8, 1907, the Encyclical, *Pascendi*, in two passages, treats of the Bible and Modernism. *Acta S. Sedis*, XL, 593-650.

spiration, or suggestion, or even at the dictation of the Holy Spirit; even that they were written and edited by Him. Yet he never questions but that the individual authors of these Books worked in full freedom under the Divine afflatus, each of them in accordance with his individual nature and character. Thus he is not merely content to affirm as a general principle—what indeed pertains to all the sacred writers—that they followed the Spirit of God as they wrote, in such sort that God is the principal cause of all that Scripture means and says; but he also accurately describes what pertains to each individual writer. In each case Jerome shows us how, in composition, in language, in style and mode of expression, each of them uses his own gifts and powers; hence he is able to portray and describe for us their individual character, almost their very features; this is especially so in his treatment of the Prophets and of St. Paul. This partnership of God and man in the production of a work in common Jerome illustrates by the case of a workman who uses instruments for the production of his work; for he says that whatsoever the sacred authors say "Is the word of God, and not their own; and what the Lord says by their mouths He says, as it were, by means of an instrument."¹⁹

If we ask how we are to explain this power and action of God, the principal cause, on the sacred writers we shall find that St. Jerome in no wise differs from the common teaching of the Catholic Church. For he holds that God, through His grace, illumines the writer's mind regarding the particular truth which, "in the person of God," he is to set before men; he holds, moreover, that God moves the writer's will—nay, even impels it—to write; finally, that God abides with him unceasingly, in unique fashion, until his task is accomplished. Whence the Saint infers the supreme excellence and dignity of Scripture, and declares that knowledge of it is to be likened to the "treasure"²⁰ and the "pearl beyond price,"²¹ since in them are to be found the riches of Christ²² and "silver wherewith to adorn God's house."²³

¹⁹ *Tract. in Ps.* 88.

²⁰ *Comment. in Matt.* 13:4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13:45.

²² *Quaest. in Genesim, Prologus.*

²³ *Comment. in Agg.*, 2:1; *cf. in Gal.* 2:10.

they wrote, that their minds could rightly conceive only those and all those things which He Himself bade them conceive; only such things could they faithfully commit to writing and aptly express with unerring truth; else God would not be the Author of the entirety of Sacred Scripture.⁴²

III MODERN VIEWS COMPARED WITH ST. JEROME'S TEACHING

But although these words of our predecessor leave no room for doubt or dispute, it grieves us to find that not only men outside, but even children of the Catholic Church—nay, what is a peculiar sorrow to us, even clerics and professors of sacred learning—who in their own conceit either openly repudiate or at least attack in secret the Church's teaching on this point.

We warmly commend, of course, those who, with the assistance of critical methods, seek to discover new ways of explaining the difficulties in Holy Scripture, whether for their own guidance or to help others. But we remind them that they will only come to miserable grief if they neglect our predecessor's injunctions and overstep the limits set by the Fathers.

1. NO DISTINCTION OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY ELEMENTS

Yet no one can pretend that certain recent writers really adhere to these limitations. For while conceding that inspiration extends to every phrase—and, indeed, to every single word of Scripture—yet, by endeavoring to distinguish between what they style the primary or religious and the secondary or profane element in the Bible, they claim that the effect of inspiration—namely, absolute truth and immunity from error—are to be restricted to that primary or religious element. Their notion is that only what concerns religion is intended and taught by God in Scripture, and that all the rest—things concerning “profane knowledge,” the garments in which Divine truth is presented—God merely permits, and even leaves to the individual author's greater or less knowledge. Small wonder, then, that in their view a considerable number of things occur in the Bible touching

⁴² Lit. Ency., *Providentissimus Deus*; *supra*, p. 24.

ture, we should speedily have to acknowledge you a leader amongst us.⁵¹

2. NEED OF PREPARATION

How we are to seek for this great treasure, given as it is by our Father in heaven for our solace during this earthly pilgrimage, St. Jerome's example shows us. First, we must be well prepared and must possess a good will. Thus Jerome himself, immediately on his baptism, determined to remove whatever might prove a hindrance to his ambitions in this respect. Like the man who found a treasure and "for joy thereof went and sold all that he had and bought that field" (Mt. 13:44), so did Jerome say farewell to the idle pleasures of this passing world; he went into the desert, and since he realized what risks he had run in the past through the allurements of vice, he adopted a most severe style of life. With all obstacles thus removed he prepared his soul for "the knowledge of Jesus Christ" and for putting on Him Who was "meek and humble of heart." But he went through what Augustine also experienced when he took up the study of Scripture. For the latter has told us how, steeped as a youth in Cicero and profane authors, the Bible seemed to him unfit to be compared with Cicero.

My swelling pride shrank from its modest garb, while my gaze could not pierce to what the latter hid. Of a truth Scripture was meant to grow up with the childlike; but then I could not be childlike; turgid eloquence appealed mightily to me.⁵²

So, too, St. Jerome; even though withdrawn into the desert he still found such delight in profane literature that at first he failed to discern the lowly Christ in His lowly Scriptures:

Wretch that I was! I read Cicero even before I broke my fast! And after the long night-watches, when memory of my past sins wrung tears from my soul, even then I took up my Plautus! Then perhaps I would come to my senses and would start reading the Prophets. But their uncouth language made me shiver, and, since blind eyes do not see the light, I blamed the sun and not my own eyes.⁵³

⁵¹ *Epist.* 58:9,11.

⁵² *Confessiones* ii. 5; cf. viii. 12.

⁵³ *Epist.* 22:30.

But in a brief space Jerome became so enamored of the "folly of the Cross" that he himself serves as a proof of the extent to which a humble and devout frame of mind is conducive to the understanding of Holy Scripture. He realized that "in expounding Scripture we need God's Holy Spirit";⁵⁴ he saw that one cannot otherwise read or understand it "than the Holy Spirit by Whom it was written demands."⁵⁵ Consequently, he was ever humbly praying for God's assistance and for the light of the Holy Spirit, and asking his friends to do the same for him. We find him commending to the Divine assistance and to his brethren's prayers his Commentaries on various books as he began them, and then rendering God due thanks when completed.

3. NEED OF LIVELY CATHOLIC FAITH

As he trusted to God's grace, so too did he rely upon the authority of his predecessors: "What I have learned I did not teach myself—a wretchedly presumptuous teacher!—but I learned it from illustrious men in the Church."⁵⁶ Again: "In studying Scripture I never trusted to myself."⁵⁷ To Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, he imparted the rule he had laid down for his own student life: "It has always been my custom to fight for the prerogatives of a Christian, not to overpass the limits set by the Fathers, always to bear in mind that Roman faith praised by the Apostle."⁵⁸

He ever paid submissive homage to the Church, our supreme teacher through the Roman Pontiffs. Thus, with a view to putting an end to the controversy raging in the East concerning the mystery of the Holy Trinity, he submitted the question to the Roman See for settlement, and wrote from the Syrian desert to Pope Damasus as follows:

I decided, therefore, to consult the Chair of Peter and that Roman faith which the Apostle praised; I ask for my soul's food from that city wherein I first put on the garment of Christ.... I, who follow no other leader save Christ, associate myself with Your Blessedness, in communion, that is, with the Chair of Peter. For I know the

⁵⁴ *In Mich.* 1:10,15.

⁵⁵ *In Gal.* 5:19.

⁵⁶ *Epist.* 108:26.

⁵⁷ *Praefat. in 1 Paral.*

⁵⁸ *Epist.* 63:2.

Church was built upon that Rock. . . I beg you to settle this dispute. If you desire it I shall not be afraid to say there are Three Hypostases. If it is your wish let them draw up a Symbol of faith subsequent to that of Nicæa, and let us orthodox praise God in the same form of words as the Arians employ.⁵⁹

And in his next letter: "Meanwhile I keep crying out, 'Any man who is joined to Peter's Chair, he is my man.'"⁶⁰ Since he had learnt this "rule of faith" from his study of the Bible, he was able to refute a false interpretation of a Biblical text with the simple remark: "Yes, but the Church of God does not admit that."⁶¹ When, again, Vigilantius quoted an Apocryphal book, Jerome was content to reply: "A book I have never so much as read! For what is the good of soiling one's hands with a book the Church does not receive?"⁶² With his strong insistence on adhering to the integrity of the faith, it is not to be wondered at that he attacked vehemently those who left the Church; he promptly regarded them as his own personal enemies. "To put it briefly," he says, "I have never spared heretics, and have always striven to regard the Church's enemies as my own."⁶³ To Rufinus he writes: "There is one point in which I cannot agree with you: you ask me to spare heretics—or, in other words—not to prove myself a Catholic."⁶⁴ Yet at the same time Jerome deplored the lamentable state of heretics, and adjured them to return to their sorrowing Mother, the one source of salvation;⁶⁵ he prayed, too, with all earnestness for the conversion of those "who had quitted the Church and put away the Holy Spirit's teaching to follow their own notions."⁶⁶

Was there ever a time, Venerable Brethren, when there was greater call than now for us all, lay and cleric alike, to imbibe the spirit of this "Greatest of Doctors"? For there are many contumacious folk now who sneer at the authority and government of God, Who has revealed Himself, and of the Church which teaches. You know—for Leo XIII. warned us—"how insistently men fight against us; you know the arms and arts they rely upon." It is your duty, then, to train as many really fit defenders

⁵⁹ *Epist.* 15:1.

⁶⁰ *Epist.* 16:2.

⁶¹ *In Dan.* 3:37.

⁶² *Adv. Vigil.*, 6.

⁶³ *Dial. contra Pelagianos*, *Prol.* 2.

⁶⁴ *Contra Rufin.*, 3:43.

⁶⁵ *In Mich.* 1:10.

⁶⁶ *In Isa.* 16:1-5.

of this holiest of causes as you can. They must be ready to combat not only those who deny the existence of the Supernatural Order altogether, and are thus led to deny the existence of any divine revelation or inspiration, but those, too, who—through an itching desire for novelty—venture to interpret the sacred books as though they were of purely human origin; those, too, who scoff at opinions held of old in the Church, or who, through contempt of its teaching office, either reck little of, or silently disregard, or at least obstinately endeavor to adapt to their own views, the Constitutions of the Apostolic See or the decisions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

Would that all Catholics would cling to St. Jerome's golden rule and obediently listen to their Mother's words, so as modestly to keep within the bounds marked out by the Fathers and ratified by the Church.

4. PIETY AND HUMILITY

To return, however, to the question of the formation of Biblical students. We must lay the foundations in piety and humility of mind; only when we have done that does St. Jerome invite us to study the Bible. In the first place, he insists, in season and out, on daily reading of the text. "Provided," he says, "our bodies are not the slaves of sin, wisdom will come to us; but exercise your mind, feed it daily with Holy Scripture."⁶⁷ And again: "We have got, then, to read Holy Scripture assiduously; we have got to meditate on the Law of God day and night so that, as expert money-changers, we may be able to detect false coin from true."⁶⁸

For matrons and maidens alike he lays down the same rule. Thus, writing to the Roman matron Laeta about her daughter's training, he says:

Every day she should give you a definite account of her Bible-reading.... For her the Bible must take the place of silks and jewels.... Let her learn the Psalter first, and find her recreation in its songs; let her learn from Solomon's Proverbs the way of life, from Ecclesiastes how to trample on the world. In Job she will find an example of patient virtue. Thence let her pass to the Gospels; they should always be in her hands. She should steep herself in the

⁶⁷ *Comment. in Tit.* 3:9.

⁶⁸ *Comment. in Eph.* 4:31.

with the wishes of Leo XIII. As the experience of the past ten years has shown, it has proved a great gain to the Church. Not all, however, can avail themselves of this. It will be well, then, Venerable Brethren, that picked men, both of the secular and regular clergy, should come to Rome for Biblical study. All will not come with the same object. Some, in accordance with the real purpose of the Institute, will so devote themselves to Biblical study that "afterwards, both in private and in public, whether by writing or by teaching, whether as professors in Catholic schools or by writing in defense of Catholic truth, they may be able worthily to uphold the cause of Biblical study."⁷⁹ Others, however, already priests, will obtain here a wider knowledge of the Bible than they were able to acquire during their theological course; they will gain, too, an acquaintance with the great commentators and with Biblical history and geography. Such knowledge will avail them much in their ministry; they will be "instructed to every good work."⁸⁰

VI PURPOSE OF BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE

1. SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

We learn, then, from St. Jerome's example and teaching the qualities required in one who would devote himself to Biblical study. But what, in his view, is the goal of such study? First, that from the Bible's pages we learn spiritual perfection. Meditating as he did day and night on the Law of the Lord and on His Scriptures, Jerome himself found there the "Bread that cometh down from heaven," the manna containing all delights.⁸¹ And we certainly cannot do without that bread. How can a cleric teach others the way of salvation if through neglect of meditation on God's word he fails to teach himself? What confidence can he have that, when ministering to others, he is really "a leader of the blind, a light to them that are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, having the form of knowledge and of truth in the law," if he is unwilling to study the said Law and thus shuts the door on any divine illumination on it?

⁷⁹ Pius X., *Vinea electa*, May 7, 1909; *Acta Apost. Sedis*, I, 447-451.

⁸⁰ 2 Tim. 3:17.

⁸¹ *Tract. in Ps.* 147.

any mistake in them, to explain it and thus make the text perfectly clear. The precise meaning, too, that attaches to particular words has to be worked out, for "when discussing Holy Scripture it is not words we want so much as the meaning of words."⁸⁵ We do not for a moment deny that Jerome, in imitation of Latin and Greek doctors before him, leaned too much, especially at the outset, towards allegorical interpretations. But his love of the Bible, his unceasing toil in reading and re-reading it and weighing its meaning, compelled him to an ever-growing appreciation of its literal sense and to the formulation of sound principles regarding it. These we set down here, for they mark out a safe path for us if we would discover the Bible's meaning.

In the first place, then, we must study the literal or historical meaning:

I earnestly warn the prudent reader not to pay attention to superstitious interpretations such as are given cut and dried according to some interpreter's fancy. He should study the beginning, middle, and end, and so form a connected idea of the whole of what he finds written.⁸⁶

Jerome then goes on to say that all interpretation rests on the literal sense,⁸⁷ and that we are not to think that there is no literal sense merely because a thing is said metaphorically, for "the history itself is often presented in metaphorical dress and described figuratively."⁸⁸ Indeed, he himself affords the best refutation of those who maintain that he says that certain passages have no historical meaning: "We are not rejecting the history, we are merely giving a spiritual interpretation of it."⁸⁹ Once, however, he has firmly established the literal or historical meaning, Jerome goes on to seek out deeper and hidden meanings, so as to nourish his mind with more delicate food. Thus he says of the Book of Proverbs—and he makes the same remark about other parts of the Bible—that we must not stop at the simple literal sense: "Just as we have to seek gold in the earth, for the kernel in the shell, for the chestnut's hidden fruit beneath

⁸⁵ *Epist.* 29:1.

⁸⁶ *In Matt.* 25:13.

⁸⁷ *Cf. in Ezech.* 38:1; 41:23; *in Marc.* 1:13-31; *Epist.* 129:6.

⁸⁸ *In Hab.* 3:14.

⁸⁹ *In Mark* 9:1-7; *cf. in Ezech.* 40:24-27.

also daily become more perfect and fruitful; and to that end We are specially intent on pointing out to all what yet remains to be done, with what spirit the Catholic exegete should undertake, at the present day, so great and noble a work, and to give new incentive and fresh courage to the laborers who toil so strenuously in the vineyard of the Lord.

1. RECOURSE TO ORIGINAL TEXTS

14. The Fathers of the Church in their time, especially Augustine, warmly recommended to the Catholic scholar, who undertook the investigation and explanation of the Sacred Scriptures, the study of the ancient languages and recourse to the original texts.²² However, such was the state of letters in those times, that not many—and these few but imperfectly—knew the Hebrew language. In the middle ages, when Scholastic Theology was at the height of its vigor, the knowledge of even the Greek language had long since become so rare in the West, that even the greatest Doctors of that time, in their exposition of the Sacred Text, had recourse only to the Latin version, known as the Vulgate.

15. On the contrary in this our time, not only the Greek language, which since the humanistic renaissance has been, as it were, restored to new life, is familiar to almost all students of antiquity and letters, but the knowledge of Hebrew also and of other oriental languages has spread far and wide among literary men. Moreover there are now such abundant aids to the study of these languages that the biblical scholar, who by neglecting them would deprive himself of access to the original texts, could in no wise escape the stigma of levity and sloth. For it is the duty of the exegete to lay hold, so to speak, with the greatest care and reverence of the very least expressions which, under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, have flowed from the pen of the sacred writer, so as to arrive at a deeper and fuller knowledge of his meaning.

16. Wherefore let him diligently apply himself so as to ac-

²² Cf. ex. gr. St. JEROME, *Praef. in IV Evang. ad Damasum*; PL 29, col. 526-527; St. AUGUSTINE, *De Doctr. christ.* II, 16; PL 34, col. 42-43.

CURRICULUM IN SEMINARIES

53. But it is plain to everyone that priests cannot duly fulfil all this, unless in their Seminary days they have imbibed a practical and enduring love for the Sacred Scriptures. Wherefore let the Bishops, on whom devolves the paternal care of their Seminaries, with all diligence see to it that nothing be omitted in this matter which may help towards the desired end. Let the professors of Sacred Scripture in the Seminaries give the whole course of biblical studies in such a way, that they may instruct the young aspirants to the Priesthood and to the ministry of the divine word with that knowledge of the Sacred Letters and imbue them with that love for the same, without which it is vain to hope for copious fruits of the apostolate.

54. Hence their exegetical explanation should aim especially at the theological doctrine, avoiding useless disputations and omitting all that is calculated rather to gratify curiosity than to promote true learning and solid piety. The literal sense and especially the theological let them propose with such definiteness, explain with such skill and inculcate with such ardor that in their students may be in a sense verified what happened to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, when, having heard the words of the Master, they exclaimed: "Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He opened to us the Scriptures?"³⁶

55. Thus the Divine Letters will become for the future priests of the Church a pure and never-failing source for their own spiritual life, as well as food and strength for the sacred office of preaching which they are about to undertake. If the professors of this most important matter in the Seminaries accomplish all this, then let them rest joyfully assured that they have most efficaciously contributed to the salvation of souls, to the progress of the Catholic faith, to the honor and glory of God, and that they have performed a work most closely connected with the apostolic office.

VALUE OF DIVINE WORD

56. If these things which We have said, Venerable Brethren and beloved sons, are necessary in every age, much more urgently

³⁶ Lk. 24:32.