

The Truth Of Scripture

By Rev C. Lattey, S.J.

Catholic Truth Society of Ireland No.sc043a (1947)

1. Introductory.

— The following pamphlet is not concerned with the truth of Scripture merely in the same way that one might test the trustworthiness of any other books. In the case of non-biblical works, one would usually try to discover whatever other evidence there was bearing upon the subject in hand, and after considering it carefully examine the particular book in question, with a view to discovering how far it squared with all that other evidence now available. The result might be to convince the student that the work was thoroughly reliable, or else that it was thoroughly unreliable, or again that its historical value lay somewhere between these extremes, perhaps nearer the one, perhaps nearer the other. But the conclusion would always be made a posteriori — that is to say, it would be the direct result of an investigation made into all or most of the statements involved, and would depend upon the investigator having been able to satisfy himself that all or most or some definite proportion of them were false or true. Such is (speaking roughly) the purely human and historical method of estimating the truth of any human writing.

Now, when it comes to assuring ourselves of the full extent of the truth of Holy Scripture, we rest our conclusion upon totally different grounds. We believe with the certainty of faith that it can contain no formal error. This is an a priori conviction; we might have it before we ever read a word of Scripture, and very many have it who have never studied Scripture seriously. It is based upon the fact that Almighty God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, is the principal author of Holy Writ. This is the Catholic doctrine of inspiration, which is the foundation of what is to be said here about the truth of the Scriptures; and therefore the best introduction to this pamphlet will probably be its fellow "Inspiration", by the same author. It must be enough to repeat here with some brief explanations the definition furnished on page 2 of that pamphlet, which in this way it will not be absolutely essential, but merely helpful to read. The same is true in a lesser degree of the pamphlets on Revelation and Prophecy

2. Inspiration.

— The definition therefore runs as follows:

“Biblical inspiration is a charismatic enlightening of the intellect and motion of the will and divine assistance bestowed upon the sacred writer, to the end that he may write all those things and only those things which God wishes to be written in His name and to be delivered as such to the Church.”

“Charismatic.” This convenient word is taken from the so-called charismata (or “gifts”) of 1 Corinth 12, which bear some likeness to inspiration, though inspiration itself is not discussed there. Two points should particularly be noticed. (1) The word implies that inspiration is not given for the benefit of the individual. Inspired, at all events primarily, but for the sake of the Church; the Old Testament was written for the sake of the Jews as well. (2) It also implies that inspiration is a

transient action, in this resembling actual graces: it does not last beyond the time during which God is having written what He wishes written. It is liable to interruption, since a work would not usually be completed in one sitting. Later copies or translations of the inspired work are not themselves inspired in the strict sense of the term.

“Divine assistance.” This, as distinguished from the motion of intellect and will, includes all the outward circumstances needed for the writing of the work. Inspiration is not merely a spiritual action upon the soul; it is not complete until the work intended by God be actually written, for which a supply of writing materials and many other outward circumstances are necessary.

“Delivered as such to the Church.” This means in the main that biblical inspiration is revealed by God to the Church, and that at the same time He gives to the Church the right and duty of teaching the fact of that inspiration. This fact of inspiration is part of the deposit of faith, which was closed with the end of the apostolic age. Almighty God may have inspired other books, but, if so, He has not entrusted the Church with the right and duty of proclaiming this fact, nor can she put forth any infallible teaching to that effect. If anyone thinks that such a book as the *Imitation of Christ* must have been inspired, he is free to do so, and his opinion is not contrary to the Catholic faith, but nobody else is bound to follow his opinion, which would rest purely upon such arguments as he could bring up in his favour. The Church would not be very likely to interfere, unless an individual contended for the inspiration of a book quite unworthy in some way or other of Almighty God; so that there would be cause to prevent disrespect to the Divine Majesty.

For clearness also, it may be repeated that antecedent revelation is not necessary for inspiration; Almighty God can guide the intellect and will of the sacred writer without a revelation properly so called — indeed the writer may not even be conscious that he is being inspired. But the inspired book, when completed, may truly be said to contain consequent revelation — that is to say, revelation that is the essential consequence of inspiration, because the statements come to us in the name and with the authority of God Himself.

It may be well also to remind the reader that this biblical inspiration is not at all the same thing as prophetic inspiration, which latter (as may be seen in the pamphlet on Prophecy) does not necessarily involve any writing at all, but does involve a revelation, together with a mission from God to communicate that revelation to some other person or persons, usually (in the Old Testament) to the Chosen People.

3. Inerrancy.

— So far there has been mention only of the truth of Scripture, but we must now turn our attention to the more technical term “inerrancy,” which is far too convenient to be left out from these explanations. By inerrancy is meant the absence of formal error, a definition which now calls for comment. In the first place, we notice that it is a negative term, like infallibility, to which we shall shortly be comparing it; it is the absence of something. This way of treating the subject is far simpler and clearer, and indeed is often adopted in other connections also, when the object is to vindicate the truthfulness of persons or statements. What finally destroys the claim to truth is the proof of error. And again, in a certain sense, error is something more tangible than truth. To illustrate this, we may take the case of many a poem or novel; we might be puzzled to say exactly where was the truth in it, but if somebody said that the author was a liar, we should be prepared at once and with certainty to repudiate the charge. And so it is with Holy Writ. “Who has understood the mind of the Lord?” So Saint Paul cries twice over (Romans 11:34; 1 Corinth 2:16; and see Isa.

11:13); and we ourselves have far better reason than he for eschewing such presumption. We cannot always give the exact sense and force of a passage of Holy Scripture, and at the same time prove it to be true; but if someone claims to prove positively that there is a real mistake in Holy Scripture, we generally have no great difficulty in finding a flaw in his argument. And even if we did have great difficulty in so doing, we should still believe that the flaw was there.

It must be borne, in mind, however, that it is God's meaning that is in question, not that of the human writer 'who is God's instrument'; he too cannot always "understand the mind of the Lord," and indeed, like the rest of us mortals, may be said never to understand it fully. All that we can hope for is that it may be understood better and better as time goes on. In particular, the New Testament has helped greatly to a deeper understanding of the Old, according to the old saying, *Novum in Vetere latet: Vetus in Novo patet* (the New Testament lies hidden in the Old: the Old lies revealed in the New).

Two illustrations may be offered of the above principle. The Epistle to the Hebrews opens with the truth that of old God spoke through the prophets (translating quite literally) "in many portions and in many ways." As an example of one of these "many ways" we may take the prophecy by Caiaphas in John 11:50. He speaks with all the rudeness said by the Jewish historian Josephus (*Jewish War*, book 2, chapter 8, number 14) to be characteristic of the Sadducees, to which party the high-priestly families largely belonged (See Acts 4:1, and 5:17). "Ye know nothing at all," he says, which is equivalent to saying, "You are talking nonsense": and he goes on to say, "neither do you consider that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and the whole nation not perish." If we had no further guidance from the Evangelist in the matter, we should be inclined to say simply that he had the wrong idea that Our Lord would stir up the Jews to rebellion, and therefore had better be put to death Himself beforehand, because otherwise the Romans would cause the whole nation to perish. But we know from Saint John's comment that Caiaphas was unwittingly 'delivering a message from God', inasmuch as it was in the divine plan that Christ should offer Himself in sacrifice for the redemption of the Jews (and, as Saint John adds, of "the scattered children of God" also). It was through Christ's atoning death that all the Jews who were to go to Heaven should be saved, whether in the time of the 'Old' or 'New' Testament.

The above is an example taken from prophetic, not biblical, inspiration; we may turn to the latter for an example of God speaking "in many portions" — that is to say, revealing often only a part of the truth, for which the Jews were more ready. In the Book of Malachy, it is prophesied that the Old Testament sacrifices are to be rejected by God,

"For from the rising of the sun even unto the setting thereof

My name shall be great among the Gentiles,

And in every place

There shall be sacrifice, there shall be offering

Unto my name, even a pure oblation." (Malachy 1:11)

The objection has been raised that the prophet did not foresee the sacrifice of the Mass. That may well be true, though it cannot be proved; but even if it be true, it is no less true that the above lines contain a true prophecy, which is found to be fulfilled only in the Mass. Almighty God, for His own good reasons, revealed only a part of the truth; but this should have been enough to prevent

Protestants from saying that the Mass is contrary to Holy Scripture. Indeed, they cannot give a satisfactory explanation of the lines.

4. Formal Error.

— At the beginning of the previous section inerrancy was defined as “the absence of formal error,” a definition which now demands a fuller explanation. By formal error is meant a mistake or untruth in the objective meaning of the words, an expression which again calls for some explanation. The truth of Holy Scripture is so much attacked nowadays that it is necessary to be very careful and precise in its defence. By the “objective” meaning, we intend to exclude any subjective ideas of their own, that some rationalists may try to read into the text, although they are not really there. We may be faced, for example, with an airy remark that the writer of the Book of Genesis obviously had quite wrong ideas about scientific matters. Well, possibly he had; but that does not convict him of formal error. Our only inference would be that, if his ideas were wrong, the Holy Ghost kept him from committing himself to them when he was writing the Book of Genesis. And many-passages of Scripture are quoted as being wrong which can be justified, once we examine them with care and reverence; within the space of this pamphlet, it is only possible to speak in rather general terms and lay down some important principles.

The “objective” meaning, then, is the meaning truly contained in the words. This meaning will usually, of course, be fairly obvious, but sometimes careful reading will be needed to discover it; sometimes, indeed, but only rarely, prolonged study and accurate scholarship. There are cases, in fact, where it has not proved possible to attain to absolute certainty, at all events up to the present time.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission, it may be noticed, has evidently not thought the time ripe as yet for determining the method of interpretation to be applied to some books of Scripture. In 1905 it dealt with two methods of meeting difficulties, chiefly in the historical books; in neither case did it prohibit them, but merely required safeguards that the methods were justified by the objective meaning of the words. The first proposal was to treat some passages as ‘implicit quotations’: that is to say, the sacred writer would be supposed merely to be quoting documentary sources, without committing himself to them, so that it would not matter if there were error in such passages. He would merely be reporting the errors of others. The Biblical Commission in its answer required (1) that there should be solid proof that the writer really was making a quotation: and (2) that he was not approving the words or making them his own, so as to be committing himself to them. If, that is to say, the objective meaning of the biblical words clearly implies the objective truth of what is supposed to be quoted, then there must be no formal error in the quotation.

The other answer dealt with a question of literary form. In the ‘case of books usually looked upon as historical, may it be accepted as a principle of correct interpretation’, that sometimes either in whole or part they are narrating, not history properly so called and objectively true, but what bears the appearance only of history, in order to signify something other than the strictly literal or historical meaning of the words? The answer is negative, except in the case, not easily or rashly to be admitted, where it is proved by solid arguments that the sacred writer wished to present, not true history properly so called, but under the appearance and form of history a parable or allegory or some meaning different from the strictly literal or historical meaning of the words: always supposing that such an exception and interpretation is not against the mind of the Church, and with proper submission to her judgment. An obvious parallel from modern English literature would be

the historical novel, a mixture of fact and fiction of which there are many examples, such as some of the works of the late Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson.

5. The Scope of Inerrancy.

— It will be understood from what has gone before that the scope of inerrancy is universal: wherever a statement is made in Holy Scripture, there the objective sense of the words is true. Towards the end of last century, [the 19th] a few Catholic writers wished to limit unduly the scope of inerrancy, the most distinguished among them being Cardinal Newman. It may be enough here to quote in this regard what has already been written in the pamphlet on Inspiration (page 8):

In the Nineteenth Century for February, 1884, he wrote an article, “On the Inspiration of Scripture” (pages 185-99), wherein he suggested that obiter dicta, casual and parenthetical remarks need not be inspired, and need not be true; he even seems to suggest that truth, necessary and infallible, may be considered to be limited to matters bearing on faith or morals. He wrote, however, “unreservedly submitting what I have written to the judgment of the Holy See,” and the adverse judgment of the Holy See on the main issue is clearly expressed in the *Providentissimus Deus*.

To the *Providentissimus Deus*, the great encyclical of Pope Leo XIII upon biblical studies, we shall have occasion to return. It may be said at once, however, that it insists strongly upon the fundamental principle of divine authorship: the essential question to ask is, who has written the Bible, not why He has written it. The mere fact that a statement does not directly touch upon faith or morals is no reason for doubting its truth, when it comes to us as a statement from Almighty God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Nor is it possible, (if one may reverently write in this way) that He should have produced some obiter dicta without adverting to the fact that they were untrue.

It may be asked, and has been asked, what does it matter, if some sentences that bear no relation to faith or morals should prove untrue? Why bother about these unessential and irrelevant matters? To this it must be answered, that the essential and relevant fact about such sentences is that they have God for author: deny that, and then they are Scripture no more, and we have nothing left us but purely human documents, and incidentally in that case the Church could only be considered a purely human society, herself without divine authority or truth, because she would be wrong in respect of a fundamental article of faith.

In the second place, we must say once again, as in our section 3, above, “who has understood the mind of the Lord?” We must not be in such a hurry to measure God’s purposes by our own short-sighted guesswork; if it may be said so reverently, we might be more ready to give Him the benefit of the doubt. Though, on the other hand, we must beware of calling “mystery” too often and too easily; often we can understand something of the divine plan if we meditate upon it well. What seem irrelevant details may be found, for example, to give us a more vivid picture of the background of the prophetic preaching; and the history of the Chosen People is full of lessons for us if we will but attend to them. What does Saint Paul say? “Whatsoever things were written aforetime [that is, in the Old Testament] were written for our instruction, that through patience and through the comfort of the scriptures we may have hope” (Romans 15:4).

6. Words Reported.

— In the discussion of formal error in our Section 4, above, mention has been made of an answer of the Pontifical Biblical Commission dealing with the suggestion that some passages might be treated

as “implicit quotations”, a difficulty arising from such a passage might be met by assuming that the writer was merely reporting the words (right or wrong) of others. Such a suggestion was based on what is certainly the right way to treat explicit quotations, recognized for such beyond all doubt. The principle here involved needs some further explanation, which will be best understood if it takes the form of concrete examples.

Let us take an extreme case, which will make the matter all the clearer. Saint John reports in his Gospel that many of the Jews said of Our Lord, “He has a devil, and is mad” (John 10:20). Now, it is clear that the mere fact that this sentence occurs in Scripture does not make it true; what is true is that many of the Jews uttered the sentence. And so we come to an important distinction: where the words of some person or persons are reported in Scripture, inerrancy is to be found, not necessarily in the words reported, which may be true or false, but in the accuracy of the report. In such a case we are sure of the truth of the narrative (*veritas narrationis*), but not of the words narrated to have been spoken (*veritas narrati*). This is obvious in the instance just given, but is not always so readily realized where the words themselves are not palpably false. Thus, in the note upon Acts 7:16 in the Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures it is said that “Saint Stephen seems to confuse the cave of Machpelah, bought by Abraham from Ephron the Hittite (Genesis 23:3-20 and see Genesis 50:13) with the piece of ground at Shechem bought by Jacob from the sons of Hamor (Joshua 24:32).” A reference is given to Acts 7:2-4, where a somewhat similar difficulty arises, and is discussed at some length. A true report is given of Saint Stephen’s words, but there is no sufficient reason to suppose that he was infallible, and his memory appears to have been at fault.

It is the Catholic view that the Apostles (differing in this from Saint Stephen) enjoyed a personal infallibility in the teaching of faith and morals, not necessarily depending at all times upon an immediate revelation, any more than papal infallibility is in need of such a revelation, though Almighty God may at times use this means to guarantee it if He choose.

Our Lord’s infallibility, on the other hand, was universal, because, as the Nicene Creed says, He was “true God of true God.” The words which He is reported in the Gospels to have spoken are therefore necessarily true, not in virtue of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, which only guarantee a true report of them, but in virtue of His Godhead. The point is worth noting in regard of such a book, for example, as Dr. Cadoux’s recent (1943) work, *The Historic Mission of Jesus*, in which he denies Our Lord’s infallibility, without any attempt to make out that the Gospels seriously misrepresent Him in the crucial doctrines. His chief objection appears to be to Our Lord’s doctrine of Hell (pages 344-5); although one would have thought that the divine government of the world could hardly be vindicated without some appalling punishment for the appalling crimes committed in these last years. It would be out of place to discuss such an issue here; it is much to our purpose, however, to notice that it is Our Lord that is said to have erred, not the Bible.

7. The Dogma of Inerrancy.

— Now that (as may be hoped) a fairly adequate idea has been secured of the essential nature of inerrancy, it is time to make it plain that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is an article of faith.

It has already been explained in section 1, above, that this doctrine follows from the fact that Almighty God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived, is the principal author of Holy Writ. This is evidently true, but it is not quite the whole truth; it must be added that biblical inerrancy is an article of faith in its own right. This means to say that Almighty God has not left it to us to draw the conclusion, obvious though it is, from the fact of inspiration, but has Himself revealed the truth.

Hence, we do not believe in biblical inerrancy simply because we see with our human reason that it is logically involved in the belief in another article of faith; but about inerrancy, as about inspiration, we believe God directly. That is the essence of an article of faith, taken absolutely in itself, apart from any possible preliminaries or accompaniments: to believe simply upon the authority of God revealing.

The doctrine of biblical inerrancy has never been in serious doubt in the Church; there have been no controversies about it worth mentioning. From the earliest times, it has been so much taken for granted, even by the Protestants, that not much attention has been paid to it until quite recent times. It was with the advent of the so called Liberal Protestantism and of agnosticism and of “the higher criticism” that the truth of the Bible came to be called in question, and that in consequence the Catholic defence of the Bible came to receive increasing attention and to be better organised.

In this country, (the United Kingdom) the most important historical landmark was probably the appearance in 1890 of *Lux Mundi*, edited by the late (Anglican) Bishop Gore. It ran through twelve editions in little over a year, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (in its 11th edition) truly remarks in its article upon him that “it is largely due to its influence, and to that of the school it represents, that the High Church movement developed thenceforth on Modernist rather than Tractarian lines.” Gore abandoned the inerrancy of Holy Scripture, and the next year, in his Bampton Lectures at Oxford on “The Incarnation,” the infallibility of Christ also.

A full theological proof of the inerrancy of Scripture cannot of course be attempted here. The serious student may be referred to the great work, *De Inspiratione Sacrae Scripturae*, by Father Christian Pesch, S.J., published by Herder in 1906, with an important supplement published in 1926, bringing the treatment up to that date.

In the first place, it may be noticed that the inerrancy of the Old Testament is clearly set forth in the New. Father Pesch, in his *Praelectiones Dogmaticae* (volume 1, edition 3, number 606; Herder, 1903) has calculated that such phrases as, “It is written,” or “The Scripture says,” occur about 150 times in the New Testament with reference to the Old, and always with the implication of inerrancy. It may be enough here to mention Our Lord’s own use of the expression in Matthew 4:4, 7, and 10. He uses even stronger words in John 10:35, where, after quoting an Old Testament sentence, He remarks, to use the translation in the Westminster Version, “the Scripture cannot be evaded.” Saint Paul has an even stronger and quite surprising remark upon the same subject, for, so far as words go, he attributes the divine foreknowledge to the passage of Scripture itself, which is based upon it. “The Scripture,” he writes, “foreseeing that it was through faith that God would justify the Gentiles, foretold to Abraham that ‘in you shall all the nations be blessed’.” (Gal. 3:8). In the same way, the divine purpose of salvation is imputed to “the Scripture” in Gal. 3:22. This much must suffice for the New Testament.

The testimony of Catholic tradition to the doctrine could fill volumes; but at least one striking passage may be quoted here, which has behind it a manifold authority of the greatest possible weight. Saint Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica* (Volume 1, Question 1, article 8, reply to objection 2), quotes a letter from Saint Augustine to Saint Jerome (nowadays usually numbered as 82) in which he writes: “Only to those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learnt to pay awe and honour of such a kind, that I believe most firmly that no author of them has committed any error in writing them.”

Augustine goes on to express his belief that his view of the matter is also Saint Jerome's. Thus the greatest of the Latin doctors takes it for granted that "the greatest of doctors in the exposition of the Sacred Scriptures," as the Church calls Saint Jerome upon his feast, will agree with him upon the doctrine of inerrancy; and Saint Thomas Aquinas, who now possesses the greatest authority of any single doctor of the Church, likewise agrees with him so fully as to quote him, as do likewise Pope Leo XIII in the *Providentissimus Deus* and Pope Benedict XV in the *Spiritus Paraclitus*, both of which encyclicals now call for mention.

In modern times, the *Providentissimus Deus*, the great biblical encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, the Magna Carta of the study of Holy Scripture, the golden jubilee of which falls into this year (1943), has not only made fruitful provision for the advance of such study, but has asserted more strongly and clearly than ever the fundamental doctrines which underlie the whole subject.

After insisting (as we have already seen in section 5, above) that in the matter of inerrancy the essential question is, not why the Bible was written, but who wrote it, it proceeds to lay down the principle that it is as impossible that error should be in Holy Scripture as it is impossible for God to be the author of any error.

In the dogmatic part of the *Providentissimus Deus*, Pope Leo is defining the relevant doctrines for the whole Church, clearly intending that his teaching should be accurately followed both in principle and practice by all Catholics whatever in their treatment of Holy Scripture. The matter has not often been discussed at all fully, but to the present writer it appears that all the conditions for papal infallibility are here verified, so that this teaching must be held by all. A later encyclical issued by Pope Benedict XV in 1920, the *Spiritus Paraclitus*, pressed home the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and closed the way to some evasions, but, having regard to the limits of available space, it must be enough here to have made respectful mention of it.

8. The Church and the Bible.

— It is indeed the doctrine of inerrancy that creates the difficulty; it is there, if one may use the homely phrase, that the shoe pinches. Consequently, it is there also that the vigilance of the Church and the Holy See has most been needed. Many would have no great difficulty in any abstract doctrine of biblical inspiration, if it were not for the very practical and concrete applications which the doctrine finds in biblical inerrancy, applications which for one reason or another they feel unable to accept.

In the first place, it must be realised that the Church has the right both to make such applications herself and to control the treatment of Holy Scripture by her children. All that belongs to Catholic faith and morals falls within her province, so that it is her right and duty, not only to teach the doctrine of inerrancy in the abstract, but to see that it is not violated in the concrete. This is quite evident where the Scriptures themselves are dealing with faith and morals; but even where they are treating with quite different topics, such as facts of history or science, it is still the duty of the Church to see that they are not interpreted in such a way as to involve formal error. In such cases the right of the Church to issue a decision upon the interpretation is indirect and negative, being based, not upon the nature of the questions themselves (seeing that they are not in themselves questions of faith or morals), but upon the inspiration and inerrancy of the passages involved. In this way, the right to intervene is indirect: it is also negative, because it remains true - that it is not the function of the Church to decide questions of mere history or mere science, but only to rule out of court explanations which cannot be reconciled with biblical inerrancy. Still by way of safeguarding

inerrancy, the Church may even lay down what is the true meaning of the passage, or the possible meanings, but (in matters, as has been said, which do not directly concern faith and morals) without going beyond what belongs to the interpretation of the passage. Ulterior questions of history or science do not concern her.

It must not be inferred from this that the Church is always willing and able to give an immediate and infallible answer to any difficulty that may arise; she has received no promise that justifies such an expectation. There has been a certain development in her doctrine, as may be seen, for example, in Cardinal Newman's famous *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, which in a sense brought him into the Church. Doctrines have taken time to mature; the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, to take an obvious case, could hardly be perfectly understood until that of original sin had been clearly defined. And in much smaller questions, including those of a biblical character, it is sometimes through the tentative answers of Catholic theologians and scholars that the full truth finally comes to be clearly and authoritatively, set forth. In other cases it may happen that such a satisfactory solution is not quickly or easily found, and indeed there still are and doubtless always will be biblical problems that have not yet found their definite solution. But even so, it remains the right and duty of the Church to forbid solutions which she sees to offend against Catholic faith or morals, and more particularly against biblical inerrancy.

It is not only the interpretation of the Bible, however, but the Bible itself that falls under the care of the Church as the guardian of Catholic faith and morals. It is for the Church to decide what is Scripture; and this means that it is her right and duty, not merely to determine and teach the canon of Scripture, as has been explained in Section 2, above, but also to safeguard the text of Scripture. It is the function of textual criticism to make known the exact text of Scripture, but this must be done with proper submission to the authority of the Church, to whom it certainly belongs to prevent erroneous omissions, additions, or changes. Speaking generally, she does not carry this supervision into minute details, but only checks mistakes of some importance. To her children who belong to the Latin rite she offers the Latin Vulgate as a translation substantially faithful, and safe in faith and morals. In her Eastern rites, Greek and Arabic and other languages are used in the liturgy and for other sacred purposes.

9. Catholic Apologetic.

— In all that has been said so far the purpose has been to set forth the full Catholic doctrine in regard of biblical inerrancy, and in regard of any other subjects which it has been necessary or useful to bring into the discussion.

It is now time to explain that there is also another way of treating Holy Scripture which is very important for the proper proof and defence of the Catholic position.

This is usually said to be the apologetic way of treating it. It does not mean to say that Catholics feel any need of apologising for Holy Scripture in the ordinary sense of the word (far from it), but that this treatment of Holy Scripture is essential to Catholic apologetic. The word *apologia* in Greek (as in Plato's *Apologia*) means a speech or writing in defence of a person or cause, and this meaning has been taken over into English (as in Cardinal Newman's *Apologia*), and our word "apology" is also used in this sense. It is this meaning, too, which must be given to the term "apologetic" as used above: Catholic apologetic means the defence of the Catholic position, but "defence" taken in a wide sense, involving the proof of that position no less than answers to objections against it.

The apologetic treatment of Holy Scripture, as we shall see, must be adopted in answering certain objections; but it is chiefly necessary in proving the divine mission of Christ and of the Church. This proof is part of any course of scientific theology, but no Catholic can be said to be properly instructed who does not understand something about it. It represents the passage from reason to faith. What can be known by the light of reason, and is taught in the course of Catholic philosophy, is presupposed; it embraces such subjects as the nature of human knowledge, and the existence of the soul and of Almighty God, so far as God and the soul can be known by reason. Nowadays such truths as these need to be taught to all children at school, together with the solid grounds for holding them; it is not easy to bring them home to the young, or for that matter to their elders either, but in the present state of ignorance and indifference in the world at large. Catholics are not safe in their faith without some grounding in these fundamental truths of reason.

It is these truths which must be supposed as having been learnt, whether in a scientific course of philosophy before the ecclesiastical student comes to the scientific course of theology, or in a more popular course of instruction before a corresponding course of religious doctrine. This popular course, again, may be one given to children at school, or to Catholic adults who have the good sense and zeal to desire it (as, for example, in the Catholic Evidence Guild), or to converts who are practically learning these truths for the first time as the foundation to the more strictly theological part.

This much then presupposed, we wish to show that Christ had a divine mission from God. We cannot take it for granted that He is God; or that the Church is infallible, because by so doing we should involve ourselves in the vicious circle of which we are so often accused: we should be presupposing in our argument the very conclusion which we are setting out to prove. What we really do is to proceed to show (so far as the time and other circumstances allow) that the Gospels are reliable historical documents; after which we proceed to use them as such. The Gospels are chiefly needed; but some other writings, both in the Bible and out of it, can usefully be included in the study if this be reasonably possible.

It may be said shortly (since we are not dealing with Catholic apologetic as such) that mainly from the Gospels, shown to be reliable documents, we prove that Our Lord claimed to have an absolute mission from God which all were bound to accept, and that He proved His claim in various ways, but especially by His miracles. Upon the strength of that claim He founded His Church, and endowed it with the threefold power of teaching, government, and ministry: it is infallible in teaching faith and morals: it is a supreme society, subject in its own sphere to no earthly ruler: it exercises a ministry of sacrifice and sacrament. A part of the Church's infallible teaching, as we have sufficiently seen, is her doctrine of biblical inerrancy. The doctrine of biblical inerrancy thus supposes much already proved, and may not be presupposed in proving it. As has been explained above; it would involve a vicious circle to suppose that the Gospels cannot contain any formal error; such a claim could be justified only if the doctrine of biblical inerrancy had been already proved. It is not essential to prove even that the Gospels do not contain formal error. It is not essential, for example, in order to prove Christ's resurrection, to show that there is absolutely no discrepancy in the four Gospel accounts.

Discrepancy in minor points between independent accounts does not invalidate their testimony to some important event in which they all agree.

In the same way, for apologetic purposes, it is not necessary to prove the absolute and entire infallibility of Christ; that follows only from His Divinity, which can be left out from the apologetic course, and left over for the dogmatic treatises. Some, indeed, prefer to prove Christ's claim to Divinity itself in apologetics, but this seems unwise, because it hinders more than it helps; one must at once bring in the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, in order to meet the Jewish and Moslem objection that there cannot be two gods. We can prove that Christ was worthy of absolute acceptance as a religious teacher; but it is not necessary to show that even in remarks of no religious import upon matters in themselves indifferent He was incapable of formal error. It should be remarked, however, that the rejections of Christ's infallibility already mentioned in Sections 6-7, above, imply formal error in His religious teaching, and call for refutation as an apologetic as well as a dogmatic necessity.

In conclusion, it may briefly be indicated that this apologetic treatment of Holy Writ is approved by the Holy See. To give but one example, the Pontifical Biblical Commission (on May 29, 1907) lays it down that the evidence is sufficient to prove that Saint John was the author of the Fourth Gospel, even "abstracting from the theological argument" — that is to say, not appealing to the words of the Gospel precisely as inspired, or to the authority of the Church in various pronouncements which would have some bearing on the question. It is the duty of the lecturers in our Catholic seminaries, therefore, and of other Catholic teachers, to show that there is sufficient "apologetic" (that is, merely literary and historical) proof that Saint John wrote the Gospel which passes under his name.

It has been said earlier in this section that the apologetic treatment of Scripture must sometimes be adopted in answering difficulties.

If for example, it were said that Saint Paul taught the old Protestant theory of merely imputed justification, without any inward transformation of the soul by sanctifying grace, it would not be a very satisfactory answer to bring up the decrees of the Council of Trent, and to say that the Apostle's doctrine must square with them. It is a poor compliment to Scripture to suppose that it can only be defended *a priori* in this way; it is plain enough when read carefully and under competent guidance, and is meant in the main to support Catholic doctrine, not to be supported by it. And to support Catholic doctrine it must be treated apologetically, without the proofs being drawn from Catholic doctrine itself.

10. Biblical Interpretation.

— In the preceding sections the attempt has been made to explain the Catholic doctrine of biblical inerrancy in its general principles; in conclusion, something may be added about the application of those principles.

When we think of truth or inerrancy in connection with the sacred books, we are apt to fasten our attention too exclusively upon historical truth, and even then to take too narrow a view even of the narratives of events. The Bible is an Oriental library, written, it is true, under divine inspiration with a sacred purpose; but we can safely say that that sacred purpose was not to produce scientific history in the modern Western sense, nor yet to forestall the exact phraseology of modern science, or the methods of up-to-date journalism, or the dry-cut argumentation of scholasticism. The wider the literary experience of the reader, especially in Oriental literature, the more easily he will find himself in touch with Holy Writ.

Poetry to a large extent is the expression of human emotion and fancy, rather than "a banquet of unmitigated fact." The Psalmist desires the triumph of God's cause, which is the cause of Israel; he

prays for victory, which he depicts at times in all its horror, but his cry for vengeance does not reach beyond the grave. He depicts Jehovah in vivid imagery, which yet tells us much of the Divine Nature. (Jehovah is one of the accepted ways in English of writing down God's enigmatic answer to Moses' question of who was he to say had sent him on his mission. "He who is has sent me." See Exodus 3:13-14.)

Natural phenomena the sacred writer describes as they strike him. If we can speak of the sun rising and setting, without committing ourselves in our words to a false physical theory, so also can he. When therefore it is said that at Joshua's word "the sun stood still in the midst of heaven" (Joshua 10:13), it is enough that it appeared to do so, just as it is enough for us that the sun appears to rise. More than one guess has been made as to what really happened, but we are not told enough to be at all certain.

The inerrancy of Holy Writ extends to morality no less than to truth. The history related in it is not always edifying, nor is it intended to be so. We have in fact terrible summary of Old Testament history from Our Lord Himself in the parable of the householder who let out his vineyard to husbandmen (Matthew 21:33-46, et cetera) they maltreat or kill the servants sent to receive his dues and finally murder his son. No less terrible is the story: presented of the Jews by Saint Stephen in Acts 7, or Gentiles and Jews in Romans, chapters 1 to 3. Other passages might be mentioned. But the divine purpose, as Saint Paul shows in the Epistle to the Romans, was working itself out, and the record, as he says, was written for our instruction and comfort and hope (Romans 15:4); there is another side to the story, and from the whole we can derive much help.

It is impossible to speak here of more than a very few passages, whether in regard of inerrancy or morality; it must be enough to say that for a valid objection on the score of morality it would be necessary to prove both that the deed was wicked and that the inspired writing approved of it. Jephthe's sacrifice of his daughter in accordance with his vow, to mention just one incident, is related without the slightest praise (Judges 11:30-40), and was certainly wicked.

It is the doctrine of inerrancy that makes it possible for the devout Catholic to read his Bible without misgivings. It is good that he should advance in the understanding as in the love of it, and read what is easier first, without courting difficulties; but, above all, he should never forget that it is a gift from our Heavenly Father, coming to us with the authority of Him who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

C. Lattey, S.J., professor of Sacred Scripture at Heythrop College (now Heythrop Pontifical Athenaeum) in Oxfordshire, England, was president of the Society for Old Testament Study. He contributed the articles on Wisdom, Jeremiah, and Philippians to the 1953

Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture.
