

HINTS

ON THE

Study of the Sacred Books.

BY

MERWIN-MARIE SNELL.

WITH INTRODUCTION BY

A. J. FAUST, PH. D.

Non quæras, quis hoc dixerit; sed quis dicatur, attende.—*De Imitatione Christi*, lib. I, cap. v.

BALTIMORE:

JOHN MURPHY & CO.

1887.

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April 22, 1891.

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INTRODUCTION.

In a pamphlet on the study of the Bible prepared for the Catholic laity, it seems out of place to enter into any discussion relative to the use and abuse made of the Sacred Scriptures by those who reject the authority of the Catholic Church. The terms of the Apostolic Commission examined in the light of the inspired record and in the light of nineteen centuries of Christian history are witnesses which no sophistry can bewilder and no research impugn. They present a series of truths which constitute the divine charter of the Church and its patent of incorporation—first, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ established His Church on earth, and to His Church alone He promised indefectibility and infallibility till the end of the world; secondly, in the establishment of His Church, Our Lord appointed St. Peter the Rock of its foundation, and to him and to him alone in the Apostolic College He gave supreme jurisdiction under the symbol of the Keys; and thirdly, the prerogatives bestowed upon the Chief of the Apostles became by divine appointment the prerogatives of all successors to the Chair of Peter. Thus Scripture and history are the unbroken testimony to the great cardinal fact of Christian civilization—the Supremacy of the See of Rome.

With this divine fact, intellectually and ethically comprehended, as the luminous centre from which emanate dogmatic definitions pertaining alike to faith and morals, the Catholic reader of the Sacred Scriptures is prepared for their study under such limitations as the Church in her wisdom may see fit to enact by disciplinary decrees, when peculiar exigencies demand the exercise of her authority. Under the guidance of the *Ecclesia docens* the Catholic student of the Sacred Volume is fortified against an evil genius in modern Biblical criticism whose tendency, in harmony with the Protestant principle of private judgment, is to wrest from a pre-established system of Christian thought its hereditary right, to divert its nomenclature from definitive and authentic use, and make it the vehicle of novel and destructive theories.

The Catholic scholar who has examined the writings of the Fathers of the Church with reference to the Christian use of the Greek and Roman classics, will readily admit that a partial consensus can be formulated in their favor, of interest and of value in our day when the trend of popular

education is in a new direction. So also a consensus of teaching, patristic and conciliar, relative to the use and misuse of Holy Scripture can be drawn from the Christian writings of different periods, but while such an exposition of Catholic thought on an important subject would prove a desideratum for the laity, it would require more space than the introduction to a brief essay. A few facts of undoubted authenticity may be serviceable not only to the readers of this tractate on "The Study of the Sacred Books," but to those also desiring to follow the earnest suggestions of Mr. Snell in enlarging their knowledge of cognate subjects involved in the investigations urged upon their attention, and for which he has supplied suitable aids in the list of valuable Catholic books in English appended to his pamphlet. The principles with which the well-instructed Catholic may enter upon the study of the Bible devotionally or exegetically, are of supreme moment if he desire to keep within the domain of faith and morals—a position taken for granted by the author of this brochure and by the writer of this preface. I will enumerate some of these principles in the order in which they occur to my own mind, but they may be enlarged so as to include others of a character so special that I hardly consider the latter to be necessary for the class of readers for whom Mr. Snell writes.

It is of prime importance that the Catholic student should never lose sight of the facts—(1) That the Catholic Church settled the Canon of the Scripture as early as the fourth and fifth centuries by the Councils of Carthage and Rome, and by the authority of Pope Innocent and Pope Gelasius. (2) That the inspiration of Holy Scripture, like the canon determining its canonical books, cannot be consistently accepted or defended except by the tradition of the Catholic Church, the custodian of the full revelation of God to man, written and unwritten. (3) That belief in inspiration pre-supposes belief in an infallible interpreter, that it is a dogma *de fide* that the Catholic Church is the infallible interpreter, and that the decrees of the Council of Trent and the Council of the Vatican clearly define this dogma as follows: "Nemo sua prudentia innixus, in rebus fidei et morum ad aedificationem doctrinae Christianae pertinentium, Sacram Scripturam ad suos sensus contorquens, contra eum sensum quem tenuit et tenet Sancta Mater Ecclesia, cujus est judicare de vero et interpretatione Scripturarum Sanctorum, aut etiam contra unanimum consensum Patrum, ipsam Scripturam Sacram interpretari audeat."

"Let no one, relying on his own wisdom, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the inculcation of Christian doctrine, wresting the Sacred Scripture to his own meaning, dare to interpret that Sacred Scripture against that sense which Holy Mother Church has held and holds, to whom it belongs to judge of truth and the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, nor yet against the unanimous consent of the Fathers."

"Nos, idem Decretum renovantes, hanc illius mentem esse declaramus, ut in rebus fidei et morum ad aedificationem doctrinae Christianae pertinentium, is pro vero sensum Sacrae Scripturae habendus sit, quem tenuit et

tenet Sancta Mater Ecclesia, cujus est judicare de vero sensu et interpretatione Scripturarum Sanctorum."

"We, reviving that same decree (of Trent) declare this to be its intent: that in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the inculcation of Christian doctrine, that sense of the Sacred Scripture is to be held as the true one which Holy Mother Church has held and holds, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures."

(4) That in the reading of the Bible, whether the layman be learned or unlearned, the rule which a great Doctor of the Church laid down for his own guidance ought to suggest the spirit which should animate the modern student and ought to be to him the subject of frequent meditation. St. Augustine says:—"Ego fateor caritati tue, solis eis Scripturarum libris qui jam Canonici appellantur didici hunc timorem honoremque deferre, ut nullum eorum auctorem scribendo aliquid errasse firmissime credam. Ac si aliquid in eis offendero litteris, quod videtur contrarium veritatis nihil aliud, quam vel mendosum esse codicem, vel interpretem non assecutum esse quod dictum est, vel me minime intellexisse, non ambigam." "To your charity I submit the confession, that only to those books of the Scriptures which are already entitled Canonical do I pay this tribute of reverence and honor, as to believe undoubtingly that no author of these books ever erred in any of his writing. And if I ever find anything in these documents, which may seem contrary to truth, I shall assume unhesitatingly that either it is a faulty copy, or that the translator has not attained the sense of what was spoken, or that I have not understood it."

(5) The reading of the Scriptures by the laity in their own vernacular is not a recent practice among Catholics as some Protestant writers would fain make their co-religionists believe. Sir Thomas More, whom the Church calls Blessed, says that "the Holy Bible was long before Wickliffe's days, by virtuous and well-learned men translated into the English tongue, and by good and godly people, with devotion and soberness, well and reverently read." And this pious custom had the approbation of Pius the Sixth, expressed in a letter written in 1778 by his Secretary and addressed to a prelate, afterwards Archbishop of Florence, the Most Rev. Anthony Martini, who had made an Italian translation of the Bible. This letter is usually prefixed to the Douai Bible, and I quote the following passage:—"At a time that a vast number of bad books, which most grossly attack the Catholic religion, are circulated, even among the unlearned, to the great destruction of souls, you judge exceedingly well, that the faithful should be excited to the reading of the Holy Scriptures: for these are the most abundant sources which ought to be left open to every one, to draw from them purity of morals and of doctrine, to eradicate the errors which are so widely disseminated in these corrupt times."

A. J. FAUST.

WASHINGTON, D. C., *All Saints*, 1887.

NOTE.—A considerable portion of this little treatise consists of a series of articles published originally in the New Orleans *Morning Star*, in June and July, 1885. Sections I, II, and V have since been added and now appear for the first time; and the same is true of the appended list of works on Biblical subjects. In the other sections only a few slight alterations have been made.

THE STUDY OF THE SACRED BOOKS.

I.—DEFINITION OF THE TERM.

Nearly every people whose civilization has been derived from prehistoric times has inherited from its remote progenitors a body of literature which is the object of its deepest reverence. Of this class are the Vedas of the Hindoos, the Zend Avesta of the Persians, the five *Kings* and the four *Shoos* of the Chinese, and the Popul Vuh of the Quiché Indians. These books were rightly given a sacred character, for, whatever their errors and shortcomings, they preserved more of the divine traditions of the primitive age than could be gathered from any other source.¹

But when, as Catholics, we speak of *the* Sacred Books, we refer to those records which the very Deity who first revealed to man the truths of which all Gentile traditions are but the obscure and imperfect vehicles, made a means of perpetuating the same divine truths in an uncorrupted form and of preparing the way for the Universal Church of whose perfect and all-embracing teachings they were to be the profoundest embodiment and the unifying center. Knowing, through the analogies of nature, the unanswerable evidence of history, the deductions of pure reason, and the testimony of our spirits' deepest intuitions, that the Church is the guardian and infallible teacher of the divine revelation, we have the certain assurance of supernatural faith that she speaks the truth in asserting the divine inspiration and indubitable correctness of certain books; and the most searching investigations of modern science have served to again and again triumphantly vindicate this conclusion. It is true that it is impossible to establish

¹ Compare *Gentilism*, by Rev. Aug. J. Thébaud, S. J., 1876.

the character of most of the books from internal evidence; but in no case are their contents inconsistent with the claim which is made for them.

The writings which take this prominent place in the literature of the world, and are, therefore, collectively known as the Bible, *i. e.*, The Book, are divided into two classes, the Scriptures of the New Covenant, for which the Catholic Church is the only authority, and the Scriptures of the Old Covenant, most of which were acknowledged as divine in the local and preparatory era of the Church, and consequently are still found in the Jewish sect, which is the empty chrysalis-case discarded by the society of the faithful on emerging into a broader and higher life.

II.—THE DISPUTED BOOKS.

The books which the modern Jews agree in rejecting are those of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and I and II Machabees, and a part of Daniel, which are called by Catholics deutero-canonical, and by most sectarians apocryphal. Some assert, on the authority of the Talmud,² which was compiled several centuries A. D., that the Old Testament canon, or list of inspired writings, was closed by Esdras; but the facts of history do not bear out this statement. At the time of the Messiah there were two canons in general use; the Alexandrian, with which that of the Catholic Church coincides, and the Palestinian, which agreed nearly with that held by most Jews and Protestants at the present day.³ The Palestinian canon was even yet unsettled; for the school of Shammai differed with the school of Hillel by rejecting the book of Esther and the Canticle of Canticles, which the latter accepted, and the dispute was only ended by a rabbinical

² *Mishna*, treatise *Pirke Avoth*.

³ Many exceptions to this statement are to be noted. The adherents of the large and growing Reformed branch of Judaism, together with a large proportion of the Protestants of different shades, reject a much greater part or even the whole of the Bible. The Oriental schismatics, on the other hand, and an influential division of the Lutherans, including no less an authority than the eminent Biblical scholar Prof. Ernst Henzsenberg, acknowledge the Alexandrian and Catholic canon. See *American Cyclopaedia*, article *Apocrypha*.

council held about the year 90, a long time after both parties had fallen into schism.⁴

The Jews of Egypt, and many others in different parts of the world, used the Greek version of the Scriptures, commonly called the Septuagint, which had been begun about the year 280 B. C., under the patronage of Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, by a committee of seventy-two of the most learned Israelites, selected for the purpose by the high priest and the Sanhedrim at Jerusalem. This version, in its final form, contained the books mentioned above, which had been written since the time of Esdras in the Greek language. The opinion of the Hellenistic Jews derives great weight not only from their superior learning and culture, but from the fact that since 180 B. C., the pontifical line had been transferred from Jerusalem to Egypt. According to the Mosaic law, the high priesthood could be made vacant only by death, and descended from father to son according to the law of primogeniture,⁵ and the lawful incumbent of that office was to be the principal teacher of the people.⁶ After the expulsion of the true high priest Onias from Jerusalem and his subsequent murder, his sons fled to Egypt, where their descendants continued to reside, administering the Jewish worship in a temple built near Heliopolis.⁷ So the authority of the lawful high priest can be appealed to in behalf of the Alexandrian canon, for which there is a still higher authority, anterior to the formal decisions of the church, no less than that of our Lord himself and of the Apostles; for nearly all the quotations in the New Testament books are from the Septuagint, and St. Augustine states expressly that that version had been approved by the Apostles.⁸ It should be remem-

⁴ According to the author of the article on the Canticle of Canticles in the work just cited, it was not yet ended, even in the time of the Mishnah, about 200 A. D.

⁵ Exodus xxx, 21; Leviticus, xvi, 32, xxi, 10; Numbers iii, 10, xx, 26; Ecclesiasticus, xlv, 30. See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, xv, 6, xx, 10; *Wars*, iv, 3, § 8.

⁶ Malachias, ii, 7.

⁷ f. Josephus, *Ant.* xii, 9, § 7; xiii, 11, § 4; xx, 10. See Isaias xix, 18-21.

⁸ Epistle 28. See for a full discussion of the canonicity of the deuterocanonical books the article *Canon* in Addis and Arnold's *Catholic Dictionary*, which gives the testimony of the best Protestant Biblical scholars, such as Delitzsch, Keil, and Westcott; also the article *Canon* in Smith's *Bible Dic-*

bered that without the books in question, there would be a serious break in the inspired record. For example, the books of Machabees are necessary to fill the gap between the historical narratives of Esdras and St. Luke, and the books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus show the development of the doctrine of the Logos from its germ in the Proverbs to its majestic completeness in the Gospel of St. John.

III.—EXCELLENCE OF THE BIBLE, AND ITS MISUSE.

Among all the precious gifts and privileges which God has bestowed upon the world through His Holy Church, a foremost rank must be assigned to these seventy-three inspired books of the Old and New Testament. Written under the guidance of our heavenly Father, they come to us as letters from our dear eternal home. Their words must ever be sweeter to us than any mere human ones can be, and will form in the future, as they have always done in the past, the native language of the Catholic and the natural expression of the spiritual life. The sacred liturgies, the writings of the fathers and doctors of the Church, the decrees of the councils and pontiffs, and, indeed, all the varied divisions of Christian literature, centre around the sacred volume, whose words adorn every hymn of praise or revery of devotion, and serve to give additional force to all expositions of divine truth.

Like every other holy thing, this wonderful collection of writings is often misused and desecrated. Just as many unrepentant sinners dare to lightly approach the Holy Table and receive unworthily the Living Bread which cometh down from Heaven, so others enter presumptuously into the mysteries of the written word, and both alike, because of their lack of reverence, humility, and love, receive to themselves condemnation.

Another class, who fail to discern the Lord's Body, not believing

tionary. The Septuagint is far more trustworthy than the modern Hebrew text, upon which all standard Protestant translations are based, as is indicated by the admission of Rabbi Maimonides, considered by modern Jews their greatest commentator on the Scriptures, that "the Hebrew having been for many years a dead language it is difficult to estimate with certainty the power of its phrases." (*Moreh Nebukhim*; cited by the Protestant scholar Beau-sabré, *Histoire de Manichée*, liv. V, chap. IV, p. 207).

in this crowning proof of His love and condescension, have their counterparts in those others, who, alike separated from the unity of the Faith, reduce to a minimum the inspiration and the value of the Scriptures. In the third place, as there are those who exhibit a satanic hatred towards the incomparable Sacrament, so also there are many misguided men who treat the Bible with open and complete contempt.

For those who hate both the Church and her sacred books we can only pray that they may, before it is too late, be converted to the God whom they now defy. To the fair-minded who have thus far failed to find sufficient evidence of the divine-human origin and consequent doctrinal and moral truthfulness of the Scriptures, we would say: "Seek to verify the claims of Holy Church, for her authority is the strongest evidence," reminding them of the Master's assurance, He that asketh, receiveth, and he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

There are many who hold the Bible in the highest esteem, and yet use it for another purpose than that for which it was designed, and disregard in their study of it the plainest rules which it contains; and it sometimes happens that even Catholics, the children of the Bible Church, are tainted with such errors, or, on the other hand, neglect to give to the sacred volume the reverence and attention which are demanded for it by the Church. It is for the assistance of such that the paragraphs which follow have been written.

We may look for direction as to the true methods which the Bible student should pursue to three sources: the book itself, patristic tradition, and our own reason.

IV.—THE TEACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES. REGARDING THEIR OWN USE.

Before entering upon the discussion, it is desirable to note a few axiomatic truths, which will at once rid us of a large quantity of the rubbish which has been heaped about this question by more or less well-meaning persons, who have tried to thrust the Scriptures into a false position.

1. No statement which one book of the Bible makes regarding itself can be adduced as evidence in the case of another not

expressly mentioned in the text. This follows from the fact that the books were written at different times and by different men, and were not gathered into one volume until several centuries after the last of them were written.

2. No references to the "Scriptures," without any qualifying clause, can be held to refer to books not written at the time of the reference; but they might refer to even uninspired books which were then in existence.

3. The expression "word of God" means divinely revealed truth, however expressed, and is not to be limited to the inspired writings.⁹

Any one, who, bearing in mind these almost self-evident propositions, will give careful examination to the various books between Genesis and the Apocalypse will find that, with very few exceptions, they do not lay claim to divine inspiration, much less to be "the only infallible rule of doctrine and duty;"¹⁰ and he will see how entirely the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures is dependent upon that of the infallibility of the Church.

Now let us see what are the directions given in Holy Writ for its own study.

The Doctor of the Gentiles writing to Timothy, Bishop of Ephesus, says: All scripture inspired of God is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the *man of God* may be perfect, furnished to every good work;¹¹ and the Apostle of the Circumcision, Primate of the Apostolic College, addressing the whole Catholic communion, urges the faithful to be diligent that they may be found undefiled and unspotted before the Lord in the day of His coming "as, also, our most dear brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, hath written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are certain things hard to be understood, *which the unlearned and unstable wrest*, as they do the other scriptures, to their own destruction."¹² These then are the qualifications of the Bible student. He must be a man of God; he must be learned and stable in the Faith.

⁹ See Luke, v, 1; Acts, iv, 31; Acts, xiii, 46, etc.

¹⁰ Westminster (Presbyterian) Catechism.

¹¹ II Tim. iii, 16, 17.

¹² II Peter, iii, 15, 16.

What is it to be a man of God? He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him.¹³ But this is not enough. Whosoever denieth the Son the same hath not the Father.¹⁴ This is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He hath given commandment to us.¹⁵ If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as He also is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.¹⁶

Furthermore, Whosoever revolteth and continueth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God.¹⁷ A man of God, then, is one who believes in the Divine Being and Providence, in the divine nature and mission of Jesus, and, in short, in the whole Christian doctrine originally revealed to the twelve Apostles of the Lamb; and whose daily life and dominating affections are consistent with this light which he possesses. The question arises, What must one do in order to become a man of God, learned and stable? St. John has partly answered this question in proclaiming, in behalf of the apostolic ministry of all ages, We are of God; he that knoweth God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth us not; by this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.¹⁸

The one who seeks the godliness which will qualify him for the study of the sacred books must, then, follow the teachings of the Apostolic Body, which has held forth the word of life with uninterrupted voice since the day of Pentecost. He must, also, as the Beloved Disciple tells us above, walk in the light. This need not require any great learning, provided there is a profound humility, distrust of self, and confidence in God and His Holy Church. The High and Eminent One, that inhabiteth eternity, dwelleth in the high and holy place and with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit.¹⁹ Even the lowly craftsman, applying his soul with such dispositions, may search in the law of the Most High.²⁰

This teaching of Holy Scripture is reasonable in the highest degree; for if we have divinely inspired books, every passage in

¹³ Hebrews, xi, 6.

¹⁴ I John, i, 7.

¹⁵ Isaiah, lvii, 15.

¹⁶ I John, ii, 23.

¹⁷ II John, 9.

¹⁸ Ecclesiasticus, xxxviii, 39.

¹⁹ I John, iii, 23.

²⁰ I John, iv, 6.

which is capable of various interpretations, it is necessary for the inspirer to become the interpreter, in order to make the inspiration effective. God might either interpret them directly to each separate individual or place the true interpretation in the hands of a corporate body of individuals who should transmit it from generation to generation, every part of it being at each step brought to their remembrance.²¹ We know that the interpretation is not ordinarily given directly to individuals, for thousands of equally sincere and prayerful students of Holy Writ, who consider it as the one infallible guide to truth, hold entirely contradictory opinions on every doctrine which the Scripture is claimed to teach; it must then have been given to the Christian Church as an organization, the Christian Church then as now consisting, to speak in strictly accurate terms, of the whole body of believers, subject to the Apostolic Ministry and in communion with See of Peter.²² Surely reason demands of us to admit that no Scripture is of private interpretation,²³ and that it is the Church of the Living God which is the pillar and ground of the truth.²⁴ Wisdom openeth her mouth in the Church of the Most High.²⁵

V.—THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS.

This conclusion is confirmed, without a dissenting voice, by the earliest Christian writers. In the first century, Pope St. Clement, while he tells the Corinthians to "look carefully into the Scriptures, which are the true utterances of the Holy Spirit," yet teaches plainly the authority of the Church. "Our apostles also knew, on the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those ministers already mentioned, and after-

²¹ St. John, xvi, 13; xiv, 26.

²² See *Catholic Dictionary*, articles *Church of Christ* and *Pope*, Bruno's *Catholic Belief*, part I, chapter xxvii, and part III, No. 1; and Capel's *Catholic*.

²³ II Peter, i, 24.

²⁴ I Timothy, iii, 15.

²⁵ Ecclesiasticus, xxiv, 2.

wards gave instructions that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed in their ministry." "Christ was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ, and preaching through cities and countries they appointed the first fruits of their labors, having tested them in spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe." "Who did not rejoice over your perfect and well-grounded knowledge? For ye did all things without respect of persons, and walked in the commandments of God, being obedient to those who had the rule over you, and giving all fitting honor to the presbyters among you."²⁶ As for St. Ignatius of Antioch, the keynote of all his epistles is this: "Study therefore to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that so all things whatsoever ye do may prosper, both in the flesh and spirit, in faith and love, with your most admirable bishop and the well-compacted crown of your presbytery and the deacons." "If he that rises up against kings is justly held to be worthy of punishment, inasmuch as he dissolves public order, of how much rarer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who presumes to do anything without the bishop, thus destroying the Church's unity and throwing its order into confusion? For the priesthood is the very highest point of all good things among men, against which whosever is mad enough to strive dishonors not man but God, and Christ Jesus, the First Born, and the only High Priest by nature, of the Father. Let all things, therefore, be done by you with good order in Christ. Let the laity be subject to the deacons; the deacons to the presbyters; the presbyters to the bishop; the bishop to Christ, even as He is to the Father."²⁷

The author of the epistle to Diognetus, about the beginning of the second century, says: "Having been a disciple of the Apostles, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles. I minister the things delivered to me to those that are disciples worthy of the truth. For who that is rightly taught and begotten by the living Word,

²⁶ First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, A. D. 90. In the translation of the Apostolic Fathers by the Protestant scholars, Drs. Roberts, Donaldson, and Crombie, pp. 8, 37, 38, 39.

²⁷ Epistle to Magnesians and Epistle to Smyrneans, about A. D. 100. Work cited, pp. 186, 250.

would not seek to learn accurately the things which have been clearly shown by the Word to His disciples? . . . This is He Who, being from everlasting, is to-day called the Son; through Whom the Church is enriched, and grace, widely spread, increases in the Saints, furnishing understanding, revealing mysteries, announcing times, rejoicing over the faithful, giving to those that seek, by whom the limits of faith are not broken through, nor the boundaries set by the fathers passed over. Then the fear of the law is chanted, and the grace of the prophets is known, and the faith of the gospels is established, and the tradition of the Apostles is preserved, and the grace of the Church exults; which grace, if you grieve not, you shall know those things which the Word teaches, by whom He wills, and when He pleases."²⁸

So, too, St. Polycarp: "Wherefore, forsaking the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the Word which has been handed down to us from the beginning, being subject to the presbyters and deacons as unto God and Christ;"²⁹ and the author of the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles urges in similar language the importance of tradition: "Thou shalt by no means forsake the Lord's commandments, but shalt guard what thou hast received, neither adding to it nor taking from it." "See that no one lead thee astray from this teaching, because apart from God does he teach thee."³⁰

Here is the teaching of St. Irenæus (A. D. 135-202): "We ought not to seek amongst others for truth which it is easy to receive from the Church, seeing that the Apostles most fully committed unto this Church, as unto a rich depository, all whatsoever is of truth, that every one that willeth may draw out of it the drink of life. For this is the gate of life; but all others are thieves and robbers. Therefore we ought to avoid them, but to cling with the utmost care to whatever is of the Church, and to hold fast to the tradition of truth. For what? Even if there should be a dispute about any trifling point, ought we not to have

²⁸ Work cited, pp. 314, 315.

²⁹ Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, about A. D. 150. Work cited, pp. 72, 73.

³⁰ *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. Between A. D. 120 and 160. Edited by Profs. Hitchcock and Brown, of Union Theological Seminary, New York. Lines 107-133.

recourse to the most ancient churches, in which Apostles presided, and from them to take whatever is certain and really clear on the existing dispute? But what if the Apostles had not left us writings? would it not have been needful to follow the order of that tradition which they delivered to those to whom they committed the churches?"

"The presbyters both guard that faith of ours in one God who made all things, and increase our love towards the Son of God; and they expound the Scriptures to us without danger."²¹

The last sentence may be emphasized by a remark of the profound Origen (A. D. 185-254): "There will be many who will be ready to say to the disciples out of the divine Scriptures, adding thereunto their own peculiar meaning, 'Behold here is Christ.' As often as they bring forward canonical Scriptures, in which every Christian agrees and believes, they seem to say, 'Behold in the house' is the word of truth. But we are not to credit them; not to 'go out' from the first and the ecclesiastical tradition; not to believe otherwise than according as the Church of God has by succession transmitted to us."²²

Tertullian denied repeatedly, and in the most absolute and unmeasured terms, the right of sectarians even to appeal to the Scriptures in argument. It will be worth while to quote him at some length. "They put forward the Scriptures, and by this their boldness they forthwith move some; but in the actual encounter they weary the strong, catch the weak, send away the wavering without a doubt. We therefore interpose this first and foremost position, that they are not to be admitted to any discussion whatever touching the Scriptures. . . . The order of things requires that the question should be first proposed, which is now the only one to be discussed, 'To whom belongs the very faith, whose are the Scriptures, by whom, and through whom, and when, and to whom, was that rule delivered whereby men become Christians;' for wherever the true Christian rule (discipline) and faith are shown to be, there will be the true Scriptures, and the true expositions, and all the true Christian traditions. If these

²¹ Against Heretics, A. D. 181, B. III, 4, and IV, 26. See Capel's *Faith of Catholics*, Vol. I, pp. 18, 137.

²² Commentary, in St. Matthew xxiv. *Faith of Catholics*, I, 29.

things be so, so that the truth be adjudged to us, as many as walk according to the rule which the Church has handed down from the Apostles, the Apostles from Christ, and Christ from God, the reasonableness of our proposition is manifest, which determines that heretics are not to be allowed to enter upon an appeal to the Scriptures, whom we prove, without the Scriptures, to have no concern with the Scriptures.”²³

These citations might be multiplied seven-fold without going beyond the Christian writers of the first and second centuries; and among their successors no one is more outspoken in his defense of the teaching authority of the Church than St. Augustine, whom most sectarians, with strange inconsistency, so highly extol.

VI.—REASONS FOR BIBLE STUDY.

It is often desirable that non-Catholics, in considering the evidences of Christ's divinity and the truth of the Christian religion, should, like the Bereans of the Acts, search the Scriptures daily to find whether these things were so.²⁴ This is the ordinary use to which they were put in the apostolic age. The few Christians who could read preferred to listen to the burning words of truth and devotion which fell from the lips of the Apostles, rather than to read even the sacred books of the Old Testament; while the New Testament books were unwritten or unknown. So the New Testament references to Holy Scripture are usually no more than notices of the fulfilment of prophecy. To the apostolic missionary of the first century its principal use was to establish his Master's divinity and, consequently, to vindicate his own divine mission. Two important motives for its study by Catholics are given, however, in the second epistle to Timothy, iii, 16, and in Romans xv, 4. The first passage shows the value of the inspired writings to the Christian priest or teacher: they are profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice. In the epistle to the Romans, we are told: What things soever were written, were written for our learning, that through patience and the comfort

²³ Tertullian (150–220 A. D.), on the Objections of Heretics. *Faith of Catholics*, I, 326, 338.

²⁴ Acts, xvii, 11.

of the Scriptures we might have hope. Though the reference is still to the ancient prophecies, this is entirely true of all the books of both Testaments. There is a peculiar comfort which comes from the reading of the words written by the holy men of old speaking as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;³⁵ and our faith is strengthened and our hope fed as we meditate upon the "exceedingly great and precious promises" which abound in the sacred pages. The more we study the Bible, the more we shall love it; so that we can say, with Jeremiah, Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy word was to me a joy and gladness of my heart;³⁶ and, with the royal psalmist, Oh! how I have loved Thy law, O Lord! It is my meditation all the day;³⁷ How sweet are Thy words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth; by Thy commandments I have had understanding, therefore have I hated every way of iniquity. Thy word is as a lamp to my feet and light to my paths.³⁸ It is true that the love of Holy Scripture has been the pretext under which some have been led by the spirits of evil into questioning the doctrines of the Church; but the true children of God shun the self-love which puts one's own hastily framed interpretation in opposition to that which has been held by the best and wisest men and which coincides with the divine teachings of the Christian Faith. When any man ceases to be an humble trustful child of the Holy Universal Church, the written pages of the Bible cease to be to him the word of God; for he has lost the key to their mysteries and he is blinded and perplexed by the conflicting explanations which mere human ingenuity has devised. The word of God which by the gospel is preached unto you³⁹ is no longer a lamp to his feet and a light to his paths, for he has put himself beyond its reach.

There is another still more important reason for Scripture study. The pleasure and the direct spiritual profit which we may derive from it we may obtain perhaps equally well from other sources, or, at least, from the many choice Scripture extracts with which every book of devotion abounds. The divine truth listened to from Catholic pulpits is as truly the word of God as the same divine truth read in the Sacred Books. Catholic preachers and saintly

³⁵ II Peter, i, 20.
³⁶ Id., 103-105.

³⁶ Jeremiah, xv, 16.
³⁷ I Peter, i, 25.

³⁷ Psalm cxviii, 97.

spiritual writers are the miners who, to borrow a beautiful simile from St. Augustine, explore the exhaustless caverns of the word and bring forth for our edification its inestimable treasures. But, since such frequent references are made, in all orthodox instructions and literature, to the books of the Scriptures and the historical and other not strictly spiritual matter contained in them, it is exceedingly useful to at least read them through several times, so as to become familiar with the character and arrangement of the books and the sequence of their narratives.

Another reason which may be alleged is that, since Bible study is a kind of specialty of certain sectarians, it is well not to allow ourselves to be outdone by them, but to be thoroughly adept in the use of this "Sword of the Spirit."

VII.—METHODS OF STUDY.

It is very desirable to begin by a prayer for the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and especially for a spirit of humility, invoking also the intercession of the Doctors of the Church (as St. Jerome and St. Francis de Sales), or even of the writer himself of the passage which we are about to read or study. Certain parts of the Imitation of Christ are especially suitable for this occasion; for example, book I, chapter v, and book III, chap. ii, iii.

There are two very distinct kinds of scripture study, which may be called the spiritual and the scientific. The leading object of the first is to cultivate in our hearts those dispositions which will enable us to receive worthily the sacraments, to persevere in grace, and to grow more and more closely united to God. Scientific study, on the other hand, is devoted to the discovery of the exact meaning of each expression of the sacred volume, and to gaining all possible light upon it by ethnological, linguistic, historical, and archæological researches, as well as by a careful comparison of texts. As might have been expected, it is the spiritual or devotional mode of study which is most prevalent and most encouraged in the Church; while her wandering children, in their frantic endeavor to solve the contradictions which are thrust upon them and to find the key which their ancestors have carelessly cast aside, have built up huge monuments to the genius

of inconsistency in the field of Biblical criticism, with no other result, however, than to more and more unsettle the opinions of Protestants and to gather together much useful material for the student, who, because Catholic, is truly Christian. As we do not write either for the saint or the theologian we will not consider these classes of study separately; an intelligent Christian layman may well mingle the two in about equal proportions.

VIII.—AIDS TO STUDY.

One very desirable aid is a concordance, which will enable one to find any desired text or to collect all those bearing upon a particular subject. There are several concordances common among our separated brethren, which can be safely used by an intelligent Catholic; such as Cruden's Complete Concordance to the Holy Scriptures, and Smith's Analytical Concordance; but, thanks to the well-known American priest and author, Rev. L. A. Lambert, English-speaking Catholics need not look beyond the Church for all their books of this kind, which the Catholics of central and southern Europe have long had in their own languages and which are so common in the sacred tongue of the Western Church. Father Lambert has recently compiled a valuable *Thesaurus Biblicus*, or hand-book of Scriptural Reference, from the Latin of Philip Paul Merz.

It is absolutely necessary for a Catholic Bible student to have at hand some thorough exposition of Christian doctrine, for only when read in the light of Apostolic tradition and the Church's decisions is the Bible the word of God. The number of such books is endless, but for the benefit of any chance Protestant reader we will mention, without attempting to make a careful selection, the Catechism of the Council of Trent, Mgr. Gaume's Catechism of Perseverance and DeHarbe's Complete Catechism.

Commentaries and Bible Dictionaries are desirable, but not yet very plenty in the modern English language. Archbishop Kenrick's translation and notes are excellent, and Haydock's annotations were commended by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore as being especially useful. Challoner's notes, published in the ordinary cheap editions of the Bible, need not be mentioned

to our Catholic readers. There is a valuable and comprehensive work by Archbishop Dixon, of which the first American edition was published in 1853.⁴⁰ The first of the two volumes of which it is composed treats of the canon of Scripture, the form of the sacred books, the original Greek and Hebrew texts, the various ancient and modern versions, the practice of the Church regarding the reading of the Scriptures in the vulgar tongue, Biblical criticism and hermeneutics, and the historical geography of Bible lands. The second volume deals at length with the physical geography of the Holy Land, the political, sacred, and domestic antiquities of the Jews, and, finally, with the Catholic commentators and other writers on the Scriptures. Another very excellent reference book is Addis and Arnold's Catholic Dictionary; and Wiseman's Connexion between Science and Revealed Religion throws light upon many difficult points. Calmet's Bible Dictionary has been translated into English by Rev. Ignatius F. Horstmann, D. D., of the Seminary of St. Charles Borromeo, Philadelphia, and other translations have been made under Protestant auspices. Much light on the Gospel narrative may be gained in a pleasant way by the average reader from such works as Ben Hur, by General Lew Wallace, and The Martyr of Golgotha, by Enrich Perez Escrich. The latter has been translated from the Spanish by Adèle Godoy.

Especially for the devotional Bible student, the writings of the Saints are the best commentaries; the Canticle of Canticles, for example, will become transfigured to the mind of one who has read the Treatise on the Love of God, by St. Francis de Sales, a book which was one of the favorites of St. Vincent de Paul, and which has recently been translated by Rev. Henry Benedict Mackey, O. S. B.

Other useful works are those descriptive of the plants, animals, and minerals of Scripture, accounts of Oriental travel, and many

⁴⁰ *A General Introduction to the Sacred Scriptures*: in a series of dissertations, critical, hermeneutical, and historical. By the Rev. Joseph Dixon, D. D., Professor of Sacred Scripture and Hebrew in the Royal College of St. Patrick's, Maynooth, now Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland. "Ego ipse qui loquebar," Isaïæ lii, 6. Two volumes in one. First American, carefully revised, from the Dublin edition. Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., MDCCCLIII.

books bearing upon kindred subjects.⁴¹ Histories of the Christian Church, and historical tales, such as Wiseman's *Fabiola* and Newman's *Callista*, should not be forgotten, as tracing the course of the sacred stream of which the Bible pictures to us the source.

IX.—THE TIME FOR STUDY.

As we are writing to persons living in the world, the question would naturally be asked, When could one find time to read all these books and go into such an elaborate investigation of Scripture subjects? We would answer that we do not claim that there is any obligation upon a layman to devote any considerable amount of time to this study, and much less urge him to enter upon a system of elaborate investigation; all we say is that there is no reason why Catholics, who possess the key to the Scriptures, should not derive far more pleasure, as they certainly may more profit, from the study of the sacred books than do their disunited brothers, multitudes of whom certainly do find pleasure in it. A Catholic is bound to devote a little while morning and evening to exercises of devotion, and cannot neglect this practice, the moral theologians tell us, for any considerable length of time, without being guilty of mortal sin. Now to read, carefully and devoutly, at these times, two chapters of Scripture a day, one from the Old and the other from the New Testament, will prove to be a pleasure rather than a hardship. Still more profitable and pleasurable to an active mind will it be to read one chapter, or only a few verses, getting all the light possible upon them by means of concordances, commentaries, and other reference books. No time is better to devote to Scripture study than Sunday and

⁴¹ Among these may be noticed Lady Herbert's *Cradle Lands*; Father Vetromile's *Tour in both Hemispheres*; and the Franciscan periodical, *The Pilgrim of Palestine*; and, by non-Catholic authors, Wood's *Bible Animals*; Fletcher's *Natural History of the Scriptures* (\$9.00); H. B. Tristram's *Natural History of the Bible* (\$1.50); Layfarth's *Summary of Recent Discoveries in Biblical Archaeology* (\$1.00); The Bible Atlases of Kitto, A. K. Johnston, and Philips; the reports of the Palestine Exploration Fund; and Thompson's *Land and the Book*. The last-named work is by a Protestant missionary, but seems to contain no serious doctrinal errors, and is otherwise very interesting and valuable.

other holidays of obligation. The person who has no other time at his command may need to devote much of his leisure on those days, after attending to his necessary religious duties, to innocent diversion or secular reading; but the average man or woman of the upper and middle classes has time for recreation during the week, and could do nothing better than to devote most of the Lord's day to things concerning His kingdom. A very pleasant occupation is to hunt for as many texts as possible of a given kind; for example, all of the promises of God relating to the infallible guidance of His Holy Church or the future reward of the just; the warnings against lying, or against unkindness, or against impurity; the prophecies regarding the Redeemer and His Virgin Mother; or even all the verses which refer to the snow, or to the rain, or some particular animal. Let any one try the experiment of getting together all the verses about storms,⁴² reading them carefully, and committing some of the most striking of them to memory; and when the next terrible thunder storm occurs let him stand at the window or elsewhere where he can observe it well, recalling the result of his study, and see if it does not move him as no sermon ever has done. Even children not yet old enough to be encouraged to read the mystic Book from end to end can be taught to find great interest in looking up texts on some subject captivating to a childish fancy.

Those who have least time at their command can spare a few moments each Sunday for the careful reading of the Gospel and Epistle of the day. There are many volumes of practical instructions by different authors upon these choice passages, and few Catholics can plead a valid excuse for not possessing at least one of them. The Church by selecting certain portions of Scripture for her public offices in preference to others has given a plain and certain intimation of their especial value; and in the heavenly wisdom which is her constant characteristic they have a brevity which permits of their study even by the most busy participant in our whirling American life.

⁴²Such as Psalms xxviii [Heb. xxix], lxxvi (13-21), xcxvi, clxiii (5-7).

X.—CONCLUSION.

The son of Sirach said two thousand years ago : Let thy thoughts be upon the precepts of God, and meditate continually on His commandments, and He will give thee a heart, and wisdom shall be given to thee ;⁴³ and in 1885, the American Episcopate, assembled in the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, began that portion of their Pastoral Letter which related to the Holy Scriptures with these words : “ It can hardly be necessary for us to remind you, beloved brethren, that the most highly valued treasure of every family library, and the most frequently and lovingly made use of, should be the Holy Scriptures.” All that has been written in the foregoing pages is only an amplification of these words and their context ; and if our Lord Jesus Christ shall deign to use it in extending among the faithful the love of the Holy Scriptures, and among the separated a knowledge of their proper and profitable use, its object will be fully accomplished. At the least a few hints may be gathered from it as to how the wishes of our beloved bishops may best be carried out. And in no way can we better carry out their sacred intentions than by remembering in our Bible study, as well as in all our devout reading, that the test of piety is a good life, and that our Lord Jesus Christ gives as a characteristic of the children of Mary the hearing and *obeying* of the word of God, even comparing this holy conduct to the unspeakable glory of the divine maternity itself: My mother and my brethren are they who hear the word of God and do it.⁴⁴ Whosoever shall do the will of God, he is my brother and my sister and mother.⁴⁵ Let us pray the Mother of Mercy to obtain for us the grace which God is waiting to give of doing perfectly His blessed will ; in this way we may become increasingly likened to her, the sweet ideal of creaturehood, and to Him, Whose name is above every name, Who is her Firstborn Son and Elder Brother to us who have the happiness of being also her spiritual children.

⁴³ Ecclesiasticus, vi, 37.

⁴⁴ Luke, viii, 21.

⁴⁵ Mark, iii, 35.

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