



The Holy See

Inspired by the Divine Spirit, the Sacred Writers composed those books, which God, in His paternal charity towards the human race, deigned to bestow on them in order "to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice: that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work." [1] This heaven-sent treasure Holy Church considers as the most precious source of doctrine on faith and morals. No wonder herefore that, as she received it intact from the hands of the Apostles, so she kept it with all care, defended it from every false and perverse interpretation and used it diligently as an instrument for securing the eternal salvation of souls, as almost countless documents in every age strikingly bear witness. In more recent times, however, since the divine origin and the correct interpretation of the Sacred Writings have been very specially called in question, the Church has with even greater zeal and care undertaken their defense and protection. The sacred Council of Trent ordained by solemn decree that "the entire books with all their parts, as they have been wont to be read in the Catholic Church and are contained in the old vulgate Latin edition, are to be held sacred and canonical." [2] In our own time the Vatican Council, with the object of condemning false doctrines regarding inspiration, declared that these same books were to be regarded by the Church as sacred and canonical "not because, having been composed by human industry, they were afterwards approved by her authority, nor merely because they contain revelation without error, but because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their author, and as such were handed down to the Church herself." [3] When, subsequently, some Catholic writers, in spite of this solemn definition of Catholic doctrine, by which such divine authority is claimed for the "entire books with all their parts" as to secure freedom from any error whatsoever, ventured to restrict the truth of Sacred Scripture solely to matters of faith and morals, and to regard other matters, whether in the domain of physical science or history, as "obiter dicta" and - as they contended - in no wise connected with faith, Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII in the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus*, published on November 18 in the year 1893, justly and rightly condemned these errors and safe-guarded the studies of the Divine Books by most wise precepts and rules.

2. Since then it is fitting that We should commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of this Encyclical Letter, which is considered the supreme guide in biblical studies, We, moved by that solicitude for sacred studies, which We manifested from the very beginning of Our Pontificate, [4] have considered that this may most opportunely be done by ratifying and inculcating all that was wisely laid down by Our Predecessor and ordained by His Successors for the

consolidating and perfecting of the work, and by pointing out what seems necessary in the present day, in order to incite ever more earnestly all those sons of the Church who devote themselves to these studies, to so necessary and so praiseworthy an enterprise.

3. The first and greatest care of Leo XIII was to set forth the teaching on the truth of the Sacred Books and to defend it from attack. Hence with grave words did he proclaim that there is no error whatsoever if the sacred writer, speaking of things of the physical order "went by what sensibly appeared" as the Angelic Doctor says,[5] speaking either "in figurative language, or in terms which were commonly used at the time, and which in many instances are in daily use at this day, even among the most eminent men of science." For "the sacred writers, or to speak more accurately - the words are St. Augustine's - [6] the Holy Spirit, Who spoke by them, did not intend to teach men these things - that is the essential nature of the things of the universe - things in no way profitable to salvation"; which principle "will apply to cognate sciences, and especially to history,"[7] that is, by refuting, "in a somewhat similar way the fallacies of the adversaries and defending the historical truth of Sacred Scripture from their attacks." [8] Nor is the sacred writer to be taxed with error, if "copyists have made mistakes in the text of the Bible," or, "if the real meaning of a passage remains ambiguous." Finally it is absolutely wrong and forbidden "either to narrow inspiration to certain passages of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred," since divine inspiration "not only is essentially incompatible with error but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and constant faith of the Church." [9]

4. This teaching, which Our Predecessor Leo XIII set forth with such solemnity, We also proclaim with Our authority and We urge all to adhere to it religiously. No less earnestly do We inculcate obedience at the present day to the counsels and exhortations which he, in his day, so wisely enjoined. For whereas there arose new and serious difficulties and questions, from the wide-spread prejudices of rationalism and more especially from the discovery and investigation of the antiquities of the East, this same Our Predecessor, moved by zeal of the apostolic office, not only that such an excellent source of Catholic revelation might be more securely and abundantly available to the advantage of the Christian flock, but also that he might not suffer it to be in any way tainted, wished and most earnestly desired "to see an increase in the number of the approved and persevering laborers in the cause of Holy Scripture; and more especially that those whom Divine Grace has called to Holy Orders, should day-by-day, as their state demands, display greater diligence and industry in reading, meditating and explaining it." [10]

5. Wherefore the same Pontiff, as he had already praised and approved the school for biblical studies, founded at St. Stephen's, Jerusalem, by the Master General of the Sacred Order of Preachers - from which, to use his own words, "biblical science itself had received no small advantage, while giving promise of more" [11] - so in the last year of his life he provided yet another way, by which these same studies, so warmly commended in the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus*, might daily make greater progress and be pursued with the greatest

possible security. By the Apostolic Letter *Vigilantiae*, published on October 30 in the year 1902, he founded a Council or Commission, as it is called, of eminent men, "whose duty it would be to procure by every means that the sacred texts may receive everywhere among us that more thorough exposition which the times demand, and be kept safe not only from every breath of error, but also from all inconsiderate opinions." [12] Following the example of Our Predecessors, We also have effectively confirmed and amplified this Council using its good offices, as often before, to remind commentators of the Sacred Books of those safe rules of Catholic exegesis, which have been handed down by the Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, as well as by the Sovereign Pontiffs themselves. [13]

6. It may not be out of place here to recall gratefully the principal and more useful contributions made successively by Our Predecessors toward this same end, which contributions may be considered as the complement or fruit of the movement so happily initiated by Leo XIII. And first of all Pius X, wishing "to provide a sure way for the preparation of a copious supply of teachers, who, commended by the seriousness and the integrity of their doctrine, might explain the Sacred Books in Catholic schools . . ." instituted "the academic degrees of licentiate and doctorate in Sacred Scripture . . .; to be conferred by the Biblical Commission"; [14] he later enacted a law "concerning the method of Scripture studies to be followed in Clerical Seminaries" with this end in view, viz.: that students of the sacred sciences "not only should themselves fully understand the power, purpose and teaching of the Bible, but should also be equipped to engage in the ministry of the Divine Word with elegance and ability and repel attacks against the divinely inspired books"; [15] finally "in order that a center of higher biblical studies might be established in Rome, which in the best way possible might promote the study of the Bible and all cognate sciences in accordance with the mind of the Catholic Church" he founded the Pontifical Biblical Institute, entrusted to the care of the illustrious Society of Jesus, which he wished endowed "with a superior professorial staff and every facility for biblical research"; he prescribed its laws and rules, professing to follow in this the "salutary and fruitful project" of Leo XIII. [16]

7. All this in fine Our immediate Predecessor of happy memory Pius XI brought to perfection, laying down among other things "that no one should be appointed professor of Sacred Scripture in any Seminary, unless, having completed a special course of biblical studies, he had in due form obtained the academic degrees before the Biblical Commission or the Biblical Institute." He wished that these degrees should have the same rights and the same effects as the degrees duly conferred in Sacred Theology or Canon Law; likewise he decreed that no one should receive "a benefice having attached the canonical obligation of expounding the Sacred Scripture to the people, unless, among other things, he had obtained the licentiate or doctorate in biblical science." And having at the same time urged the Superiors General of the Regular Orders and of the religious Congregations, as well as the Bishops of the Catholic world, to send the more suitable of their students to frequent the schools of the Biblical Institute and obtain there the academical degrees, he confirmed these exhortations by his own example, appointing out of his bounty an annual sum for this very purpose. [17]

8. Seeing that, in the year 1907, with the benign approval of Pius X of happy memory, "to the Benedictine monks had been committed the task of preparing the investigations and studies on which might be based a new edition of the Latin version of the Scripture, commonly called the Vulgate,[18] the same Pontiff, Pius XI, wishing to consolidate more firmly and securely this "laborious and arduous enterprise," which demands considerable time and great expense, founded in Rome and lavishly endowed with a library and other means of research, the monastery of St. Jerome, to be devoted exclusively to this work.[19]

9. Nor should We fail to mention here how earnestly these same Our Predecessors, when the opportunity occurred, recommended the study or preaching or in fine the pious reading and meditation on the Sacred Scriptures. Pius X most heartily commended the society of St. Jerome, which strives to promote among the faithful - and to facilitate with all its power - the truly praiseworthy custom of reading and meditating on the holy Gospels; he exhorted them to persevere in the enterprise they had begun, proclaiming it "a most useful undertaking, as well as most suited to the times," seeing that it helps in no small way "to dissipate the idea that the Church is opposed to or in any way impedes the reading of the Scriptures in the vernacular." [20] And Benedict XV, on the occasion of the fifteenth centenary of the death of St. Jerome, the greatest Doctor of the Sacred Scriptures, after having most solemnly inculcated the precepts and examples of the same Doctor, as well as the principles and rules laid down by Leo XIII and by himself, and having recommended other things highly opportune and never to be forgotten in this connection, exhorted "all the children of the Church, especially clerics, to reverence the Holy Scripture, to read it piously and meditate it constantly"; he reminded them "that in these pages is to be sought that food, by which the spiritual life is nourished unto perfection," and "that the chief use of Scripture pertains to the holy and fruitful exercise of the ministry of preaching"; he likewise once again expressed his warm approval of the work of the society called after St. Jerome himself, by means of which the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles are being so widely diffused, "that there is no Christian family any more without them and that all are accustomed to read and meditate them daily." [21]

10. But it is right and pleasing to confess openly that it is not only by reason of these initiatives, precepts and exhortations of Our Predecessors that the knowledge and use of the Sacred Scriptures have made great progress among Catholics; for this is also due to the works and labors of all those who diligently cooperated with them, both by meditating, investigating and writing, as well as by teaching and preaching and by translating and propagating the Sacred Books. For from the schools in which are fostered higher studies in theological and biblical science, and especially from Our Pontifical Biblical Institute, there have already come forth, and daily continue to come forth, many students of Holy Scripture who, inspired with an intense love for the Sacred Books, imbue the younger clergy with this same ardent zeal and assiduously impart to them the doctrine they themselves have acquired. Many of them also, by the written word, have promoted and do still promote, far and wide, the study of the Bible; as when they edit the sacred text corrected in accordance with the rules of textual criticism or expound, explain, and translate it into the

vernacular; or when they propose it to the faithful for their pious reading and meditation; or finally when they cultivate and seek the aid of profane sciences which are useful for the interpretation of the Scriptures. From these therefore and from other initiatives which daily become more widespread and vigorous, as, for example, biblical societies, congresses, libraries, associations for meditation on the Gospels, We firmly hope that in the future reverence for, as well as the use and knowledge of, the Sacred Scriptures will everywhere more and more increase for the good of souls, provided the method of biblical studies laid down by Leo XIII, explained more clearly and perfectly by his Successors, and by Us confirmed and amplified - which indeed is the only safe way and proved by experience - be more firmly, eagerly and faithfully accepted by all, regardless of the difficulties which, as in all human affairs, so in this most excellent work will never be wanting.

11. There is no one who cannot easily perceive that the conditions of biblical studies and their subsidiary sciences have greatly changed within the last fifty years. For, apart from anything else, when Our Predecessor published the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus*, hardly a single place in Palestine had begun to be explored by means of relevant excavations. Now, however, this kind of investigation is much more frequent and, since more precise methods and technical skill have been developed in the course of actual experience, it gives us information at once more abundant and more accurate. How much light has been derived from these explorations for the more correct and fuller understanding of the Sacred Books all experts know, as well as all those who devote themselves to these studies. The value of these excavations is enhanced by the discovery from time to time of written documents, which help much towards the knowledge of the languages, letters, events, customs, and forms of worship of most ancient times. And of no less importance is papyri which have contributed so much to the knowledge of the discovery and investigation, so frequent in our times, of letters and institutions, both public and private, especially of the time of Our Savior.

12. Moreover ancient codices of the Sacred Books have been found and edited with discerning thoroughness; the exegesis of the Fathers of the Church has been more widely and thoroughly examined; in fine the manner of speaking, relating and writing in use among the ancients is made clear by innumerable examples. All these advantages which, not without a special design of Divine Providence, our age has acquired, are as it were an invitation and inducement to interpreters of the Sacred Literature to make diligent use of this light, so abundantly given, to penetrate more deeply, explain more clearly and expound more lucidly the Divine Oracles. If, with the greatest satisfaction of mind, We perceive that these same interpreters have resolutely answered and still continue to answer this call, this is certainly not the last or least of the fruits of the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus*, by which Our Predecessor Leo XIII, foreseeing as it were this new development of biblical studies, summoned Catholic exegetes to labor and wisely defined the direction and the method to be followed in that labor.

13. We also, by this Encyclical Letter, desire to insure that the work may not only proceed without

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

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

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

16. Wherefore let him diligently apply himself so as to acquire daily a greater facility in biblical as well as in other oriental languages and to support his interpretation by the aids which all branches of philology supply. This indeed St. Jerome strove earnestly to achieve, as far as the science of his time permitted; to this also aspired with untiring zeal and no small fruit not a few of the great exegetes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although the knowledge of languages then was much less than at the present day. In like manner therefore ought we to explain the original text which, having been written by the inspired author himself, has more authority and greater weight than any even the very best translation, whether ancient or modern; this can be done all the more easily and fruitfully, if to the knowledge of languages be joined a real skill in literary criticism of the same text.

17. The great importance which should be attached to this kind of criticism was aptly pointed out by Augustine, when, among the precepts to be recommended to the student of the Sacred Books, he put in the first place the care to possess a corrected text. "The correction of the codices" - so says this most distinguished Doctor of the Church - "should first of all engage the attention of those who wish to know the Divine Scripture so that the uncollected may give place to the corrected." [23] In the present day indeed this art, which is called textual criticism and which is

used with great and praiseworthy results in the editions of profane writings, is also quite rightly employed in the case of the Sacred Books, because of that very reverence which is due to the Divine Oracles. For its very purpose is to insure that the sacred text be restored, as perfectly as possible, be purified from the corruptions due to the carelessness of the copyists and be freed, as far as may be done, from glosses and omissions, from the interchange and repetition of words and from all other kinds of mistakes, which are wont to make their way gradually into writings handed down through many centuries.

18. It is scarcely necessary to observe that this criticism, which some fifty years ago not a few made use of quite arbitrarily and often in such wise that one would say they did so to introduce into the sacred text their own preconceived ideas, today has rules so firmly established and secure, that it has become a most valuable aid to the purer and more accurate editing of the sacred text and that any abuse can easily be discovered. Nor is it necessary here to call to mind - since it is doubtless familiar and evident to all students of Sacred Scripture - to what extent namely the Church has held in honor these studies in textual criticism from the earliest centuries down even to the present day.

19. Today therefore, since this branch of science has attained to such high perfection, it is the honorable, though not always easy, task of students of the Bible to procure by every means that as soon as possible may be duly published by Catholics editions of the Sacred Books and of ancient versions, brought out in accordance with these standards, which, that is to say, unite the greatest reverence for the sacred text with an exact observance of all the rules of criticism. And let all know that this prolonged labor is not only necessary for the right understanding of the divinely-given writings, but also is urgently demanded by that piety by which it behooves us to be grateful to the God of all providence, Who from the throne of His majesty has sent these books as so many paternal letters to His own children.

20. Nor should anyone think that this use of the original texts, in accordance with the methods of criticism, in any way derogates from those decrees so wisely enacted by the Council of Trent concerning the Latin Vulgate.[24] It is historically certain that the Presidents of the Council received a commission, which they duly carried out, to beg, that is, the Sovereign Pontiff in the name of the Council that he should have corrected, as far as possible, first a Latin, and then a Greek, and Hebrew edition, which eventually would be published for the benefit of the Holy Church of God.[25] If this desire could not then be fully realized owing to the difficulties of the times and other obstacles, at present it can, We earnestly hope, be more perfectly and entirely fulfilled by the united efforts of Catholic scholars.

21. And if the Tridentine Synod wished "that all should use as authentic" the Vulgate Latin version, this, as all know, applies only to the Latin Church and to the public use of the same Scriptures; nor does it, doubtless, in any way diminish the authority and value of the original texts. For there was no question then of these texts, but of the Latin versions, which were in circulation at that time,

and of these the same Council rightly declared to be preferable that which "had been approved by its long-continued use for so many centuries in the Church." Hence this special authority or as they say, authenticity of the Vulgate was not affirmed by the Council particularly for critical reasons, but rather because of its legitimate use in the Churches throughout so many centuries; by which use indeed the same is shown, in the sense in which the Church has understood and understands it, to be free from any error whatsoever in matters of faith and morals; so that, as the Church herself testifies and affirms, it may be quoted safely and without fear of error in disputations, in lectures and in preaching; and so its authenticity is not specified primarily as critical, but rather as juridical.

22. Wherefore this authority of the Vulgate in matters of doctrine by no means prevents - nay rather today it almost demands - either the corroboration and confirmation of this same doctrine by the original texts or the having recourse on any and every occasion to the aid of these same texts, by which the correct meaning of the Sacred Letters is everywhere daily made more clear and evident. Nor is it forbidden by the decree of the Council of Trent to make translations into the vulgar tongue, even directly from the original texts themselves, for the use and benefit of the faithful and for the better understanding of the divine word, as We know to have been already done in a laudable manner in many countries with the approval of the Ecclesiastical authority.

23. Being thoroughly prepared by the knowledge of the ancient languages and by the aids afforded by the art of criticism, let the Catholic exegete undertake the task, of all those imposed on him the greatest, that namely of discovering and expounding the genuine meaning of the Sacred Books. In the performance of this task let the interpreters bear in mind that their foremost and greatest endeavor should be to discern and define clearly that sense of the biblical words which is called literal. Aided by the context and by comparison with similar passages, let them therefore by means of their knowledge of languages search out with all diligence the literal meaning of the words; all these helps indeed are wont to be pressed into service in the explanation also of profane writers, so that the mind of the author may be made abundantly clear.

24. The commentators of the Sacred Letters, mindful of the fact that here there is question of a divinely inspired text, the care and interpretation of which have been confided to the Church by God Himself, should no less diligently take into account the explanations and declarations of the teaching authority of the Church, as likewise the interpretation given by the Holy Fathers, and even "the analogy of faith" as Leo XIII most wisely observed in the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus*.^[26] With special zeal should they apply themselves, not only to expounding exclusively these matters which belong to the historical, archaeological, philological and other auxiliary sciences - as, to Our regret, is done in certain commentaries - but, having duly referred to these, in so far as they may aid the exegesis, they should set forth in particular the theological doctrine in faith and morals of the individual books or texts so that their exposition may not only aid the professors of theology in their explanations and proofs of the dogmas of faith, but may also be of assistance to priests in their presentation of Christian doctrine to the people, and in fine may help all the faithful to lead a life that is holy and worthy of a Christian.

25. By making such an exposition, which is above all, as We have said, theological, they will efficaciously reduce to silence those who, affirming that they scarcely ever find anything in biblical commentaries to raise their hearts to God, to nourish their souls or promote their interior life, repeatedly urge that we should have recourse to a certain spiritual and, as they say, mystical interpretation. With what little reason they thus speak is shown by the experience of many, who, assiduously considering and meditating the word of God, advanced in perfection and were moved to an intense love for God; and this same truth is clearly proved by the constant tradition of the Church and the precepts of the greatest Doctors. Doubtless all spiritual sense is not excluded from the Sacred Scripture.

26. For what was said and done in the Old Testament was ordained and disposed by God with such consummate wisdom, that things past prefigured in a spiritual way those that were to come under the new dispensation of grace. Wherefore the exegete, just as he must search out and expound the literal meaning of the words, intended and expressed by the sacred writer, so also must he do likewise for the spiritual sense, provided it is clearly intended by God. For God alone could have known this spiritual meaning and have revealed it to us. Now Our Divine Savior Himself points out to us and teaches us this same sense in the Holy Gospel; the Apostles also, following the example of the Master, profess it in their spoken and written words; the unchanging tradition of the Church approves it; and finally the most ancient usage of the liturgy proclaims it, wherever may be rightly applied the well-known principle: "The rule of prayer is the rule of faith."

27. Let Catholic exegetes then disclose and expound this spiritual significance, intended and ordained by God, with that care which the dignity of the divine word demands; but let them scrupulously refrain from proposing as the genuine meaning of Sacred Scripture other figurative senses. It may indeed be useful, especially in preaching, to illustrate, and present the matters of faith and morals by a broader use of the Sacred Text in the figurative sense, provided this be done with moderation and restraint; it should, however, never be forgotten that this use of the Sacred Scripture is, as it were, extrinsic to it and accidental, and that, especially in these days, it is not free from danger, since the faithful, in particular those who are well-informed in the sciences sacred and profane, wish to know what God has told us in the Sacred Letters rather than what an ingenious orator or writer may suggest by a clever use of the words of Scripture. Nor does "the word of God, living and effectual and more piercing than any two-edged sword and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow, and a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart"[27] need artificial devices and human adaptation to move and impress souls; for the Sacred Pages, written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, are of themselves rich in original meaning; endowed with a divine power, they have their own value; adorned with heavenly beauty, they radiate of themselves light and splendor, provided they are so fully and accurately explained by the interpreter, that all the treasures of wisdom and prudence, therein contained are brought to light.

28. In the accomplishment of this task the Catholic exegete will find invaluable help in an

assiduous study of those works, in which the Holy Fathers, the Doctors of the Church and the renowned interpreters of past ages have explained the Sacred Books. For, although sometimes less instructed in profane learning and in the knowledge of languages than the scripture scholars of our time, nevertheless by reason of the office assigned to them by God in the Church, they are distinguished by a certain subtle insight into heavenly things and by a marvelous keenness of intellect, which enables them to penetrate to the very innermost meaning of the divine word and bring to light all that can help to elucidate the teaching of Christ and to promote holiness of life.

29. It is indeed regrettable that such precious treasures of Christian antiquity are almost unknown to many writers of the present day, and that students of the history of exegesis have not yet accomplished all that seems necessary for the due investigation and appreciation of so momentous a subject. Would that many, by seeking out the authors of the Catholic interpretation of Scripture and diligently studying their works and drawing thence the almost inexhaustible riches therein stored up, might contribute largely to this end, so that it might be daily more apparent to what extent those authors understood and made known the divine teaching of the Sacred Books, and that the interpreters of today might thence take example and seek suitable arguments.

30. For thus at long last will be brought about the happy and fruitful union between the doctrine and spiritual sweetness of expression of the ancient authors and the greater erudition and maturer knowledge of the modern, having as its result new progress in the never fully explored and inexhaustible field of the Divine Letters.

31. Moreover we may rightly and deservedly hope that our time also can contribute something towards the deeper and more accurate interpretation of Sacred Scripture. For not a few things, especially in matters pertaining to history, were scarcely at all or not fully explained by the commentators of past ages, since they lacked almost all the information which was needed for their clearer exposition. How difficult for the Fathers themselves, and indeed well nigh unintelligible, were certain passages is shown, among other things, by the oft-repeated efforts of many of them to explain the first chapters of Genesis; likewise by the reiterated attempts of St. Jerome so to translate the Psalms that the literal sense, that, namely, which is expressed by the words themselves, might be clearly revealed.

32. There are, in fine, other books or texts, which contain difficulties brought to light only in quite recent times, since a more profound knowledge of antiquity has given rise to new questions, on the basis of which the point at issue may be more appropriately examined. Quite wrongly therefore do some pretend, not rightly understanding the conditions of biblical study, that nothing remains to be added by the Catholic exegete of our time to what Christian antiquity has produced; since, on the contrary, these our times have brought to light so many things, which call for a fresh investigation, and which stimulate not a little the practical zest of the present-day interpreter.

33. As in our age, indeed new questions and new difficulties are multiplied, so, by God's favor,

new means and aids to exegesis are also provided. Among these it is worthy of special mention that Catholic theologians, following the teaching of the Holy Fathers and especially of the Angelic and Common Doctor, have examined and explained the nature and effects of biblical inspiration more exactly and more fully than was wont to be done in previous ages. For having begun by expounding minutely the principle that the inspired writer, in composing the sacred book, is the living and reasonable instrument of the Holy Spirit, they rightly observe that, impelled by the divine motion, he so uses his faculties and powers, that from the book composed by him all may easily infer "the special character of each one and, as it were, his personal traits." [28] Let the interpreter then, with all care and without neglecting any light derived from recent research, endeavor to determine the peculiar character and circumstances of the sacred writer, the age in which he lived, the sources written or oral to which he had recourse and the forms of expression he employed.

34. Thus can he the better understand who was the inspired author, and what he wishes to express by his writings. There is no one indeed but knows that the supreme rule of interpretation is to discover and define what the writer intended to express, as St. Athanasius excellently observes: "Here, as indeed is expedient in all other passages of Sacred Scripture, it should be noted, on what occasion the Apostle spoke; we should carefully and faithfully observe to whom and why he wrote, lest, being ignorant of these points, or confounding one with another, we miss the real meaning of the author." [29]

35. What is the literal sense of a passage is not always as obvious in the speeches and writings of the ancient authors of the East, as it is in the works of our own time. For what they wished to express is not to be determined by the rules of grammar and philology alone, nor solely by the context; the interpreter must, as it were, go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East and with the aid of history, archaeology, ethnology, and other sciences, accurately determine what modes of writing, so to speak, the authors of that ancient period would be likely to use, and in fact did use.

36. For the ancient peoples of the East, in order to express their ideas, did not always employ those forms or kinds of speech which we use today; but rather those used by the men of their times and countries. What those exactly were the commentator cannot determine as it were in advance, but only after a careful examination of the ancient literature of the East. The investigation, carried out, on this point, during the past forty or fifty years with greater care and diligence than ever before, has more clearly shown what forms of expression were used in those far off times, whether in poetic description or in the formulation of laws and rules of life or in recording the facts and events of history. The same inquiry has also shown the special preeminence of the people of Israel among all the other ancient nations of the East in their mode of compiling history, both by reason of its antiquity and by reasons of the faithful record of the events; qualities which may well be attributed to the gift of divine inspiration and to the peculiar religious purpose of biblical history.

37. Nevertheless no one, who has a correct idea of biblical inspiration, will be surprised to find, even in the Sacred Writers, as in other ancient authors, certain fixed ways of expounding and narrating, certain definite idioms, especially of a kind peculiar to the Semitic tongues, so-called approximations, and certain hyperbolic modes of expression, nay, at times, even paradoxical, which even help to impress the ideas more deeply on the mind. For of the modes of expression which, among ancient peoples, and especially those of the East, human language used to express its thought, none is excluded from the Sacred Books, provided the way of speaking adopted in no wise contradicts the holiness and truth of God, as, with his customary wisdom, the Angelic Doctor already observed in these words: "In Scripture divine things are presented to us in the manner which is in common use amongst men."^[30] For as the substantial Word of God became like to men in all things, "except sin,"^[31] so the words of God, expressed in human language, are made like to human speech in every respect, except error. In this consists that "condescension" of the God of providence, which St. John Chrysostom extolled with the highest praise and repeatedly declared to be found in the Sacred Books.^[32]

38. Hence the Catholic commentator, in order to comply with the present needs of biblical studies, in explaining the Sacred Scripture and in demonstrating and proving its immunity from all error, should also make a prudent use of this means, determine, that is, to what extent the manner of expression or the literary mode adopted by the sacred writer may lead to a correct and genuine interpretation; and let him be convinced that this part of his office cannot be neglected without serious detriment to Catholic exegesis. Not infrequently - to mention only one instance - when some persons reproachfully charge the Sacred Writers with some historical error or inaccuracy in the recording of facts, on closer examination it turns out to be nothing else than those customary modes of expression and narration peculiar to the ancients, which used to be employed in the mutual dealings of social life and which in fact were sanctioned by common usage.

39. When then such modes of expression are met within the sacred text, which, being meant for men, is couched in human language, justice demands that they be no more taxed with error than when they occur in the ordinary intercourse of daily life. By this knowledge and exact appreciation of the modes of speaking and writing in use among the ancients can be solved many difficulties, which are raised against the veracity and historical value of the Divine Scriptures, and no less efficaciously does this study contribute to a fuller and more luminous understanding of the mind of the Sacred Writer.

40. Let those who cultivate biblical studies turn their attention with all due diligence towards this point and let them neglect none of those discoveries, whether in the domain of archaeology or in ancient history or literature, which serve to make better known the mentality of the ancient writers, as well as their manner and art of reasoning, narrating and writing. In this connection Catholic laymen should consider that they will not only further profane science, but moreover will render a conspicuous service to the Christian cause if they devote themselves with all due diligence and application to the exploration and investigation of the monuments of antiquity and contribute,

according to their abilities, to the solution of questions hitherto obscure.

41. For all human knowledge, even the nonsacred, has indeed its own proper dignity and excellence, being a finite participation of the infinite knowledge of God, but it acquires a new and higher dignity and, as it were, a consecration, when it is employed to cast a brighter light upon the things of God.

42. The progressive exploration of the antiquities of the East, mentioned above, the more accurate examination of the original text itself, the more extensive and exact knowledge of languages both biblical and oriental, have with the help of God, happily provided the solution of not a few of those questions, which in the time of Our Predecessor Leo XIII of immortal memory, were raised by critics outside or hostile to the Church against the authenticity, antiquity, integrity and historical value of the Sacred Books. For Catholic exegetes, by a right use of those same scientific arms, not infrequently abused by the adversaries, proposed such interpretations, which are in harmony with Catholic doctrine and the genuine current of tradition, and at the same time are seen to have proved equal to the difficulties, either raised by new explorations and discoveries, or bequeathed by antiquity for solution in our time.

43. Thus has it come about that confidence in the authority and historical value of the Bible, somewhat shaken in the case of some by so many attacks, today among Catholics is completely restored; moreover there are not wanting even non-Catholic writers, who by serious and calm inquiry have been led to abandon modern opinion and to return, at least in some points, to the more ancient ideas. This change is due in great part to the untiring labor by which Catholic commentators of the Sacred Letters, in no way deterred by difficulties and obstacles of all kinds, strove with all their strength to make suitable use of what learned men of the present day, by their investigations in the domain of archaeology or history or philology, have made available for the solution of new questions.

44. Nevertheless no one will be surprised, if all difficulties are not yet solved and overcome; but that even today serious problems greatly exercise the minds of Catholic exegetes. We should not lose courage on this account; nor should we forget that in the human sciences the same happens as in the natural world; that is to say, new beginnings grow little by little and fruits are gathered only after many labors. Thus it has happened that certain disputed points, which in the past remained unsolved and in suspense, in our days, with the progress of studies, have found a satisfactory solution. Hence there are grounds for hope that those also will by constant effort be at last made clear, which now seem most complicated and difficult.

45. And if the wished-for solution be slow in coming or does not satisfy us, since perhaps a successful conclusion may be reserved to posterity, let us not wax impatient thereat, seeing that in us also is rightly verified what the Fathers, and especially Augustine,[33] observed in their time viz: God wished difficulties to be scattered through the Sacred Books inspired by Him, in order that we

might be urged to read and scrutinize them more intently, and, experiencing in a salutary manner our own limitations, we might be exercised in due submission of mind. No wonder if of one or other question no solution wholly satisfactory will ever be found, since sometimes we have to do with matters obscure in themselves and too remote from our times and our experience; and since exegesis also, like all other most important sciences, has its secrets, which, impenetrable to our minds, by no efforts whatsoever can be unraveled.

46. But this state of things is no reason why the Catholic commentator, inspired by an active and ardent love of his subject and sincerely devoted to Holy Mother Church, should in any way be deterred from grappling again and again with these difficult problems, hitherto unsolved, not only that he may refute the objections of the adversaries, but also may attempt to find a satisfactory solution, which will be in full accord with the doctrine of the Church, in particular with the traditional teaching regarding the inerrancy of Sacred Scripture, and which will at the same time satisfy the indubitable conclusion of profane sciences.

47. Let all the other sons of the Church bear in mind that the efforts of these resolute laborers in the vineyard of the Lord should be judged not only with equity and justice, but also with the greatest charity; all moreover should abhor that intemperate zeal which imagines that whatever is new should for that very reason be opposed or suspected. Let them bear in mind above all that in the rules and laws promulgated by the Church there is question of doctrine regarding faith and morals; and that in the immense matter contained in the Sacred Books - legislative, historical, sapiential and prophetic - there are but few texts whose sense has been defined by the authority of the Church, nor are those more numerous about which the teaching of the Holy Fathers is unanimous. There remain therefore many things, and of the greatest importance, in the discussion and exposition of which the skill and genius of Catholic commentators may and ought to be freely exercised, so that each may contribute his part to the advantage of all, to the continued progress of the sacred doctrine and to the defense and honor of the Church.

48. This true liberty of the children of God, which adheres faithfully to the teaching of the Church and accepts and uses gratefully the contributions of profane science, this liberty, upheld and sustained in every way by the confidence of all, is the condition and source of all lasting fruit and of all solid progress in Catholic doctrine, as Our Predecessor of happy memory Leo XIII rightly observes, when he says: "unless harmony of mind be maintained and principle safeguarded, no progress can be expected in this matter from the varied studies of many." [34]

49. Whosoever considers the immense labors undertaken by Catholic exegetes during well nigh two thousand years, so that the word of God, imparted to men through the Sacred Letters, might daily be more deeply and fully understood and more intensely loved, will easily be convinced that it is the serious duty of the faithful, and especially of priests, to make free and holy use of this treasure, accumulated throughout so many centuries by the greatest intellects. For the Sacred Books were not given by God to men to satisfy their curiosity or to provide them with material for

study and research, but, as the Apostle observes, in order that these Divine Oracles might "instruct us to salvation, by the faith which is in Christ Jesus" and "that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work." [35]

50. Let priests therefore, who are bound by their office to procure the eternal salvation of the faithful, after they have themselves by diligent study perused the sacred pages and made them their own by prayer and meditations, assiduously distribute the heavenly treasures of the divine word by sermons, homilies and exhortations; let them confirm the Christian doctrine by sentences from the Sacred Books and illustrate it by outstanding examples from sacred history and in particular from the Gospel of Christ Our Lord; and - avoiding with the greatest care those purely arbitrary and far-fetched adaptations, which are not a use, but rather an abuse of the divine word - let them set forth all this with such eloquence, lucidity and clearness that the faithful may not only be moved and inflamed to reform their lives, but may also conceive in their hearts the greatest veneration for the Sacred Scripture.

51. The same veneration the Bishops should endeavor daily to increase and perfect among the faithful committed to their care, encouraging all those initiatives by which men, filled with apostolic zeal, laudably strive to excite and foster among Catholics a greater knowledge of and love for the Sacred Books. Let them favor therefore and lend help to those pious associations whose aim it is to spread copies of the Sacred Letters, especially of the Gospels, among the faithful, and to procure by every means that in Christian families the same be read daily with piety and devotion; let them efficaciously recommend by word and example, whenever the liturgical laws permit, the Sacred Scriptures translated, with the approval of the Ecclesiastical authority, into modern languages; let them themselves give public conferences or dissertations on biblical subjects, or see that they are given by other public orators well versed in the matter.

52. Let the ministers of the Sanctuary support in every way possible and diffuse in fitting manner among all classes of the faithful the periodicals which so laudably and with such heartening results are published from time to time in various parts of the world, whether to treat and expose in a scientific manner biblical questions, or to adapt the fruits of these investigations to the sacred ministry, or to benefit the faithful. Let the ministers of the Sanctuary be convinced that all this, and whatsoever else an apostolical zeal and a sincere love of the divine word may find suitable to this high purpose, will be an efficacious help to the cure of souls.

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

is vain to hope for copious fruits of the apostolate.

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

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

56. If these things which We have said, Venerable Brethren and beloved sons, are necessary in every age, much more urgently are they needed in our sorrowful times, when almost all peoples and nations are plunged in a sea of calamities, when a cruel war heaps ruins upon ruins and slaughter upon slaughter, when, owing to the most bitter hatred stirred up among the nations, We perceive with greatest sorrow that in not a few has been extinguished the sense not only of Christian moderation and charity, but also of humanity itself. Who can heal these mortal wounds of the human family if not He, to Whom the Prince of the Apostles, full of confidence and love, addresses these words: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. "[37]

57. To this Our most merciful Redeemer we must therefore bring all back by every means in our power; for He is the divine consoler of the afflicted; He it is Who teaches all, whether they be invested with public authority or are bound in duty to obey and submit, true honesty, absolute justice and generous charity; it is He in fine, and He alone, Who can be the firm foundation and support of peace and tranquillity: "For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid: which is Christ Jesus."[38] This author of salvation, Christ, will men more fully know, more ardently love and faithfully imitate in proportion as they are more assiduously urged to know and meditate the Sacred Letters, especially the New Testament, for, as St. Jerome the Doctor of Stridon says: "To ignore the Scripture is to ignore Christ";[39] and again: "If there is anything in this life which sustains a wise man and induces him to maintain his serenity amidst the tribulations and adversities of the world, it is in the first place, I consider, the meditation and knowledge of the Scriptures."[40]

58. There those who are wearied and oppressed by adversities and afflictions will find true consolation and divine strength to suffer and bear with patience; there - that is in the Holy Gospels

- Christ, the highest and greatest example of justice, charity and mercy, is present to all; and to the lacerated and trembling human race are laid open the fountains of that divine grace without which both peoples and their rulers can never arrive at, never establish, peace in the state and unity of heart; there in fine will all learn Christ, "Who is the head of all principality and power"[41] and "Who of God is made unto us wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption."[42]

59. Having expounded and recommended those things which are required for the adaptation of Scripture studies to the necessities of the day, it remains, Venerable Brethren and beloved sons, that to biblical scholars who are devoted sons of the Church and follow faithfully her teaching and direction, We address with paternal affection, not only Our congratulations that they have been chosen and called to so sublime an office, but also Our encouragement to continue with ever renewed vigor with all zeal and care, the work so happily begun. Sublime office, We say; for what is more sublime than to scrutinize, explain, propose to the faithful and defend from unbelievers the very word of God, communicated to men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.?

60. With this spiritual food the mind of the interpreter is fed and nourished "to the commemoration of faith, the consolation of hope, the exhortation of charity."[43] "To live amidst these things, to meditate these things, to know nothing else, to seek nothing else, does it not seem to you already here below a foretaste of the heavenly kingdom?"[44] Let also the minds of the faithful be nourished with this same food, that they may draw from thence the knowledge and love of God and the progress in perfection and the happiness of their own individual souls. Let, then, the interpreters of the Divine Oracles devote themselves to this holy practice with all their heart. "Let them pray, that they may understand";[45] let them labor to penetrate ever more deeply into the secrets of the Sacred Pages; let them teach and preach, in order to open to others also the treasures of the word of God.

61. Let the present-day commentators of the Sacred Scripture emulate, according to their capacity, what those illustrious interpreters of past ages accomplished with such great fruit; so that, as in the past, so also in these days, the Church may have at her disposal learned doctors for the expounding of the Divine Letters; and, through their assiduous labors, the faithful may comprehend all the splendor, stimulating language, and joy contained in the Holy Scriptures. And in this very arduous and important office let them have "for their comfort the Holy Books"[46] and be mindful of the promised reward: since "they that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that instruct many unto justice, as stars for all eternity."[47]

62. And now, while ardently desiring for all sons of the Church, and especially for the professors in biblical science, for the young clergy and for preachers, that, continually meditating on the divine word, they may taste how good and sweet is the spirit of the Lord;[48] as a presage of heavenly gifts and a token of Our paternal goodwill, We impart to you one and all, Venerable Brethren and beloved sons, most lovingly in the Lord, the Apostolic Benediction.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, on the 30th of September, the feast of St. Jerome, the greatest Doctor in the exposition of the Sacred Scriptures, in the year 1943, the fifth of Our Pontificate.

PIUS XII

1. 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

2. Session IV, decr. 1; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 45.

3. Session III, Cap. 2; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 62.

4. *Address to the Ecclesiastical students in Rome* (June 24, 1939); *Acta Ap. Sedis XXXI* (1939), p. 245-251.

5. Cf. I^a, q. 70, art. I ad 3.

6. *De Gen. ad litt.* 2, 9, 20; *PL* 34, col. 270 s.; *CSEL* 28 (Sectio III, pars. 2), p. 46.

7. Leonis XIII *acta* XIII, p. 355; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 106; *supra*, p. 22.

8. Cf. Benedictus XV, Enc. *Spiritus Paraclitus*, *Acta Ap. Sedis* XII (1920), p. 396; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 471; *supra* p. 53.

9. Leonis XIII *Acta* XIII, P. 357 sq.; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 109 sq.; *supra*, pp. 23-25.

10. Leonis XIII *Acta* XIII, p. 328; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 67 sq.

11. Apostolic Letter *Hierosolymae in coenobio*, Sept. 17, 1892; Leonis XIII *Acta* XII, pp. 239-241; v. p. 240.

12. Cf. Leonis XIII *Acta* XXII, p. 232 ss.; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 130-141; v. nn. 130, 132; *supra*. p. 31.

13. Letter of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to their Excellencies the Archbishops and Bishops of Italy, Aug. 20, 1941; *Acta Ap. Sedis* XXXIII (1941), pp. 465-472; *infra*, pp. 129-138.
14. Apostolic Letter *Scripturae Sanctae*, Feb. 23, 1904; Pii X Acta I, pp.176-179; *Ench. Bibl.* nn. 142-150; v nn. 143-144.
15. Cf. Apostolic Letter *Quoniam in re biblica*, March 27, 1906; Pii X Acta III, p. 72-76; *Ench. Bibl.* nn. 155-173; v. n. 155; *supra*. pp. 36-39.
16. Apostolic Letter *Vinea electa*, May 7, 1909; *Acta Ap., Sedis* I(1909), pp. 447-449; *Ench. Bibl.* nn. 293-306; v. nn. 296-306; v. nn. 296 et 294.
17. Cf. Motu proprio *Bibliorum scientiam*, April 27, 1924; *Acta Ap. Sedis* XVI (1924), pp. 180-182; *Ench. Bibl.* nn. 518-525.
18. Letter to the Most Rev. Abbot Aidan Gasquet, Dec. 3, 1907; Pii X Acta IV, pp. 117-119, *Ench. Bibl.* n. 285 sq.
19. Apostolic Constitution *Inter praecipuas*, June 15, 1933; *Acta Ap. Sedis* XXVI (1934), pp. 85-87.
20. Letter to the Most Eminent Cardinal Casetta *Qui piam*, Jan. 21, 1907; Pii X Acta IV, pp. 23-25.
21. Encyclical Letter *Spiritus Paraclitus*, Sept. 15, 1920; *Acta Ap. Sedis* XII (1920), pp. 385-422; *Ench. Bibl.* nn. 457-508; v. nn. 457, 495, 497, 491; *supra*, pp. 43-78.
22. Cf. ex. gr. St. Jerome, *Praef. in IV Evang. ad Damasum*; PL 29. col. 526-527; St. Augustine, *De Doctr. christ.* II, 16; PL 34, col. 42-43.
23. *De doctr. christ.* II, 21; PL 34, col. 40.
24. *Decr. de editione et usu Sacrorum Librorum; Conc. Trid.* ed. Soc. Goerres, t. V, p. 91 s.
25. *Ib.*, t. X, p.471; cf. t.V, pp. 29, 59, 65; t. X, p. 446 sq.
26. Leonis XIII *Acta* XIII, pp. 345-346; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 94-96; *infra*, pp. 15-16.
27. Hebr. 4:12.
28. Cf. Benedict XV, Encyclical *Spiritus Paraclitus*; *Acta Ap. Sedis* XII (1920), p. 390; *Ench. Bibl.* n. 461; *supra*, pp. 46-47.
29. *Contra Arianos* I, 54; PG 26, col. 123.

30. *Comment. ad Hebr. cap. I, lectio 4.*

31. Hebr. 4:15.

32. Cf. v. gr. *In Gen. I, 4* (PG 53, col. 34-35); *In Gen. II, 21* (*ib. col. 121*); *In Gen. III, 8* (*ib. col. 135*); *Hom. 15 in Joan., ad. I, 18* (PG 59, col. 97 sq.).

33. St. Augustine, *Epist. 149 ad Paulinum*, n. 34 (PL 33, col. 644); *De diversis quaestionibus*, q. 53, n. 2 (*ib. XL, col. 36*); *Enarr. in Ps. 146*, n. 12 (*ib. 37, col. 1907*).

34. Apostolic letter *Vigilantiae*; Leonis XIII *Acta XIII*, p. 237; *Ench. Bibl.*n. 136; *supra*, p. 34.

35. Cf. 2 Tim. 3:15, 17.

36. Lk. 24:32.

37. Jn. 6:69.

38. 1 Cor. 3:11.

39. St. Jerome, *In Isaiam, prologus*; PL 24, col. 17.

40. Id., *In Ephesios, prologus*; PL 26, col. 439.

41. Col. 2:10.

42. 1 Cor. 1:30.

43. Cf. St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum XIII*, 18; PL 42, col. 294; *CSEL. XXV*, p. 400.

44. St. Jerome, *Ep. 53*, 10; PL 22, col. 549; *CSEL 54*, p. 463.

45. St. Augustine, *de doctr. christ. III*, 56; PL 34, col. 89.

46. 1 Mach. 12:9.

47. Dan. 12:3.

48. Cf. Wisd. 12:1.
