

RECENT SCRIPTURAL STUDIES

BY

REGINALD GINNS, O.P.



THE word recent is hardly applicable to the first of the works here under review, *La Voix Vivante de l'Évangile au Début de l'Église* (Casterman, Tournai & Paris), by M. Le Chanoine Cerfaux of Louvain. It is three years since the Collection Lovanium published this excellent little study of the origin and character of the Gospels. In that collection it finds itself in somewhat strange company with works on genetics, archaeology, law, the atom bomb, and even on the tendencies of modern English democracy. But the series claims to be a collection of studies on general culture, and no one can claim to be cultured who is ignorant of the Gospels. It may be said without hesitation that this book provides a useful course of introduction for the student of the New Testament, showing him his way about in the maze of difficulties he will meet. Readers of the book already familiar with the teaching of the venerable Père Lagrange will not fail to recognise how copiously the author has drawn from that admirable source. His method of treatment is that defined and elaborated in Lagrange's *Méthode Historique*, summed up by Cerfaux in the words, '*la bonne manière de faire l'histoire, la seule possible, c'est d'entrer dans les vues du milieu étudié*'; the only way, indeed, to avoid those anachronisms which ruin so many professedly critical studies of the Scriptures, which project into the ancient mind ideas, views and mental developments belonging to a later age.

Canon Cerfaux makes a detailed examination of the oral and living tradition of the early Church, borrowing his title from the well-known passage of Papias preserved by Eusebius (H.E. III. xxix): 'For I considered that I should not get so much profit from what was written in books as from the voice which yet lives and remains'. Following Lagrange in his *Sens du Christianisme* he shows how modernistic critics like Loisy and the Liberal Protestants are quite at variance with the evidence of history, when they maintain that the Church as we know it is a creation of a later tradition which did not take its rise until the last quarter of the second century; a tradition that apotheosized, and so gravely falsified in the interests of propaganda the primitive tradition of the immediate followers of Christ concerning his character and the nature of his mission. In a word, they maintain that Catholic teaching about our Lord and his Church is merely the product of ecclesiastical theology and worship. Under that form the objection is seen to be common to many who would hesitate to rank themselves with Loisy and the Liberal Protestants. How frequently it showed itself during the

recent *Times* correspondence on 'Catholicism Today', when writers declared that cooperation with Rome was impossible as long as she refused to reject the corruptions with which she had defiled the primitive teaching of Christ!

Now if there is one thing more than another which stands out in the attitude of the early Fathers towards the faith they teach, it is their consistent appeal to the living tradition handed down by their predecessors. In the judgment of these early witnesses to the Christian faith—men like Papias, Polycarp and Irenaeus, who were in the direct line of apostolic tradition—the true test of reliability was the living and oral tradition rather than any written document. And no unbiassed student of history can fail to observe what they noted, that while Catholic tradition persevered so faithfully and consistently, its adversaries with equal consistency were always at loggerheads with one another, and remain so still. Chaos is the only alternative to infallible tradition. When the light and significance of this fact broke upon Newman's mind, his problem was solved. Chesterton deals in his inimitable manner with what is fundamentally the same fact when he writes on the paradoxes of Christianity in *Orthodoxy*, showing how the objections of the critics cancel out. It was Huxley, Spencer and Bradlaugh who led him back to orthodox theology. 'As I laid down the last of Colonel Ingersoll's atheistic lectures the dreadful thought broke across my mind: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian".' Writing against the Gnostic heretics seventeen centuries earlier, Irenaeus had pointed out that they could not agree among themselves about what precisely was the secret tradition which they alone possessed; Basilides said one thing, Valentinus another, Marcion yet another.

We shall not miss noting that our modern critics insist on what we have always insisted on, namely, that the written Scriptures did not produce the Church, but the tradition of the Church produced the Scriptures, at least those of the New Testament; and those who produce a thing are in the best position to say what is its significance and purpose.¹ In other words, with those alone to whom the deposit of Christian faith was committed will be found the true teaching of faith, the true meaning of Scripture and of all Christian traditions. The same principle is asserted with equal

¹ No one has put this more strongly than Tertullian in his advice about the futility of arguing with heretics by the exchange of scripture texts: 'quoniam nihil proficiat congressio Scripturarum, nisi plane ut stomachi quis ineat aversionem aut cerebri. . . . Et tu quidem nihil perdes nisi vocem in contentione: nihil consequeris nisi bilem de blasphematone. . . . Ergo non ad Scripturas provocandum est; nec in his constituendum certamen in quibus aut nulla aut incerta victoria est, aut par incertae. . . . Ordo rerum desiderabat illud prius proponi quod nunc solum disputandum est: quibus competat fides ipsa? cuius sint Scripturae? a quo, et per quos, et quando, et quibus sit tradita disciplina qua fiunt christiani. Ubi enim apparuerit esse veritatem et disciplinae et fidei christianae, illic erit veritas Scripturarum, et expositionum, et omnium traditionum christianarum' (*De Prescriptionibus adversus Haereses* 17 & 19).

strength by Origen, Cyprian, Eusebius, Basil, Epiphanius and Chrysostom; and it is very much *apropos* today when we hear Dr Garbett of York, in his protest about the nature of the recent instruction from Rome on the question of cooperation between Catholics and non-Catholics, once more repeating the claim 'we appeal to the scriptures for proof of all doctrine that is necessary for salvation'. Such appeal is of little value until the mind is finally made up about what the scriptures mean, and it is evident that non-Catholic biblical scholars are further from that than ever they were.

Here we touch on the main thesis of Canon Cerfaux's book, namely the relation of the Gospels to the living and permanent tradition of the early Church. For many years the Church lived and spread without the aid of the written Gospels, though not for so many years as was once so firmly maintained by the opponents of Christian tradition. Gradually they have returned towards the position held by that tradition, until at last an authority like Harnack adopts a date for the Gospels which hardly differs from our own. Wait long enough and genuine tradition will always justify herself. A striking example of this is furnished by Lagrange in his *Sens du Christianisme*, p. 274. In that work he traces the history of Protestant criticism of Catholic tradition right back to Luther, and by that method succeeds in shaking the whole edifice of Protestantism to its very foundations. According to Luther and his followers it is St Paul who is the true exponent of primitive Christian tradition, and that especially in his reputed teaching about salvation by faith alone. This teaching finds special application in the Lutheran view on the causality of the Sacraments. That is why the Council of Trent thought fit to issue the anathema: 'If anyone shall say that the Sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not bestow that very grace on those who place no obstacle in the way; or that grace is not bestowed by virtue of the sacramental rite itself, but that mere faith in the promise of God suffices for obtaining that grace, let him be anathema' (*Sess. 7, can. 6 & 8*). No one would expect to find the strongest supporters of the Tridentine teaching among the modern spiritual descendants of Luther, but that is what we do find; for the adherents of what is called the Judaeo-pagan syncretic school (particularly among the Germans) declare that the Council of Trent teaches the same sacramental doctrine as that held by St Paul, namely the *ex opere operato* efficacy of the Sacraments; what Dr Barnes considers indistinguishable from magic. In the view of these critics traditional Catholic Christianity is the result of a union, made under the influence of St Paul and his fellow Judaeo-Hellenistic converts, of elements drawn from both Jewish and pagan sources, the sacramental doctrine of the Church in particular having been borrowed from the mystery rites of paganism. Without doubt

these mystery rites were held to have an *ex opere operato* efficiency for the salvation of the initiates. Four centuries before St Paul, Plato had written that those who instituted the mysteries taught that everyone who descends to Hades without having first been initiated into the mystery rites will lie for ever buried in the slime, while the initiated and the purified will dwell for ever with the divine beings. The discovery of the tombstone of some obscure individual, perhaps contemporary with St Paul, bearing the inscription *tauro-bolio in aeternum renatus* (reborn into eternal life by the bull-sacrifice) lends touching witness to the permanence of popular belief in this pagan dogma.

But let us, says Lagrange, draw the plain conclusion: 'First of all this must be said, (these critics) must give up St Paul and hand him back to the Catholic Church, and that is a lot to say. For now it is held by them that Paul, the bulwark of Protestantism, the refuge from Roman idolatry, the apostle of justification by faith alone, in a word the Paul of Luther, has introduced into the pure and unadulterated gospel the doctrine of supernatural grace, the sacramental agency of baptism *ex opere operato*, the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, not merely present with the bread but so present that the faithful actually eat the body and blood of a God! Not that these modern critics believe this teaching of St Paul; on the contrary they accuse him of having corrupted in this fashion the primitive gospel. But the plain fact remains that they now interpret him literally just as the Church has always interpreted him, and in the way that the Council of Trent understands him.'

As Canon Cerfaux points out, as long as there remained alive the 'witnesses of the Word' and those who had learnt the traditional faith directly from them, appeal to these authorities was looked on as the true test of primitive belief. In other words the Church lived by living oral tradition or what has been called the primitive cataphesis (cf Luke 1, 1-4). It was only when the witnesses of the Word began to disappear from the world that the demand naturally arose for the committal of this oral tradition to writing. But even then, as Papias affirms, it was only gradually that the authority of the written word took the place of appeal to the living and permanent voice of tradition. 'To know what the Apostles taught', writes Tertullian, 'that is, what Christ revealed to them, recourse must be had to the churches which they founded and instructed by word of mouth and by their letters' (*De Praescrip.* 21). And again: 'Of these practices (in the administration of Baptism) and other usages, if you ask for the written authority of scripture none will be found. They spring from tradition, which practice has confirmed and obedience ratified' (*De Corona Militis*, c. 3, 4). And Origen: 'As often as the heretics produce the canonical scriptures with which every Christian agrees and in which he believes, they seem to say:

Lo! with us is the word of truth. But we cannot give credit to these men, nor depart from the first and ecclesiastical traditions. We can only believe as the succeeding churches of God have delivered (*Tract. 29 in Matt.*). Precisely similar declarations by such Fathers as Cyprian, Basil, Epiphanius and Chrysostom show on which side of the line stands Dr Garbett in his claim to appeal to the scriptures for proof of all doctrine that is necessary for salvation. It is a hoary old claim, shared by Dr Garbett not only with the Gnostics but also with Seventh Day Adventists and the Witnesses of Jehovah.

The name of Canon Cerfaux appears on the list of biblical scholars who form the directing committee of the new French translation of the Bible, organised by the Dominican *Ecole Biblique de Jérusalem* and published by *Les Editions du Cerf*, already noticed last year. Five more volumes have recently appeared containing Deuteronomy, Kings, Josue, the Epistles of the Captivity and the Apocalypse. These new volumes fulfil the promise made by their predecessors and should prove to be of great interest and help to students of the Bible. The brief introductions to each book are excellent of their kind. In the introduction to Deuteronomy one naturally looks first at the treatment of the question of date and composition. The translator, M. l'abbé Cazalles, deals with this thorny problem in a very frank way and proposes what seems to him the most probable solution, safeguarding himself by adding *salvo meliori judicio*. For he admits that the structure of the book makes it impossible to maintain that Deuteronomy as we find it could have been written at one go, as we say; moreover the whole book bears evidence of several stages of editing, and it seems proved that some of the legal enactments date from a time later than the division of the kingdoms of Israel and Juda. Certainly Moses was held to be the legislator *par excellence* of God's people, but '*à problèmes nouveaux il fallait régulations nouvelles, mais inspirées par l'esprit de Moïse*'. In this way the work of Moses was continued after his death; the various documents of which Deuteronomy is composed seem to have been formed into a book soon after the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. This would seem to be the book of the Law discovered by Helcias in the days of the reformer Josiah. A further edition with additions is assigned to the time of the Babylonian captivity: '*parallèlement à la mission d'Ezéchiel, Dieu inspira une seconde édition du Deutéronome dans le même esprit que la première, mais avec des vues plus précises sur l'exil, une insistance marquée sur les perspectives de délivrance. . . . Mais le fond est mosaïque, ne serait-ce que par le Décalogue. La religion et l'esprit sont mosaïques.*' Such treatment is as refreshing as the breath of fresh air, but it is easy to understand why the writer should be so anxious to safeguard *salvo meliori judicio*.

In the book of Josue, translated by my old professor, Père Abbat of the *Ecole Biblique*, an acknowledged authority on the topography

of Palestine, it is very aptly pointed out that the chapters which give a list of the tribes and their cities furnish us with a geographical document of such a value that nothing worthy of comparison with it is to be found in ancient literature. Not that its geographical value is its sole value. The rabbis placed Josue among the Prophets and with reason; for they saw *'dans l'enchaînement des recits un plan surnaturel que se réalisait progressivement en dépit de tous les obstacles, et dont le terme était la création du peuple d'Israël comme nation théocratique avec la Palestine comme patrie et la loi mosaïque comme charte'*. And if Josue was held in such high honour by early Christian commentators, it was not only because he bore the name of Jesus but also because *'il sut néanmoins préfigurer le Seigneur autant par ses actions que par son nom: passant le Jourdain, renversant les royaumes ennemis, distribuant la terre au peuple victorieux, énumérant villes, villages, montagnes et limites, décrivant ainsi d'avance les royaumes spirituels de l'Eglise et de la Jérusalem céleste'*.

In the Pauline Epistles of the Captivity Père Benoit of the Ecole Biblique sums up in a scholarly manner the evidence for the provenance of these letters and arrives at the following conclusions. The doctrinal synthesis of Ephesians and Colossians he considers to be of such a developed character that they naturally fall into place after the great epistles, Romans and Corinthians; hence, either the prison at Caesarea, or better still at Rome, was the place of their composition, *'apres quelques années qui auront permis à Paul de mûrir cette synthèse'*. On the other hand, the doctrine, style and references of Philippians lead Père Benoit to the conclusion that this epistle was written by St Paul from prison in Ephesus, despite the reference of 1, 13 to the pretorium, and of 4, 22 to the house of Caesar. Such expressions, we now know, would be equally applicable both to Rome and the great provincial cities, more especially to Ephesus. The chief objection, of course, to this opinion is that there is no evidence that St Paul ever suffered imprisonment at Ephesus, if we leave aside the references in Philippians itself.

The translation and introduction to the Apocalypse are from the pen of Père Boismard, another professor of the Ecole Biblique, and his introduction contains some excellent observations which help towards a right approach to such a book as this; observations, for instance, on the relationship between apocalypse and prophecy. Apocalypse, like the visions of Ezechiel and Daniel, stands as a sort of half-way house between the two. But these visions do not themselves form that which is revealed to the prophet; rather they call it forth by the use of symbolism, *'cette utilisation du symbolisme qui dérouté si fort nos esprits modernes'*. Nevertheless it is a thing to be understood and appreciated by anyone who wishes to get at the mind of St John. Take, for example, the instance of numbers upon which Père Boismard commits himself to the state-

ment 'il ne faut presque jamais les prendre pour ce qu'ils valent'. Thus the frequently used figure 7 symbolises perfection or completion, 4 signifies the created world, 1000 means a great multitude. Hence if you would follow the thought of St John do not strain the imagination by trying to picture a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, still less by endeavouring to fit the ten horns of the beast upon its only seven heads. And when we have done our best after this sane method of interpretation the Apocalypse will still remain largely enigmatic, chiefly because we have lost the meaning of many of its symbols which were no mystery to the contemporaries of St John.²

In the *Chronique des Editions du Cerf*, published as a supplement to *La Vie Intellectuelle* for October last, there is an interesting account of the intentions and ideals proposed by the editors of the Jerusalem Bible, as this new translation is styled. It may surprise us to learn that the existing French translations are not citable as is our English translation (it is the Protestant authorised version they have in mind). '*L'équivalent de la Bible anglaise n'existe pas: n'a jamais été le monument littéraire qu'elle est en Angleterre et en Allemagne . . . elle n'est pas citable dans les traductions françaises*'. They admit that such translations are *une traduction de génie* and confess that genius is not so easily come by. Moreover a literary genius is not always capable of providing us with the true sense of the inspired word, and that is more important than mere literary form and style. Hence the apportioning of the work of translation among a group of accredited biblical scholars and the submission of their work to another group of literary authorities for revision seem best adapted to secure the aim of this new translation.

The slow publication of the various books in small fascicules apparently criticised unfavourably by some, should prove a further advantage. Hurry over a monument intended to last is surely unintelligent, especially in a case like this. The method adopted gives time for second thoughts and further revision before the translation is committed to its final form. It provides encouragement to read books which might never be read at all if they were buried in a complete Bible. It serves to emphasise the important fact that the Bible is not a book but a collection of books whose unity does not proceed from the principles of human authorship, matter or style. On this account it seems preferable to use a plurality of translators, and it is good to read that, '*même lorsque la Bible complète aura paru, nous comptons bien maintenir la présentation actuelle concurremment avec cette Bible complète*'.

² In addition the actual text of the book presents so many incoherences and much lack of logical order that some have held it to be made up of two or three different documents, mainly of Jewish origin, badly put together by some Christian editor. Père Boismard offers a solution of his own to account for the anomalies mentioned above, a solution which he has already explained at length in *Revue Biblique* of October 1949.