

A BIBLICAL CONGRESS AT BRIGHTON, MASS. U.S.A.

IMPRESSIONS OF A VISITOR FROM ENGLAND

ONE evening last July the writer was taking a walk with another priest in Central Park, when they happened to come to Columbus Circle, New York's Orators' Corner. There were not so many orators or groups as in our Hyde Park, but the presence of the C.E.G. platform made the scene familiar enough. We listened in admiration to the speaker, a student from New York's Seminary, and later we went behind the platform to chat with some of his supporters. They told us that hecklers did not worry them, so long as one thing was forthcoming. The one thing was a text from the Bible; from that the average questioner had no appeal. Indeed, we were given to understand that the American crowd "is all pepper for the Bible."

Although only about half the population in the U.S.A. belongs definitely to any religious body, the Federal Census of 1936 (in three stout volumes) reports 256 denominations. Now all of these seek warrant for their faith and existence in their interpretation of the Bible. In general, American Protestantism is even more emphatic about the Bible than is its English counterpart. In America it is the Bible, and not the Prayer Book, that takes first place in all the Protestant sects.

The Catholic Biblical Association of America does not allow itself to become enveloped in pure theory. At the ninth general meeting held 26th-9th August at St. John's Seminary, Brighton, Mass., one of the papers was "How to present Catholic views on the Bible to non-Catholics." It was read by Fr. Renehan, C.S.S.R., and it embodied much of his experience as a missionary with a trailer in the southern States. We learnt that in South Carolina Catholics were fewer in proportion to the whole population than they are in China. But in this Bible Belt the missionaries found that simple reading from the Douay Bible and films on Biblical subjects invariably attracted a large crowd which stayed on to listen with respect to the teaching of the New Testament.

Many of the Protestant sects make great use of the Apocalypse, and maybe the Association had its eye on Apologetics when it arranged for a paper to be read by Fr. Guyot, C.M., on "The Apocalypse in the Seminary Scripture Course." The main concern was to decide on a system of interpretation and to carry this through the whole Book.

A paper with a very practical bearing was read by the Very Rev. Ignatius Smith, O.P., on "The Bible and Catholic Living." Fr. Smith is a well-known preacher in the U.S.A., and he was at the time directing a ten day Summer School on preaching for some 80 priests in another section of the Seminary buildings.

Fr. Cotter, S.J., who has taught Fundamental Theology and Scripture for many years at the Jesuit house of studies at Weston, Mass., read an excellent paper on the "Obscurity of Sacred Scripture." There is no *a priori* reason, he said, why the Bible has to be obscure, but obscure it is—at least in parts. Did God intend the obscurity; or did He merely allow it? The Fathers suggest God intended it.

Americans crowd many lectures into a day. At the ten day Summer School on Scripture for Professors, held at Niagara University under the direction of Fr. Vosté, O.P., and Dr. Albright, five hours a day were devoted to lectures. At Brighton, Mass., the programme looked equally formidable. On the first morning we assisted at Mass at 8.30 a.m., celebrated by Archbishop Cushing, and before we left the chapel His Grace gave us an inspiring address of welcome. In the course of this he said there was a danger that American Catholics, while emphasizing the need to receive the Incarnate Word in Holy Communion frequently, might overlook the need of forming the mind and developing it by the written word of God. By 9.30 a.m., we were all in the separate building which houses the library, and we listened to (and later discussed) papers read on the Holy Eucharist. The first of these was read by Fr. Temple of New York: "The Eucharist in St. John." This was followed by a paper read by Fr. Peters, C.S.P., of Washington on "The Eucharist in St. Paul," and finally we had "The Eucharist and the Mystery Religions" by Fr. McConnell, M.M. This was a morning's programme, but in order to leave room for discussions, it was wisely decided to limit the time for the papers to twenty minutes. The discussions were always good and often lively. There was Fr. Gruenthaner, S.J., in the afternoon session who enjoyed quizzing a fellow Jesuit from California (Fr. Casey) about regarding the Book of Jonas as wholly historical. And Fr. Vosté was always ready to help and to guide—besides giving excellent lectures.

Unfortunately Fr. Arbez, S.S., was unable to be present to read his paper "Prophecy in the Bible and in the Koran," and in his place we listened to Fr. Plassmann, O.F.M., recounting the sad plight of scholars in Germany, a country which he had recently visited. One other paper was devoted to the Prophets: "The Authorship of Isaias" by Fr. R. T. Murphy, O.P. This was an admirably succinct exposition of the whole problem.

One afternoon was kept free for an excursion. We climbed into a comfortable coach (equipped with a microphone and loudspeaker for the guide) and were shown Boston and the historic sites of Lexington and Concord. For a foreigner one of the greatest thrills was to have two policemen on motor cycles preceding the coach. With their sirens wailing as if an air raid were in progress, we were able to pass through the red traffic lights. Besides seeing Paul Revere's house,

Bunker Hill, and the ship in the harbour which took part in the Civil War, we were able to visit the Semitic and Oriental Museum at Harvard.

Perhaps the chief advantage of any such Conference is the opportunity it affords of meeting enthusiasts and of discussing subjects of mutual interest. A friendly welcome met one everywhere, and the hospitality of the Americans lived up to its high reputation.

One of the unofficial discussions might interest readers of SCRIPTURE. From Fr. Vosté's observations we gathered that the time is not far distant when a translation into Latin direct from the original languages of the Bible will be made and authorized for the Liturgy. This has, of course, already taken place in the new version of the Psalms. A corollary to this is that many of us may live to see the day when we shall hear read in church a new English translation of Holy Writ made from the original languages through a Latin translation. It is noteworthy that the Pontifical Biblical Commission in its answer of 30th April 1934 to a question submitted by the Dutch Hierarchy, declared that the version to be read in churches must be made from "a text approved by the Church for the Sacred Liturgy."

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Since the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament were to be fulfilled only in the then distant future, how did contemporary Israelites recognize the divine mission of the prophets and distinguish them from false ones?

To keep the expectation of the Messiah vivid in the mind of Israel by ever clearer prophecies concerning Him was indeed one of the functions of the prophets, but it was not their main or primary one. Their chief duty was to proclaim Yahweh as the true and only God and maintain the people in His worship without any admixture of superstition and idolatry, cf. Ricciotti, *Storia d'Israele*, vol. I, p. 384. Their task involved the reassertion of the divine revelation, given to Abraham and Moses. Moreover, since Yahweh was a holy God, it included the inculcation of the moral law and the observance of the Ten Commandments. The sublimity and purity of the teaching of the true prophets cannot but have been in obvious contrast to the spirit of compromise and hypocrisy of the false ones. The true prophets stood out also by their personal sanctity, frequently suffering persecution and even death as a recompense for their preaching; whereas it was notorious that the false prophets sought the favour of the great and powerful in the land.