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THE KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF THE BIBLE
IN THE MEDIEVAL AGE

A Thesis presented to the
Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Divinity

by

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The period of the history of the world known as the Middle Ages is one which has been much misunderstood in our circles. In an effort to emphasize the importance of Luther's translation of the Bible into the German language, many of our clergymen have, in years past, claimed in their Reformation Day sermons:

"that German church hymns did not exist before Luther's time; that the Holy Scriptures were largely unknown among the clergy and utterly unfamiliar to the laity; that there was little or no preaching in German, and that a catechism for the people and for the instruction of the young was entirely lacking." (1)

The Medieval Age has been depicted as dark in every sense of the word; the old argument of the chained Bible has been used time and again to show that the people of this time were kept in woeful ignorance of Scripture by a designing Church.

Fortunately, however, this opinion of the Middle Ages has almost disappeared today, largely due to the influence of Ranke, who insisted that history is to be written "wie es gewesen und geworden," without any attempt at proving a preconceived or utterly biased thesis.

"Careful investigations into the religious and churchly life of the fifteenth century, like the exploration of an unknown land, have gone forward step by step, and,

(1) Reu, M., Luther's German Bible, Columbus, Ohio, Lutheran Book Concern, 1934, p. 1.

through the study of long neglected manuscripts, have gradually rediscovered, bit by bit, a truer picture of its character, that has been constructed on the basis of these absolutely reliable sources." (1)

The investigations of careful students of the Middle Ages have shown that the religious knowledge, both of the clergy and the laity, was much greater than has heretofore been supposed, that there was a great deal of preaching and teaching in the vernacular, and that the Bible, far from being an unknown and unused book, existed in manuscript and printed form, both in the Latin Vulgate and in translation.

"Die Lutherbibel ist kein Meteor in der Bibelgeschichte, sondern ein Glied in der Kette der Bibeluebersetzungen, allerdings ein Glied, das alle andern in den Schatten stellt." (2)

The results of these investigations, however, far from detracting from the great importance of the work of the monk of Wittenberg in the Reformation, rather serve to emphasize the splendor of his work.

"There was nothing new in Luther's undertaking when he gave us a little book in which the chief articles of the Christian faith were briefly stated, but the really new contribution he made lay in the exposition of these truths; an exposition which flows out of the very heart of the Gospel. In the homiletical sphere there has been a similar change of opinion. Today we know, and are able to prove from documentary sources, that at the close of the Middle Ages there was frequent preaching in the vernacular tongue, in fact that, in some regions,

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 1.

(2) Risch, Adolph, Luthers Bibelverdeutschung, Leipzig, M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1922, p. 2.

it was commoner than now. Here again, Luther's innovation did not consist in a revival of preaching, as such, but in the fact that real Christian preaching, a preaching that centered in Christ, and his redemption, now took the place of Christless sermons... The opinion that Luther was the actual founder of the German school system is still widespread, but this too cannot be maintained without qualification. The usual citation of Luther's flaming appeal to the authorities of the German cities, to establish schools everywhere, in support of this opinion, fails to justify it. It only discloses the fact that this treatise has been very superficially read. While it is true that this appeal of Luther, made in 1524, together with the Instruction to the Visitors, prepared in 1527 by Melancton and approved by Luther, with its detailed educational program, caused the establishment of many new Latin and town schools, they did not call the public school system into existence, and it is equally true that a fairly extensive school system, that conformed to the ideals both of the Church and of the Humanists, was already flourishing in Germany. The improvement that Luther aimed at and actually accomplished was to fill the existing forms with new content, so that really Christian schools, completely dominated by the new understanding of the Gospel, came into existence." (1)

In attempting to show precisely to what extent the new learning pervaded the countries of Europe during the Middle Ages, and, specifically, just in how far the Bible was known among the clergy and laity, one must be careful to strive for the golden mean in interpreting a flood of literature which usually goes to one of two extremes. The first of these divergent opinions is the one mentioned a-

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 2f.

bove, that the Bible was almost wholly unknown by the clergy and laity of the Middle Ages. And this would seem to be substantiated by no less an authority than Luther himself.

There are several references in the "Tischreden" to the effect that the Holy Scripture was unknown to the people under the papacy in the later Medieval Age.

"Doctor Carlstadt ist doctor theologiae gewesen und hatt dannest kein biblia gehabt. Deinde dixit amplius Doctor Martinus: Vor 30 Jahren nullus doctor theologiae habuit biblia, et uhi una erat, ibi erat monasterium." (1)

Another reference to Doctor Carlstadt reads:

"Die Biblia war im Papsthum den Leuten unbekannt. Doctor Carlstadt fing erst im achten Jahr an, nachdem er war Doctor geworden, die Bibel zu lesen, die weil er und Doctor Lupinus getrieben worden, Augustinum zu lesen." (2)

Luther mentions it as a credit to Staupitz that he was the first one to restore the Bible to his cloisters:

"Staupitius fuit vicarius super 30 monasteria. Is primus restituit biblia suis monasteriis et conquisivit optima ingenia et dicavit studio theologico." (3)

In regard to his own experience with the educational system of the Roman Church in his early years Luther writes:

"Vor dreiszig Jahren war die Bibel unbekannt, die Propheten waren ungenannt und gehalten, als waeren sie unmoeglich zu verstehen. Da ich zwanzig Jahr alt war, hatte ich noch keine gesehen. Endlich fand ich in der Liberei zu Erfurt eine Bibel, die lasz ich oftmal mit groszer Verwunderung

(1) Luther, M., Dr. Martin Luthers Werke, Weimar, Hermann Boehlaus Nachfolger, Tischreden, 2, 1552.

(2) *ibid.* 3, 2844.

(3) *ibid.* 5, 5374.

D. Staupitzen... Da ein Cardinal in der Erste viel wider mich gerathschlaget, und das ein Stocknarr gehoert und gesehen hatte, soll er gesagt haben: 'Mein Herr! Folget meinem Rath, setzt ehe zuvor Paulum aus der Apostel Chor, derselbe thut euch fuer Andern den groeszten Schaden und das gebrannte Leid.' Dieser aberglaeubische gleiszende Gottesdienst, ob er wol viel Leute betrogen hat, doch haelt er im Kampf des Gewissens den Stich nicht, ja taug er nichts." (1)

"Olim me monacho contemnebant biblia. Psalterium nemo intellexit. Epistolam ad Romanos credebant aliquot disputationes habere de causis tempore Pauli; nihil usus esse ad nostra saecula. Scotum, Thomam, Aristotelum esse legendum. Sed ego delexi biblia, et cum primum ad Psalterium me applicarem, titulos inspexi ut de cervo aurorae, et cum summam quandam haberem et usum psalmi, tum dedici verba conferre. Meine Kaethe melius intelligit psalmos quam olim omnes papistae. Sic dixit Doctor quidam: Psalterium est liber pro summis et sanctissimis theologis." (2)

These citations from Luther would certainly seem to point to the fact that the Holy Scriptures were known by very few people even in the age directly preceding the Reformation. But we intend to show in a later chapter that such was not the case, and in that connection we will discuss the validity of these quotations.

The opposite of this opinion occurs time and again in books of Roman origin. And any attempt to arrive at a clear picture of the situation as it really existed must carefully distinguish between fact and inference in evaluating these sources. It is claimed that the centuries preceding the Refor-

(1) Luther, op. cit., 3, 3767.

(2) Luther, op. cit., 4, 5008.

mation constituted a period of great intellectual activity, and that the members of the Church, both clergy and laity, were well acquainted with the Scriptures, both in the Latin and in the vernacular. And again Luther is quoted to prove this opposite contention. Cardinal Gasquet, in his "Eve of the Reformation", says:

"Luther, himself, shall tell us his opinion of the century before the rise of Protestantism. 'Any one reading the chronicles,' he writes, 'will find that since the birth of Christ there is nothing that can compare with what has happened in our world during the last hundred years. Never in any country have people seen so much building, so much cultivation of the soil. Never has such good drink, such abundant and delicate food been within the reach of so many. Dress has become so rich that it cannot in this respect be improved. Who has ever heard of commerce such as we see it today? It circles the globe; it embraces the whole world! Painting, engraving -- all the arts -- have progressed and are still improving. More than all, we have men so capable, and so learned, that their wit penetrates everything in such a way, that nowadays a youth of twenty knows more than twenty doctors did in days gone by.'" (1)

"Taking a broad survey of the whole movement for the revival of letters in England, it would appear then certain that whether we regard its origin, or the forces which contributed to support it, or the men chiefly concerned in it, it must be confessed that to the Church and churchmen the country was indebted for the successes achieved. What put a stop to the humanist movement here, as it certainly did in Germany, was the rise of the religious difficulties, which under the name of the 'New Learning', was opposed by those most conspicuous for their championship of true learning, scholarship, and education." (2)

(1) Quoted in Gasquet, Cardinal, The Eve of the Reformation, London, G. Bell and Sons, 1927, from Opera Omnia, (ed. Frankfort) tom. x. p. 56.

(2) Gasquet, op. cit., p. 46.

Now in a certain sense each of these claims is true. There can certainly be no doubt that the last centuries before the Reformation were periods of great intellectual activity, periods in which the knowledge of science and the arts received a tremendous impetus, periods in which discoveries and inventions reached new heights, and periods in which the Bible was known and used by more people than ever before. But it is equally true that the Bible was a closed book to the great majority of the people of Europe, not only during the early Middle Ages, but even in the period immediately preceding the Reformation. And it is precisely to demonstrate these two theses that this paper is being written.

The period of time known as the Medieval Age is one that covers a good many centuries. It begins with the fall of the ancient Empire of the Romans, and extends to the year in which the monk of Wittenberg posted his Ninety-five Theses in protest against the indulgence traffic of Rome. It is a period of domination, domination of the thoughts and actions and lives of all the inhabitants of Europe by that man who had set himself up as the vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman bishop. This period may be divided into two smaller periods, the Middle Ages proper, and the Renaissance. Although the exact date which divides the Dark Ages from the Renaissance has never been discovered, and probably never will be, we may roughly divide the two at about 1200 A.D., even though the roots of the Renaissance go back as far as the Crusades, which began in 1095. The Dark Ages are a time of barbaric invasions, of feudalism and serfdom,

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of compulsory Christianization, of campaign after campaign against the infidel Turk to retrieve the Holy Land from his grasp, of comparative ignorance, and of complete subordination to the will of the papacy, which ruled with an iron hand over the hearts and souls of the people through the Sacraments.

The Renaissance, on the other hand, is a period of emancipation, of individualism, of the rise of towns and nationalism, of the revival of arts and letters, and of growing unrest over and growing protest against the many abuses of the Church, resulting finally, humanly speaking, in that great social and religious upheaval known as the Reformation. It must be remembered, however, that none of these things happened overnight, but that they are all the result of causes whose roots go deep into the Dark Ages.

That is the period which we intend to discuss, trying to arrive at some conclusion just in how far the Bible was used by both the clergy and laity in this period. The discussion will, of necessity, be limited largely to that part of the Middle Ages known as the Renaissance, largely because the available sources seem to have little to say on the earlier part of the Medieval period, and because all historians seem to be agreed on the intellectual and religious darkness that covered Europe during those years. The discussion will follow three main divisions: the existence of Bibles and portions of the Bible in manuscript and printed form, both in Latin and in the vernacular; the knowledge and use of the Bible by the clergy and the laity; and the dogma of the Church in regard to the use of

the Sacred Scriptures.

THE HISTORY OF THE

It seems almost certain that any discussion which has to deal with the knowledge and use of the Bible must first of all determine as exactly as possible just how many Bibles or parts of Bibles existed. There can be no knowledge or use of Scripture without copies of the Bible to use. For this reason the first part of our discussion will deal with the existence of Bibles in every age.

THE EXISTENCE OF BIBLES

The Bible age is a period of change also in this respect, that it sees a change from the old to the new, from hand-written manuscripts to the printed word. And since there is such an obvious difference between the two methods of duplication, our divisions of existing Bible translations will naturally fall into two categories: the existence of manuscript Bibles and the existence of printed Bibles.

Up to the beginning of the fifteenth century all duplication of the written word was done by hand. The ancient employed hieroglyphs to record the historical events upon various materials, such as clay tablets, papyrus, or parchment. In the classical age of ancient Greece and Rome, professional scribes copied the classics by hand for the bibliophiles of that time. Some of the wealthier people employed as many as a hundred scribes to copy manuscripts for their libraries. There were even publication houses in Rome, where manuscripts were copied after dictation. There must have been an incredible

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number of copies of books, because the cost of these manuscripts at this time was surprisingly little. The library of Alexandria is said to have had 700,000 volumes.

During the gradual decay of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the Dark Ages, the practice of reading and the art of writing fell more and more into disuse, and became the monopoly of the clergy. But the torch of learning was not altogether extinct. In segregated cloisters, pious nuns and monks laboriously copied out manuscripts of the ancient classics, and, what is important for our discussion, copies of the Bible. These copies were usually made of the Vulgate, the translation of Jerome, finished in 450 A.D., which is still the *textus receptus* of the Roman Church. But there was no attempt at a mass production of literature, because there was no demand for such literature, and therefore no inducement for mass production.

But in the Renaissance the new learning arose, and there was a great demand for books. So men set about to discover a method of producing books in large numbers. The desire for mass production brought about first the discovery of printing by means of woodcuts, and later by means of movable type. This last was the invention of John Gutenberg of Mainz, and was, together with the discovery of paper, the greatest contribution to the rapid spread of learning in the later Medieval Age. The new invention of the printing press was also largely used in the service of the Church, primarily to publish copies of the Bible or parts thereof.

The translation of the Bible that enjoyed the greatest

popularity, and therefore was reproduced more often during the Middle Ages than any other translation was the Latin Bible, the Vulgate of Jerome. It was the official Bible of the Church, and thus was used in the churches and cloisters. (1)

"Wer also von der Bibel im Mittelalter, ihrer Bedeutung fuer Kirche und Kultur ein richtiges Bild gewinnen will, musz zufoerderst ins Auge fassen, dasz die Bibel des Mittelalters lateinisch war." (2)

Charlemagne, in the Capitulary of 789, ordered that manuscript Bibles be provided in all monasteries and dioceses, and even desired that all churches possess a copy of the Vulgate. Although in all probability this latter wish of the Emperor was never carried out, owing to the great difficulty in providing manuscript copies and consequently their great cost,

(1) Dr. Erickson, President of Upsala College, says of the Vulgate:

"The Vulgate is the most important of all translations from the Roman Catholic point of view. The Council of Trent declared it the authentic version of the Church. It is the great work of Jerome. While he was at work trying to revise the Old Latin, he became convinced that it was necessary to go back to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. He began his work 390 and finished it 405. For textual criticism it is of less value than the Septuagint and the Peshitto. But it is fairly accurate and has an elegant style. The fact that the Catholic Church declared it authentic removed the last doubt as to its value. Corruptions began to creep in at an early date, and many hands tried to revise the text. Among others Alcuin undertook and completed a revision at the request of Charlemagne (801)." - Norlie, O. M., The Translated Bible, Philadelphia, The United Lutheran Publication House, 1934, p. 51.

(2) Rost, Dr. Hans, Die Bibel im Mittelalter, Augsburg, Verlag von M. Seitz, 1939, p. 2.

yet we must realize that the number of manuscript Bibles, owing to these provisions, must have been considerable. In 1900 an American, who had settled in Germany, Caspar René Gregory, catalogued the existing manuscripts of the Vulgate that were known to him, and the number in Europe amounted to more than 2400. Not all of these manuscripts, however, contain the entire Bible, but very often only certain portions of it. Later investigations have raised this number considerably. There is no way to state with reasonable exactness just how many manuscript copies of the Vulgate were in existence in the Middle Ages, since we have no sources for the number published by the various monasteries, and since a great many copies must have been worn out or perished in other ways. Dr. Reu says:

"It would not be surprising if there were 20,000 manuscripts in circulation in the fifteenth century." (1)

Dr. Rost, whose book, "Die Bibel im Mittelalter", was published in 1939, says that the number of manuscript copies now in existence in Europe is in excess of 8,000, without taking into consideration the number of commentaries or glosses of the Bible. Using the same ratio as the one used by Dr. Reu, we would come to the conclusion that there were at least 80,000 copies of the manuscript Vulgate in the Middle Ages. This number, however, seems quite extreme. But at any rate, it would seem evident that there was a greater number of copies extant than had been heretofore supposed. Until the

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 7.

publication of the *Mittelalterlichen Bibliothekskataloge*, which was begun by the Munich and Vienna Academy of Sciences in 1915, we shall not be able to compute the number of manuscript copies with any great exactness.

Many of these manuscripts are notable works of art, adorned with many beautiful illuminated letters, pictures, and other beautiful decorations.

"A number are even written in gold on purple parchment. The *Codex Aureus*, for example, of the Bavarian State Library, which contains the four Gospels, displays an unusual splendor of coloring." (1)

Already at an early date translations of the Vulgate were made into vernacular languages, notably into the German language. Although the official language of the Roman Church is and always has been the Latin language, and although the reading of the Pericopes in the Mass has always been done in Latin, yet it seems evident that there were definite attempts to educate the people in the doctrines of Holy Scripture by translating the Bible into the vernacular. A good many of the later translations were made by private persons, and not under the authorization of the Church, but when we consider that education in the early Middle Ages was almost entirely a monopoly of the clergy, we cannot but draw the conclusion that at least these early translations were executed by churchmen, with at least the tacit consent of the higher clergy. A discussion of the use to which these translations were put, and the papal prohibitions of translations will occupy a later chapter. At

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 7.

present we are primarily concerned with the number of such translations.

The oldest German manuscript of the Bible that has come down to us belongs to the eighth century, and has been preserved in only one copy that contains only fragments of St. Matthew. It came from the Benedictine monastery of Monse, which was founded in 748. The reason why there are only fragments of this translation extant is because the parchment sheets were used to bind other codices.

"Competent judges agree that it is amazing that such an excellent translation should have been produced at such an early date; a translation that is much better than many later attempts. The translator was not content with writing a real German, but used language that was beautiful, and sometimes even had a poetic touch." (1)

The next translation comes from the ninth century, and was very likely made in Fulda in 830. It is preserved in the monastery of St. Gall. Other translations from the next centuries show us that there was a constant attempt to bring the Scriptures to the people. However, most of the manuscripts of Bible translations were produced in the fourteenth century.

"In the period between 1325 and 1350 we find that four different translations of the entire Bible were produced, and, in addition, three Old Testaments, two New Testaments, five books of the Gospels, twenty Psalters and several other books of the Bible." (2)

In this period belongs the translation that later became

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 21.

(2) Quoted from Walther, Festschrift, 1917, in Reu, op. cit., p. 23.

the basis of the first German printed Bible, and the famous Wenzel Bible, which is now preserved in the National Library of Vienna. This Bible is famous for its wonderful illustrations and illuminations. It is interesting to see that the avowed purpose of this Bible is

"to open the gate of Scripture to many to whom it is still closed, so that not only the 'servants' of God seek nourishment in the field of Scripture for those who are alienated from God, so as to bring them back to God, but that all the 'children of God' may be edified thereby, whether they have it read to them or read it themselves." (1)

Another valuable work is a manuscript found in the state archives at Koenigsberg, where it was used to read to the German Order at the conventual meals.

Walther studied 202 medieval manuscripts containing translations of the Bible, and he was of the opinion that 72 separate translators had a part in producing them. To these must be added, according to Reu, nine to twelve more discovered later. Dr. Rost lists 838 manuscript Bibles and parts of Bibles still in existence, among which are 43 German Bibles, 173 German, 74 Low German, and 59 Dutch Psalters, 33 Gospels, and 87 Pericopes.

Dr. Rost makes no attempt to compute the number of translations into German existing during the Middle Ages in manuscript form, but Dr. Reu computes that a very conservative estimate would be 36,000 copies.

To this must be added 9 manuscripts of portions of the

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 24.

Bible in Danish and Icelandic, and 15 in Old English.

It is only natural, when we take into consideration the great difficulty involved in reproducing the Bible, that a great many more parts of the Bible were published independently, rather than complete Bibles. Any attempt to enumerate the number of Bibles extant with a view to discussing its spread among the people of Europe must also take these into consideration. Dr. Rost has enumerated the number of manuscripts of portions of the Bible extant in the German dialects. Thus there are 7 manuscripts extant of the five books of Moses, 6 of the books of the Kings, 32 of the Song of Solomon, 8 of Proverbs, and 24 other manuscripts which translate individual books of the Old Testament. Editions of the Psalter were particularly numerous, and were particularly prized by the people of the Middle Ages.

"Hier findest du, schreibt Alkuin in der Vorrede zu seinem Buechlein ueber den Gebrauch der Psalmen, die Fleischwerdung, das Leiden, die Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt des goettlichen Logos. Alles, was den Christen erregt, klingt in den Psalmen wieder: das Bewusstsein der Suede und die Zuversicht auf die Vergebung, die Freude ueber die goettlichen Wohltaten und die Lust an der goettlichen Herrlichkeit, die Angst in den Versuchungen und das Entbaehren der goettlichen Rache, der Ueberdruetz an der gegenwaertigen Welt und das Heimweh nach dem himmlischen Vaterland, das Gefuehl des Glueckes und der Ernst der Heiligung." (1)

The Psalter was used, so Dr. Rost declares, by the learned as a prayer book, and as a devotional book for the people, particularly for the women. At any rate, its popularity is

(1) Rost, op. cit., p. 334.

indisputable, because there are still extant today 173 manuscripts of the Psalter in German, 74 in Low German, 59 in Dutch, and 15 in Old English. Beside these, there are 22 manuscripts that contain several selected Psalms, and 169 that contain the seven Penitential Psalms. Of the New Testament, we find 33 manuscripts of the Gospels, 5 of the Acts, 6 of the letters of St. Paul, and 16 of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. Furthermore, there are 16 manuscripts still extant of harmonies of the Gospels, the earliest of which was written in 830 at Fulda.

This it would seem that even before the invention of printing there were many Bibles and particularly parts of the Bible in existence in the Middle Ages, particularly if we suppose that the computation of Walther, that 99 $\frac{4}{5}$ per cent. of the manuscripts have disappeared, is to be taken literally. At any rate, we believe that the existence of these many manuscripts shows that the early Middle Ages was not almost entirely without the Bible, as had heretofore been supposed.

As soon as the art of printing was discovered, the Latin Bible was spread in printed copies. In fact, the first book of any size that was printed was the Bible. This was the so-called Mazarin Bible, and was issued from Gutenberg's printery between 1452 and 1456. In the years after the invention of printing, Bibles flowed from the presses of the early printers. During this time, and up to 1520, there were between 94 and 160 editions of the Vulgate printed in Europe. The report of the Kommission fuer den Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke, which seems to be the latest and most authoritative work quoted by Reu,

lists 81 Latin Bibles without commentaries, 13 with commentaries. Out of this number 55 were printed in Germany. Dr. Rost lists 160 editions of the Vulgate issued in Europe during this period, 81 without commentary, and 78 with glosses.

There have been many attempts to compute the number of Latin Bibles in Europe by trying to discover the number of copies found in each edition. But there are very few editions in which it is possible to discover the number of copies printed.

"Wir bespitzten ueber die Hoehe der Auflage der Bibeldrucke keine genauen Anhaltspunkte. Nestle schaezt die Staerke der ersten Bibelauflagen auf 250. Koberger und auch die groszen Drucker in Venedig bemaszen ihre Auflagen oft auf 1600 Exemplare. In Wimpfelings Schriften wird die Staerke der Auflage auf 1000 Exemplare angegeben. Die von Konrad Sweynheym und Arnold Pannartz in Rom im Jahre 1471 gedruckte Bibel hatte eine Auflagenhoehe von 275 Exemplaren; die in Venedig im Jahre 1478 fuer Nikolaus von Frankfurt hergestellte Bibel soll 930 Exemplare betragen haben." (1)

However, using as a basis the lowest number of copies known to comprise one edition, the Roman edition, and using the lowest number of editions, 94, we come to the conclusion that there were at least 25,000 copies of the Vulgate printed and distributed between 1450 and 1520. Rost, being a Romanist, is much more optimistic, computing the figure at 48,000.

Also in the field of vernacular languages the Bible appeared in print. We know of no less than 14 High German and 4 Low German editions of the Bible published in this period.

(1) Rost, op. cit., p. 417.

The first German Bible issued was the famous Mentel Bible, published in Strassburg about 1466. The manuscript from which it was copied, however, was one of the poorer translations. There are, for instance, three thousand places where the translation does not agree with the Vulgate. Nor is the German used very cultured or polished. But there must have been a great demand for the work, since it passed through three editions between 1466 and 1473.

In addition to the 18 vernacular translations just mentioned, there are 4 Dutch editions, 23 French editions, 12 Italian editions, 3 Czech editions, 1 Polish edition, 1 Spanish edition, 1 Russian edition, and 4 Polyglott Bibles issued during this period.

The Psalter received a great deal of attention also in print, appearing in a great number of editions in many of the languages of Europe. Thus there are listed by Rost 37 German editions, 1 Dalmatic edition, 1 Ruthenian edition, 1 Czech edition, 1 Spanish edition, 19 Italian editions, 2 Swedish editions, 1 Ethiopic edition, 264 Latin editions of the entire Psalter. In addition there are 25 editions of the seven Penitential Psalms, and 18 editions of single selected Psalms.

In addition to these groups, there are 14 editions of the New Testament, 12 of the Gospels, 8 of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, 1 of the Gospel according to St. Mark, 2 of the Gospel according to St. Luke, 2 of the Gospel according to St. John, 2 of the Epistles of Peter, 28 of the Epistles of

St. Paul, 7 of the Acts of the Apostles, and 7 of the Revelation of St. John the Divine. There are also extant 18 editions of a harmony of the Gospels.

If we want to arrive at a fair conclusion as to the number of written or printed Bibles existing during the Middle Ages, we cannot confine ourselves to reproductions of the printed text alone, but we must also take paraphrases or condensations of parts of the Bible into consideration. Under this classification we find the History Bibles. Dr. Rost understands under History Bibles

"Keineswegs, wie man die frueher angenommen hat, aufgeloeste Reimbibeln, sondern eine fuer sich selbststaendig bestehende Gattung von Ausgaben der Bibeln auf der Grundlage biblischer und profaner Geschichte. Sie behandeln in erster Linie das Alte Testamet." (1)

Vollmer has the following to say about History Bibles:

"Sie sind deutsche Prosatexte, die in freier Bearbeitung den biblischen Erzuehlungsstoff, moeglichst vollstaendig, erweitert durch apokryphe und profan-geschichtliche Zutaten und unter Anschluss oder doch Zurueckdraengung der erbaulichen Glosse darbieten, ganz gleichgueltig, ob dabei gereimte Quellen oder die Vulgata, Historia scholastica, das Speculum historiale oder sonstige die heilige in Verbindung mit profaner Geschichte behandelnde Texte als Vorlage dienten." (2)

These History Bibles owe their existence to two causes: first, the need of a convenient compend of the historical portions of the Bible for its own sake, for instruction in the monasteries. Secondly, the example of the ancient Church,

(1) Rost, op. cit., p. 199.

(2) Quoted from Vollmer, in Rost, op. cit., p. 199.

which in the chronicles of Eusebius and Jerome, and particularly in the work of Isadore of Seville, had produced accounts of the history of the world that were largely taken from the Bible. Perhaps the influences from the Eastern Church and the Chronicle of the Jew Jerahmeel also played some part in their production. (1) The reason for the writing of History Bibles is given by Peter Comestor, who wrote the first Latin History about 1175:

"Der Grund, das Werk zu unternehmen, lag in der dringenden Bitten der Freunde, die mich veranlaszten, eine Geschichte nach der heiligen Schrift zu verfassen nach der Reihenfolge der Jahreszahlen, die mit Glossen versehen, ziemlich kurz und ohne Erklæuerung sei, damit sie sich an diese wenden koennten, wenn sie geschichtliche Wahrheiten erfahren wollten. Dabei beherrschte die Gesinnung den Stil in solcher Weise, dasz ich von den Ausspruechen der Vaeter in keiner Weise abwich... Von der Kosmographie ein Baechleinder Geschichte herabgeleitet bis zur Himmelfahrt des Erloesers, ein Meer von Geheimnissen den Schriftkundigern ueberlassend, worin sie alter Fragen weiter verfolgen und neue aufwerken koennen. Auch aus den Geschichtswerken heidnischer Schrifsteller habe ich manche Stellen gefuegt, gleich einem Baechlein, das anders nicht aufhoert, am Flussbett vorbei zu flieszen, bis es Nebenwege gefunden und ausgefuellt hat." (2)

In Latin manuscripts of History Bibles, the outstanding one is that of Peter Comestor, also known as the Manducator, mentioned above. His "Historia Scholastica" is usually given

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- (1) See for reference Reu, op. cit., notes to chapter 1, p. 292.
(2) Comestor, Petrus, in his Dedicatory Letter to Archbishop William, quoted in Rost, op. cit., p. 201.

in the words of the Bible, although explanations derived from Jerome, Augustine, and other sources are added. There are also very extensive additions of apocryphal character, usually derived from Josephus. The influence which this History had on the knowledge of Scripture, especially in the Latin schools, must have been a large one, since it is cited by Ranulf Higden in his "Polychronicon", about 1360, at least 120 times, and since the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, alone possessed no less than 21 copies. Its influence extended to all the countries of Europe, where it was translated into the vernacular and used in the schools. Up till the present day no one has made a list of the available manuscripts.

In Germany the History Bibles also played an important role, treating both the Old and the New Testaments, and being used as school Bibles. Dr. Vollmer lists no less than 103 manuscript copies of German Histories still extant. There can be no doubt that these were real books of the people, but it is to be regretted that they are loaded with legend, and are likely to present a subjective viewpoint in regard to faith and works.

The *Historia Scholastica* appeared in print in 1473. The first edition appeared in Augsburg, and was followed rapidly by twelve more editions. The places of publication of these editions were Augsburg, Strassburg, Basel, Cologne, and Reutlingen. So it was particularly in Germany that these Latin Histories were published and very likely used. In German translation, there are ten editions printed in High German, and two in Low German. The

earliest of these editions appeared in Augsburg in 1476. So there was a total of twelve editions in 34 years, which certainly indicates that there was a demand for copies of these histories.

Another publication that must have played a great part in the education of the people of the Middle Ages was the *Plenaria*, or books containing the Pericopes for the Sundays of the Church year and all feast and Apostles' and saints' days. These are also known as Postils. Some of the *Plenaria* also included a short commentary on the Pericopes. The Canon of the Mass demanded a reading of the Pericopes during the service, and there was many a Church which possessed copies of the *Plenaria* when it could not afford to buy an entire Bible. There can be no doubt that through the reading of the Pericopes in the Churches many of the people of Europe gained quite an extensive knowledge of the Bible.

The manuscript Latin *Plenaria*, according to Reu, have not yet been counted, although there is a great number of them in existence. For instance, the Vatican Library possesses 42 manuscripts in Latin.

The Epistles and Gospels were also translated into the vernacular at an early date, because they were usually the texts of sermons. If such was the case, the priest would read the text in the vernacular before his sermon. In the cloisters, where many of the monks and nuns were not so well at home in the Latin that they could understand the Latin Pericopes, a German edition would certainly be welcomed. Besides, there were many

of the laity who wanted to read the Pericopes for their own edification.

"This is no mere supposition, for in the printed Augsburg Plenarium of 1503, for example, we find the quite unqualified assertion that it is very profitable for men for reading, and in the edition printed in Basel in 1514 there is this statement concerning the purpose of the book: 'Because there are many people who do not thoroughly understand Latin but who can read German this present book of the Gospels, and what belongs to them, has been translated and ordered in German, to the praise and honor of God the Lord.'" (1)

Just how many manuscript Plenaria there now exist in German translation is not known, but their number cannot have been so very small, since Fr. Falk, as early as 1905, proved the existence of no less than 99 printed editions for the period of 1473 to 1523.

The editions of printed Latin Plenaria do not seem to have been put out in great number, for we know of only six editions printed before 1500. The explanation of this is probably that the Churches already possessed copies of the Pericopes, or had other books which included these Pericopes. We know of 64 editions of this book in German print, however, and not less than 19 editions in Low German.

The title of a Plenarium published in Luebeck in 1488 reads as follows:

"Here beginneth the book of the prophecies, lections, Epistles and Gospels, which it is customary to read in the office of Holy Mass in the Holy Church throughout the entire year, with many beautiful glosses

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 46.

and teachings of the holy teachers,
adorned with many striking illustrations."
(1)

This title gives us an idea of the usual contents of the High and Low German Plenaria, and we cannot question the fact that they contributed appreciably to the knowledge of Scripture, for the Pericopes included some 270 lections, including lections for all the saints' days and other holy days of the Church.

"So it is manifestly a great mistake to imagine that the question of the place of the German Bible at the close of the middle ages has been adequately considered when we simply take into account the 14 High German and 4 Low German complete Bibles. Whoever does not take the History Bibles and the German Plenaria into account is guilty of a false reckoning and gives a completely false picture of the situation."
(2)

There are several other publications of the Middle Ages that are of secondary importance here, even though they do not directly use the Biblical text, and though they were not published in such great numbers as those heretofore discussed. But at least a short description of these publications is in order if we are to get something of an overview of the situation as it seems to have existed.

The first of these is the so-called "Biblia Pauperum", which was published in an attempt, and we believe a serious attempt on the part of the clergy and monks to bring at least an elementary knowledge of Scripture to those people who were

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 49.

(2) Reu, op. cit., p. 51.

unable to read.

"Die Armenbibeln waren in erster Linie ein Ersatz fuer die Bibel. Diese koennte dem Volke nicht in groeszeren Mengen verabreicht werden, weil das Volk der lateinischen Sprache nur wenig kuenig und weil damals die Buchdruckerkunst noch nicht erfunden war. Wir muessen daher die Findigkeit der Moenchen und Handschriftenabschreiber anerkennen, die mit der Biblia Pauperum in Wort und Bild einen vortrefflichen Ersatz fuer die Bibel darboten." (1)

The Biblia Pauperum were picture Bibles, with as little text as possible included on them, telling the stories of Scripture in pictures.

"Das Leben Christi macht den Inhalt der Biblia Pauperum aus. In einer Serie von 34 bis zu 50 Bildtafeln werden die wichtigeren neutestamentlichen Heilstatsachen dargestellt. In der Mitte befindet sich ein Ereignis aus dem Evangelium, das zu beiden Seiten von zwei alttestamentlichen Vorbildern umrahmt und ausserdem oben und unten von je zwei Propheten-Brustbildern mit kurzem erläutuernden Text umgeben ist." (2)

However praiseworthy this attempt on the part of the clergy may have been, there can be little doubt that only very rarely did these picture Bibles reach the unlettered populace, because they were far too expensive for any but the very wealthy to possess. Even then, however, Cornell lists 72 manuscript copies still in existence, and there are 29 printed editions of the book extant.

Another publication that deserves mention here is the "Speculum Salvationis Humanae", which also contains pictures, but much greater emphasis is placed on the text, and various

(1) Rost, op. cit., p. 218.

(2) Rost, op. cit., p. 219.

portions of the Scriptures are merely used as a starting point for all sorts of legendary, ethical, and dogmatical material. There are, however, 351 manuscript copies of this publication still extant.

Other publications deserving of mention are the Breviaries and Missals, which were published in great number, but which have little to do with the question that lies before us, and several editions of Commentaries and Glosses, which have been included under the editions of Bibles.

As has been stated before, it is very difficult to compute with any degree of exactness just how many Bibles or parts thereof existed in manuscript and print from this distance. The Reverend John Lenhart in the "Ecclesiastical Review", (Romanist) estimates that there were 704,500 copies of Bibles and parts of Bibles issued in print between 1455 and 1520. He further computes that there were 65 to 70 million people living in Europe at this time, allowing one out of every 33 families to possess one of these volumes. Narrowing it down still further, he claims that every group of 156 adults possessed a copy of a Biblical meditation book. But without doubt these figures are greatly overdrawn. Furthermore, we are afraid to quote him as an authority on the subject because of his preconceived notions and because of his dogmatic assertions. Nor does he offer any source material for his assertions, which makes the entire work of dubious value. (1)

Dr. Rost, on the other hand, sets the figure of printed

(1) See for reference: Lenhart, J.M., The Bible as the Meditation Book of the Medieval Laity, in The Ecclesiastical Review, Philadelphia, Vol. CI, No. 3, Sept., 1939, pp. 193 - 220.

Bibles and parts of Bibles in all languages at 290,000, a figure which again is conjecture, but which is a considerable reduction from the figure quoted above. His figures as to the population of Europe are also considerably lower than those adduced by Lenhart: $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 million at the time of Charlemagne, 7 to 8 million at the time of Frederick Barbarossa, and 20 million in 1500. He makes no effort, however, to compute the number of people who owned Bibles or portions of Bibles during this period, since he is not inclined to wander into the field of pure fiction.

Dr. Neu's figure is considerably lower, amounting to about 150,000 copies of Bibles and parts of Bibles, and Professor Hoyer thinks that even this figure is too high. Thus it can be seen that there is considerable disagreement on the subject, although it must certainly be evident that there were a considerable number of these books in existence during the Middle Ages, far more than had been previously supposed.

Whether these copies of the Bible were in places easily accessible to the great mass of the people is problematical. There was a copy of the Bible or at least of a Plenarium in every Church, where it was probably used only on Sundays; the Universities had various copies in their libraries, where they were probably used as much as the Bibles in the libraries of our modern Universities are, and if they were used, were used by the priests or members of the higher social ranks, and were not accessible to the common people. The University of Paris had the following copies of Biblical books in its library in the year 1388:

"33 complete Bibles, 18 copies of the Pentateuch, 15 historical books of the Bible, 28 psalteria glossata, 17 libri sapientiales (the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus), 24 books of the Prophets, 42 Gospels with glosses, 15 Pauline Epistles, 38 other Epistles, Acts and Revelation, 5 libri glossati mixti, 13 postils, 13 postils on the Psalter, 12 on the books of Solomon, 11 on the Prophets, 20 on the Gospels, 9 on the Pauline Epistles, 13 on the other Epistles, Acts and Revelation, 33 postillae mixtae, 19 Concordantiae super Bibliam." (1)

Copies of the Bibles were also contained in the monasteries and nunneries of the Middle Ages, of which there were a great number. The library of the monastery of the Dominicans at Nuerenberg possessed 32 such copies, and St. Emmeran in Regensburg possessed 250 such volumes in the fourteenth century. The nunnery of St. James, in Freiburg in Saxony, had three complete Bibles in its library. The large theological library in the monastery in St. Gall is well known.

It is also known that many knights, merchants, and nobles possessed copies of the Bible, but whether they were used by them or kept as ornaments or valuable objects as is often done today is a matter of opinion. We are inclined to believe that very often they were purchased by the nobility merely because of their value and not for use.

It must not be forgotten that the Middle Ages covers a long period of time, and that during this time these copies of the Bible were worn out, so that at no time were there actually as many Bibles in existence as is supposed by Catholic writers. Nor can we forget that only in the last century of the Middle

(1) Reu, op. cit., p. 56.

Ages was the Bible published in great numbers in print, so that during the centuries before the invention of printing it was not possible to publish as many copies as was necessary to reach all the people.

Furthermore, the great cost of manuscript Bibles prohibited their being purchased by any except the most wealthy, and even printed copies were far above the means of the majority of the lower classes. As late as 1499 a complete copy of the printed Bible cost 9 gulden, which would amount to almost \$100 in our money, considering the comparative purchasing value of money at that time and now.

Nevertheless, we feel that we can safely say that there were far more copies of Scripture in existence during the Middle Ages than has been supposed, so that it cannot be said that the Middle Ages was without the Bible entirely. For those who could read, there was access to these Bibles in the libraries of the monasteries and universities, and in the Churches of each parish. So we must conclude that there were actually copies of Scripture or parts of Scripture in existence, and that these were accessible to the reading public. The use made of these Scriptures and the knowledge of the people of the Middle Ages as far as the Bible is concerned will occupy the next chapter.

... an act of violence is never confined to others, the
 care and education do not mix, and that let us believe, one
 of the reasons for the ignorance of both clergy and laity in
 the early Middle Ages, for society was made up of countless
 small groups, which were constantly shifting with the tides,
 while the monks and peasants, who were just a step removed from
 barbaric conditions, were occupied from dawn to dusk with their
 work in the fields, trying to raise sustenance for only them-

THE KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF THE BIBLE

... selves and their families. The fact is that in those early days, there was not time
 for ill and learning, and so there was a great amount of
 learning, both among the clergy and the laity, during the last
 century of the Middle Ages, particularly, the twelfth and thirteenth
 century of the population of Europe diminished by taxes and
 wars, so that at the time of Henry VIII of the Low Countries
 were read and written. This was particularly true for the
 high school of the writings of letters.

The education of the people of this time, until the last
 century of the Middle Ages, was entirely in the hands of the
 church. There were no state schools save in a few places. All
 learning lay in the hands of the clergy, and this was
 beginning of the Renaissance, almost exclusively for the clergy,
 and particularly the religious learning lay in the hands of
 the priests, all knowledge of scripture which the people of

An age of violence is never conducive to culture, warfare and education do not mix. And that is, we believe, one of the reasons for the ignorance of both clergy and laity in the early Middle Ages. For society was made up of countless feudal domains, which were constantly warring with one another, while the serfs and peasants, who were just a step removed from barbaric ancestors, were occupied from dawn to dark with their work in the fields, trying to raise sustenance for both themselves and their feudal lords. But with the rise of national kings, who put a stop to these petty wars, there was more time for wit and learning, and so there was a great revival of learning, both among the clergy and the laity. During the last century of the Middle Ages, particularly, the tremendous illiteracy of the population of Europe diminished by leaps and bounds, so that at the time of Luther many of the lower classes could read and write. This most particularly accounts for the rapid spread of the writings of Luther.

The education of the people of this time, until the last century of the Middle Ages, was entirely in the hands of the Church. There were no state schools such as we have them. All learning lay in the hands of the clergy, and was, until the beginning of the Renaissance, almost exclusively for the clergy. And particularly all religious learning lay in the hands of the priesthood; all knowledge of Scripture which the people of

the parish might possess came from the parish priest. And so it is important for our study to seek to discover the knowledge which the priests of the Middle Ages had of the Scriptures and the use they made of it in teaching their parishioners.

In the early Middle Ages the only schools for the education of the priesthood, in fact, the only schools, were the cathedral and monastic schools. Here the scholars were taught the seven liberal arts, all in Latin. Through the influence of Charlemagne, schools were opened in the villages, under the tutelage of the parish priests, to teach the laity at least the rudiments of Christianity, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and some of the Psalms. Beginning with about 1200, the various universities of Europe arose, at which the most talented of the priests studied, although later the laity was also admitted to these schools. But these universities occupied themselves largely with Canon Law and Scholasticism, both of which, although belonging under the study of theology, have very little to do with our topic.

"Dogmatics (including Ethics) and the Canon Law constituted the peculiar field of the Dialectic Theology of the Schoolmen. The standard of the dogmatic theology during the 12th century was the Book of the Sentences of the Lombard; that of the Canon Law the Decree of Gratian. Biblical Exegesis stood as an independent department of scientific study far behind these two, but was diligently prosecuted by the leading representatives of Scholasticism. The examination of the simple, literal sense, however, was always regarded as a secondary consideration, while it was esteemed of primary importance to determine the

allegorical, tropological, and analogical signification of the text." (1)

With the emphasis in the higher schools placed predominantly on the dogma of the Church, it can be readily understood that the knowledge and use of the Bible by the clergy was of a purely secondary nature.

If this was true of the higher and more educated clergy, it was all the more true of the parish priests, who never had the opportunity or the desire to attend the universities. These clerics were the ones with whom the common people came in closest touch, and from whom they were to learn their religion and derive their knowledge of the Bible.

"As for the lower clergy, the parish priests and their assistants and their vicars, their preparation was in many cases not such as would predispose them for faithful stewardship. It could be said of great numbers that they 'come not so much from schools and study as from the plow and servile occupations in order to govern churches or occupy some other clerical office.'" (2)

The ignorance of the clergy of the Middle Ages is closely tied up with the widespread immorality found among both the high and low members of the clergy. The low state of morality among the clergy is well known, and needs no elucidation.

"The moral condition of the clergy was in general very low. The bishops mostly lived in open concubinage. The lower secular clergy followed their example, and had toleration granted by paying a yearly tax to the bishops. The people, dis-

(1) Kurtz, Church History, Vol. II, New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1889, p. 78.

(2) Graebner, Th., The Dark Ages, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1917, p. 58.

tinguishing office and person, made no objection, but rather looked upon it as a sort of protection to their wives and daughters from the dangers of the confessional. Especially in Italy, unnatural vice was widely spread among the clergy." (1)

To illustrate the dense ignorance of the clergy, and their indifference to the Scriptures, it might be well to quote several sources of the times, in order to show that these were not isolated instances. The famous visit of Boccaccio to the monastery of Monte Cassino is a case in point.

"His pupil Benvenuti Imolensis tells the story as follows: 'My venerable teacher Boccaccio used to say that when he was in Apulia, he visited the famous monastery Monte Cassino. Eager to inspect the library, which he knew to be a famous one, he with great deference petitioned a monk that he might give him access to the library. The monk stiffly replied, pointing to a high stairway, "Walk up, it is open." Mounting the stairs joyfully, Boccaccio found the place where such treasures were stored without lock or key. Walking in, he saw the weeds growing through the windows, and books as well as chairs covered with deep dust. Greatly astonished, he began to open and turn the leaves of this book and that. He found there many volumes of ancient and foreign authors. Out of some of these, sheets had been torn, out of others the margins of the pages had been cut away. Grieved that the labors and studies of so many famous minds should have come to the hands of the most abandoned of men, he returned in tears. Meeting a monk in the cloister, he asked him how it was that these valuable books had been so shamefully treated. The monk replied that some of the brethren, desiring to earn two or five coppers, were in the habit of erasing the writing from some of

(1) Kurtz, op. cit., p. 157.

of the pages, and, covering them with prayers, would sell them to the children. Of the margins they made magic charms against sickness, etc., which they sold to the women." (1)

"Trithemius wrote his *Institutio Vitae Sacerdotalis* about 1485, and says this concerning the clergy of his day: 'Unlearned, uncouth, without distinction of merit, they enter the priesthood. No longer is there any sanctity of life required in ordaining clergymen. No knowledge of letters is demanded. Purity of conscience is disregarded. Our priests have cast off the study of the Scriptures, neglect learning, neglect studies, and train birds and dogs instead of studying the Scriptures. They have hardly any knowledge of the Bible, and are barely able to set forth the Gospel in the popular tongue. Instead of books (*libri*) they get children (*liberi*), instead of studies, they have concubines.'" (2)

"At the time of the reformation a monk complained that 'they have invented a new language which they call the Greek. Beware of her as she is the mother of all heresies! I see in many hands a book written in this language, which they call the New Testament, a book full of thorns and poison. As for Hebrew, every one who reads it is changed into a Jew on the spot.' Even the clerics who were able to read the Latin version of the Bible exhibit an ignorance of the sacred writings which were laughable if it were not so pathetic. A fifteenth century edition of the *Gesta Romanorum* shows gross ignorance of the Bible: Texts from the Apocalypse, from Ezekiel, and one from Job are quoted as from St. Paul; Genesis is quoted as from the Psalms; Isaiah from James, and scraps of the church fathers are cited as Bible texts. A carol of the fifteenth century makes Herod execute St. Stephen on the day of Christ's birth. The Franciscan Salimbene (1280) heard Italian priests quote 'a

(1) Graebner, op. cit., p. 83.

(2) Graebner, op. cit., p. 66.

hundred times' as a text from St. Paul's epistles the cynical maxim: 'Si non caste, tamen caute.'" (1)

We could quote numberless sources to show the dense ignorance of the clergy, not only in the early Middle Ages, but all through this period to the very threshold of the Reformation. Even Luther in the Enchiridion to the Small Catechism says that

"many pastors are quite unfit and incompetent to teach." (2)

And yet it is not to be supposed that this deplorable ignorance of the clergy was universal. The evils of any system always receive much more publicity than its good points. It is not fair to arrive at any judgment merely by looking at the very worst features of the system. And it cannot be denied that there were many good and pious men in the clergy.

"Yet notwithstanding all the corruption that prevailed among the clerical order it cannot be denied that the superior as well as the inferior clergy embraced a great many worthy and strictly moral men." (3)

"While a great part of the clergy was steeped in the densest ignorance, yet, as a rule, the clerics were at least able to write and read. Their accomplishments were not, in many cases, above those of a third-grade scholar in our public schools, but even this constituted a tremendous superiority over the illiterate masses." (4)

And it was among these good and pious men that the Bible enjoyed a relatively wide use. Most of the higher schools of

(1) Graebner, op. cit., p. 67.

(2) Luther, Martin, Small Catechism, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1912, p. 3.

(3) Kurtz, op. cit., p. 59.

(4) Graebner, op. cit., p. 101.

learning, although they did not stress the study of Scripture above all else, at least had courses in Scripture study. Also in the monasteries, especially those of the Augustinian order, the Scriptures were read by the brothers, in accordance with the ancient constitution of the order, which dates back to 1287. In 1514, Jerome Dingersheim, the later opponent of Luther, wrote in his "Tractatus de modo praedicandi":

"If they desire to be shepherds of the flock of Christ, the Word of God provides them with the only pasture and nourishment for the flock; if they would be physicians of souls, the Word of God offers them the only remedy; if they would tend the vineyard of the Lord, the Word of God is the only well from which they may water it; if they would be spiritual leaders of the congregation, God's Word is the sword they must be able to wield so as to repulse all foes. How then can they accomplish this task without a thorough knowledge of this same Word and unless they have studiously acquired and practiced the art of using it rightly." (1)

The diligent study of Scripture was enjoined upon the monks of the Benedictine cloister at Sponheim by their abbot, Trithemius, in 1483:

"He who loves God must also love the Holy Scriptures; for he who loves God delights to associate with God, and it is the Holy Scriptures where he meets God the Lord." (2)

The preachers of the Middle Ages were exhorted to be very careful to make diligent use of the Scriptures in their sermons. Alan of Lille, who died in 1203, made a

(1) Quoted in Reu, op. cit., p. 57.

(2) Quoted in Reu, op. cit., notes to chapter I, p. 312.

point of emphasizing the diligent use of Scripture in his "Summa de Arte Praedicatoria":

"As regards form, preaching should first of all rest upon the authority of Scripture as its own proper foundation, especially the Gospels, the Psalms, the Epistles of Paul, and the writings of Solomon, from which useful moral instruction may be derived." (1)

The deep respect in which the Holy Scriptures were held by the clergy of the Middle Ages can be seen by the following quotation from the "Seelentrost", which was printed at Cologne in 1474:

"Der Seelen Trost liegt an (in der) heiligen Lehre und an Betrachtungen der Heiligen Geschrift; darum sollst du gerne lesen und hoeren die Buecher der Heiligen Schrift, denn glicher Weise (wie) der Licham (Leib) lebet von erdscher Spise, also lebet die Sele von heilger Lehre, denn der Mensch lebet nicht allein von dem uswendigen Brote, sunder auch von dem wort, das da geht von dem Munde Gottes und das ist die Heilige Schrift, die Gott gesprochen hat durch der Propheten Mont (Mund) und durch die heiligen Lehrer." (2)

We believe that we can say then, without fear of reasonable contradiction, that, although many of the clergy during the Middle Ages were ignorant and were almost entirely ignorant of Scripture, there were nevertheless many of the members of the clergy who could and did read the Bible, and held it in the highest regard.

Turning to the laity, we find that education for them

(1) Dargan, E. C., The Art of Preaching in the Light of its History, New York, George H. Doran Co., 1922, p. 79f.
(2) ibid., op. cit., p. 25.

was greatly restricted, so that in the early Middle Ages only a very small minority of the laity of Europe could read or write. But with the revival of learning, they were also admitted to the monastery schools and to the cathedral schools, and later many of them even found their way into the universities. For the common people, schools were even established in the villages towards the end of the Middle Ages; schools which, of course, taught only the barest of essentials, but nevertheless taught many of the lower classes how to read and write. There were, during this period, many of the upper classes of society who were very well schooled, and who read the ancient classics with enjoyment. Burgher and town schools, gild schools and burghers' universities all helped to lower the terrible state of illiteracy which had heretofore existed among the laity.

That the laity of the Middle Ages was almost totally ignorant of divine things can easily be seen from numberless quotations. We will merely adduce a few from prominent authors to show that such ignorance was widespread. Indeed, it appears to us that in the system of the hierarchy the laity was almost entirely left out, and in particular the common people were not regarded at all. Only very rarely does one find anyone with any regard for the common people, and they were usually the "Heretics."

"Bellarmine, the Jesuit, says:
'For some years before the Lutheran and Calvinistic heresies were published, there was not (contemporary authors testify) any security in ecclesiastical judicature, any

discipline with regard to morals, any knowledge of sacred literature, any reverence for divine things; there was not almost any religion remaining." (1)

"Berthold of Aatisbon, a missionary preacher, testifies that children would grow to seven, fourteen, even twenty years, and not know the Lord's Prayer." (2)

"The pious man is defined as follows by a medieval writer: 'He is a good Christian, who presents the sacrifice which is offered upon the altar, who doth not taste the fruit of his own industry until he has consecrated a part of them to God, who, when the holy festivals approach, lives chastely even with his own wife during several days, that with a safe conscience he may draw near the altar of God; and who, in the last place, can repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer.'" (3)

Here we see already the reason, we believe, for the gross neglect and ignorance of the people of the Middle Ages of the Holy Scriptures. They had them in Latin and in translation, they were, particularly in the later centuries of the period, able to read them, but the Scriptures meant nothing to them, because it was the Church which laid down the rules for getting to heaven, and the Bible was considered to be unimportant and obscure, and knowledge of the Scriptures was held to be totally unnecessary for salvation. Luther even complains about the complete lack of knowledge on the part of the laity:

"The common people, especially in the villages, know nothing at all of Christian doctrine... Yet all are called

(1) Quoted in Graebner, op. cit., p. 54.

(2) Graebner, op. cit., p. 207.

(3) Quoted from Robertson, W., Charles the Fifth, Vol. I., p. 237, in Graebner, op. cit., p. 1.

Christians, have been baptized, and enjoy the use of the Sacraments, although they know neither the Lord's Prayer, nor the Creed, nor the Ten Commandments, and live like the poor brutes and irrational swine." (1)

But we cannot say that the Bible was totally unknown to the laity of the Middle Ages, even though they considered the many regulations of the Church of primary importance. We do know that the Waldenses and other "heretical sects" emphasized the reading of Scripture, but they do not directly pertain to our topic. We know also that the Bible, both in its Latin form and in the vernacular, penetrated into the laity, although just in how far this is true is extremely difficult to say. The Latin was, of course, read only by the educated, for that was the language of the scholars of that day, and is still the case, to some extent, even today. And there can be little doubt that, in spite of the silent opposition of the clergy, the Holy Scriptures were read by many a pious layman. There were, in fact, many admonitions to members of the laity to read the Scriptures. The Franciscan, Otto von Passau, wrote a manual for the instruction of the people in 1386, where he remarks:

"I advise you diligently, that you read the Scriptures of the Old and New Covenants intently, with devotions and zeal, whether in German or Latin, in case you understand Latin." (2)

Even Pope Gregory I admonished the physician of the king to read the Bible diligently.

(1) Luther, Small Catechism, p. 3f.
(2) Quoted in Reu. op. cit., p. 63.

And that many of the members of the Church followed this can be seen by the fact that Karl V of France read the Bible through once every year, and that Alphonso of Spain read the Bible through 13 times. Furthermore, it can be seen that at least the Gospels and the Epistles were known by many of the laity, because the "Manuale Coratorum" of Ulrich Surgant of Basel, published at the beginning of the 16th century, advises the preacher, after he has read the Gospel, to add:

"This is the meaning of the words of the Holy Gospel, through which Almighty God would remit your sins. Amen. I say the meaning of the words not without caution, because the Gospels are impressed on the common people and if one should read thus and another so, and laymen or women having first read it in their homes, should then say, my book does not contain such a text as that which the preacher spoke, as if he should have spoken badly." (1)

Here Surgant takes into account the existence of such an exact knowledge of the Scriptures on the part of the laity, that they would notice any deviation from the translation to which they were accustomed. Nor can we neglect to notice the fine knowledge of Scripture on the part of the laymen who wrote the many parodies on Scripture. These parodies are, it is true, caustic and bitter, but they portray such a complete knowledge of Scripture that we feel it well worth while to quote an entire parody here. It is the so-called "Geldevangelium," entitled "Evangelium secundum marcas argenti", from the first part of the 13th century.

(1) Quoted in Reu, op. cit., p. 64.

"Es stehet geschrieben im Evangelium der H. Mark Silbers. In jenen Tagen sprach der Papst zu den seinen in Rom: 'Wenn des Menschen Sohn kommen wird an den Sitz unserer Herrlichkeit, so soll der Pfoertner also zu ihm sprechen: Freund, was bist du hierhergekommen? Haelt er aber an mit Klopfen und gibt euch nichts, so werfet ihn hinaus in die seuszerste Finsternis, da wird sein Heulen und Zaehneklappen.' Sprachten die Kardinaele: 'Was sollen wir tun, dasz wir Reichtum erwerben?' Und der Papst antwortete und sprach: 'Wie stehet im Gesetz geschrieben? wie liesest du? Du sollst Gold und Silber liebhaben von ganzem Herzen und von ganzer Seele, und den Reichen als dich selbst. Tue das, so wirst du leben.' Da kam ein Pfaff, der von seinem Bischof hart gedraengt wider das Recht, und mochte nicht vor sein Angesicht kommen; denn er war arm. Der schrie und sprach: 'Erbarmet euch meiner, wenigstens ihr Pfoertner des Herrn Papstes; denn die Hand der Armut hat mich geruehret. Ich aber bin arm und duerftig; so bitte ich, dasz ihr meinem Elend und meiner Not helfet.' Da sie das hoerten, wurden sie voll Zornes und sprachen: 'Dasz du verdammt werdest mit deiner Armut! Hebe dich von uns, Satanas, denn du meunest nicht, was des Pfennigs ist. Wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage dir: du wirst nicht eingeh'n zu des Herrn Freude, bis du den letzten Heller bezahlet hast.' Der arme Pfaff aber ging hin und verkaufte seinen Mantel und Rock und alles, was er hatte, und gabe erst den Pfoertner und dann den Kardinaelen. Die aber sprachen: 'Was ist das unter so viele?' und warfen ihn hinaus vor die Tuer; und er ging hinaus und weinete bitterlich und hatte keinen Trost.

"Darnach kam ein Bischof, der war dick und fett und hatte das Amt um Geld erkaufte; der hatte im Aufruhr einen Mord begangen und war sehr reich. Sprachten die Kardinaele: 'Gelobet sei der da kommt im Namen von Gold und Silber.' Der gab erst dem Pfoertner, dann dem Kaemmerling, dann den Kardinaelen; sie aber meineten untereinander, sie haetten mehr kriegen sollen. Da aber der Herr Papst hoerte,

dasz die Kardinaele und Diener von ihm viele Geschenke erhalten haetten, ward er krank zum Tode. Da nun der Bischof hoerte, dasz der Herr Papst krank laege, gab er ihm einzunehmen Gold und Silber; und er ward gesund zur Stunde, und gabe Gold und Silber die Ehre und kueszt' ihn und sprach: 'Freund, warum bist du gekommen?' Sprachen die Kardinaele: 'Fuerwahr, dieser ist ein frommer Mensch, denn die Hand des Herrn ist mit ihm.' Der Papst aber antwortete und sprach: 'Was er bitten wird in meinem Namen, das soll ihm werden.'

"Der Papst aber sasz auf einem hohen Berge, der heiszt Saekkelstaedte. Und er sprach zu den Kardinaelen: 'Selig sind, die den Pfennig lieben; denn solcher ist die Kurie zu Rom. Wehe dem, der nicht hat; ihm waere besser, dasz ein Muehlstein an seinen Hals gehaengt wuerde und er ersaeuft wuerde im Meere, wo es am tiefsten ist. Lasset euch niemand verfuehren mit verblichenen Worten, Die da haben, die sollens behalten, und die da nicht haben, die sollen blind werden. Und wer euch Geld geben will, den fuehret in euer Haus.' Sprachen die Kardinaele: 'Alles dies haben wir gehalten von Jugend auf.' Der Papst antwortete und sprach: 'Also tut zu meinem Gedachtnis: ein Beispiel habe ich euch gegeben, dasz, wie ich nehme, auch ihr nehmet; denn Herr ist Gold und Silber, dem sei Preis und Ehre an der Kurie zu Rom und Anagni in Ewigkeit. Amen.'" (1)

But no matter how bitter these parodies were, they portray a close and intimate knowledge of Scripture on the part of the authors, which is important for our discussion.

Furthermore, the legal documents of the Middle Ages very often portray a good knowledge of the sacred writings, since

(1) Quoted in Rost, op. cit., p. 286f. We cannot bring ourselves to believe that these Parodies were merely good, clean fun, as Dr. Rost would have us believe. They would appear to us to be bitter satire on the greed and Venality of the entire clergy, couched in the terminology of that book which the clergy held to be the highest and holiest rule of life.

many of the decrees of the kings and parliaments are couched in the language of Scripture and quote passages of the Bible in profusion. A very cursory examination of Gee and Hardy's source book will serve to verify this. Nor can we neglect to point out that the coins and medallions issued by the kings and princes of the Middle Ages usually had a short Scripture verse imprinted on them; nor that many members of the plant and animal family of the Middle Ages were given names of a Scriptural connotation; and that even the taverns and inns of this period had Scriptural names or had a verse of the Bible on their shields.

We must further call attention to the many beautiful tapestries executed during the Middle Ages by pious laywomen, many of which have Biblical themes for the scenes portrayed, which show at least some knowledge of Scripture. Of course, it cannot be denied that many legendary and apocryphal scenes are also woven into the stories these pictures tell, but they do show at least a rudimentary knowledge of Scripture. Dr. Kost lists 173 tapestries, dating back to the Medieval period, which deal with Biblical topics.

The poetry of the Middle Ages also betrays a knowledge of the Scripture, and was usually written on Biblical themes, although it is usually filled with legendary and apocryphal material. The "Heliand", for example, which dates back to the ninth century, deals with the life of our Savior according to the four Gospels. To this could be added many others which deal with topics found in the Scriptures, or even

versifications of entire books or parts of books of the Bible.

The statement that the Bible was totally unknown to the laity during the Middle Ages cannot therefore be held, because there are definite indications that many of the laity were well versed in Scripture, although there is no way of knowing just how deeply this learning had permeated into the laity. Nor can the statement that there were no attempts to educate the laity in Biblical matters be held, because it can be shown definitely that there were repeated attempts to increase the Biblical knowledge of the laity, although just in how far these were successful is not known.

It is known that especially the educated clergy preached to their parishioners very often, and that this was usually done in the common tongue. The Church Historian Hauck writes:

"Man wird nicht bezweifeln koennen, dasz in den fraenkischen Gemeinden regelmaeszig gepredigt wurde. Der Ungedanke, dasz man in einer anderen Sprache als der des Landes predigen koenne, war dem 8 Jahrhundert gaenzlich fremd." (1)

The historian Edward Schroeder of Berlin writes:

"Die protestantische Forschung hat laengst klargestellt, dasz vor einer deutschen Laiengemeinde im Mittelalter niemals anders als deutsch gepredigt worden ist, und dasz weiterhin zu keiner Zeit so viel deutsch gepredigt worden ist, wie in dem Jahrhundert, welches der Reformation vorausging." (2)

The great historian Kurtz says of popular preaching during the Medieval period:

(1) Rost, op. cit., p. 139.

(2) *ibid.*

"Public worship had for a long time been popularly regarded as a performance fraught with magical power. The ignorant character of the priests led to frequent setting aside of preaching as something unessential, so that the service became purely liturgical. But now the popes and synods urged the importance of rearing a race of learned priests, and the carefully prepared and eloquent sermons of Franciscans and Dominicans found great acceptance with the people. (1)

Furthermore, the laity were exhorted to attend these preaching services and listen to the sermon attentively. The "Interpretatyon and Sygnyfycacyon of the Masse", printed in 1532, says:

"On each Sunday he shall also hear a sermon, if it be possible, for if a man did lose or omit it through contempt or custom, he would sin greatly." (2)

The "Myrrour of the Church" says:

"If there is any preacher in the church who proposes to make a sermon, you shall sweetly hear the Word of God and keep it in remembrance." (3)

This preaching during the Middle Ages, although also carried on by many parish priests, was chiefly done by the wandering monks, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, by the Brothers of the Common Life, and by the heretical sects. And there can be no doubt that many of the laity had the opportunity to hear these preachers, and gained much thereby. The crowds who listened to the great popular preachers were very large, as Kurtz testifies:

(1) Kurtz, op. cit., p. 108.

(2) Quoted in Gasquet, op. cit., p. 251.

(3) Quoted in Gasquet, op. cit., p. 251.

"Almost all the great monks and schoolmen were popular preachers. The crowds that flocked around them as they preached in the vernacular were enormous. Even in the regular services the preaching was generally done in the language of the people, but quotations from Scripture and the fathers, as a mark of respect, were made in Latin and then translated... Berthold of Regensburg, died 1272, wandered from town to town, preaching to crowds, often numbering 100,000 men, of the grace of God in Christ, against the abuse of indulgences and false trust in saints, and the idea of the meritoriousness of pilgrimages, etc." (1)

Although in all likelihood these sermons dealt largely with sanctification in accordance with the established doctrine of the Church, and left the doctrine of justification by faith alone out entirely, there is yet a strong possibility that through these sermons many of the laity learned to know something of Scripture.

A further attempt to educate the laity was what Dr. Rost calls "Gedaechtniskunst". This seems to have been a well developed art, one which the Germans still use very much even today, making use of pictures and poetry as an aid to memory.

One of the mnemonic books of the fifteenth century is the "Ars memorandi notabilis per figuras evangelistarum", consisting of 15 woodcuts, which were to help the laity to keep the stories of the Gospels in mind. Three of these pictures tell the story of the Gospel according to St. John, five more tell the story of Matthew, three the story of Mark, and four the story of Luke.

It might be well to describe one of these pictures to demonstrate how these mnemonic pictures were to help the laity

(1) Kurtz, op. cit., p. 109.

in remembering the contents of the Gospels. The picture is the one describing chapters 7 to 12 of the Gospel according to St. Mark.

The background of the picture, into which all the smaller pictures are woven, is the sign of the Evangelist St. Mark, a lion rampant. Arranged around this central figure, with identifying numbers, so that the various pictures can be fitted into their correct order are: a hand, typifying the hands the disciples did not wash before meals; the head of a woman, signifying the story of the Canaanite woman; a dog with a piece of bread in his mouth, in illustration of verse 27: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs;" seven loaves of bread, as a sign of the miraculous feeding of the disciples of Jesus in 8, 1 - 9; a key, as an attribute of Peter; an eye, to remind the reader of the healing of the blind man in 8, 22; a sun, which is to depict the transfiguration of Christ; a departing demon, as reminder of the miracle of Christ in 9, 14 - 30; clasped hands as a symbol of marriage, to depict the discussion of Jesus with the Pharisees in 10, 2 - 12; a bag of money and a needle, as a reminder of the discussion of Jesus with the rich man in 10, 17 - 22; a donkey, as a symbol of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, 11, 1 - 12; a bunch of grapes, as a symbol of the parable of the vineyard, 12, 1 - 12; a counting board with money on it, as a reminder of the discussion of Jesus on paying taxes, 12, 13 - 17; and a halberd, as a sign of the murder.

This picture is well fit to be such a mnemonic aid, giving the chief contents of each chapter in succession, and would certainly be a good aid in remembering. But just how widespread these pictures were, there is no way of telling.

Another aid to the memory was the use of "Merkverse", little verses which were to serve as memory aids, calling to mind the story behind these words. One of these verses, dating back to the 13th century, is the following hexameter:

"Sex Prohibet Peccant, Abel Enoch
Archa fit Intrans." (1)

This little verse was to remind the person who committed it to memory of the chief contents of the first seven chapters of Genesis. Nor was this all. A later author made this verse even more clear, by combing the verse with the contents of the chapters, arranged alphabetically.

opera sex dierum

1. Sex

Astra creat deus et terram,
mare replet, Adam fit.

fructum ligni vite

2. prohibet

Bis duo flumina currunt; Adam
de costa fit Eva.

Adam et Eva

3. peccant

Cum peccant, excusant, vestit,
pellit et ambos.

a Cayn occiditur

4. Abel

Dona placent Abel, et necat
hunc Cain, Eva parit Seth.

transfertur

5. Enoch

Ex Adam patres octo, Noe tres
genitique.

Noe

6. archa fit

Fac archam, propter mala nam
delebo creata.

(1) Rost, op. cit., p. 145.

archam

7. intrant

Grex salvatur in archa. Flumina
cetera mergunt." (1)

This method of treating Genesis continues all through the alphabet. Again we do not know just how far this mnemonic aid was spread, but it does show, like the mnemonic pictures mentioned above, that there were actual attempts to teach the unlearned laity the contents of Scripture. Of these helps Vollmer writes:

"Man wird sich angesichts solcher Verse jedenfalls des tiefen Eindrucks nicht erwehren koemen, dasz hier eine ungeheure Liebe und Sorgfalt darauf verwendet ist, den Bibelinhalt fuer das Gedaechnis leicht faszlich und behaltbar darzustellen, offenbar in erster Linie fuer Schulzwerke, wenn man darunter das Beduerfnis der Studierenden mitbefasst."
(2)

Another attempt to educate the people, and one that was very popular during the Middle Ages was the production of Biblical dramas, known as the Mysteries. They had their origin in the great drama of the Mass. These mysteries were first held in the Churches themselves, particularly on the great festivals, like Easter, when the officiating priests enacted the scene at the empty tomb. These dramatizations of the Easter story became more elaborate through the years, until finally comics of various sorts were introduced to lighten the story and make it interesting for the public. In a like manner the Christmas story was dramatized, with Herod as the villain. Parts of the Prophets, Genesis, the Passion story,

(1) Quoted in Rost, op. cit., p. 146.

(2) Quoted in Rost, op. cit., p. 146.

and the like were dramatized. The earliest Mystery play extant is one about Adam, which was performed in France in the 12th century. The action no longer took place in the Church itself, but on a little stage outside the Church. This drama is built up around the text of the Bible, which was chanted by a choir in Latin, and immediately acted out by the actors in French.

These dramas were later divorced from the Church to this extent, that they were no longer given in the Church or on the property of the Church, but were performed at fairs or on wagons which were pulled through the streets of the cities. They were given in great cycles, portraying the entire history of the Bible, each dramatization given by one of the craft guilds.

"Die Stuecke der Sammlung von Chester (England) seien hier aufgefuehrt, um zu zeigen, wie sie einander folgten und wie sie verteilt waren: 1. Luzifers Fall (Lohgerber), 2. Schoepfung der Erde und der Menschen (Tuchmacher), 3. Suendflut (Faerber), 4. Abraham, Melchisedech und Lot (Barbiere und Wachszieher), 5. Moses, Balak un Balaam (Hutmacher und Leinenweber), 6. Englischer Grusz; Geburt Christi (Tischler), 7. Schaefer auf dem Felde (Maler und Glaser), 8. Reise der drei Koenige (Weinschenken), 9. Darbringung der Geschenke durch die drei Koenige (Kaufleute), 10. Bethlehemischer Kindermord (Grobschmiede und Waffenschmiede), 11. Reinigung Maria (Grobschmiede), 12. Versuchung Christi (Fleischer), 13. Heilung des Blinden, Auferstehung des Lazarus (Handschuhmacher), 14. Jesus und der Aussaeztige (Schuhmacher), 15. Abendmahl (Baecker), 16. Leiden und Kreuzigung Christi (Eisenarbeiter, Kueer, und Bogenmacher), 17. Hoellenfahrt Christi (Koeche), 18. Auferstehung Christi

(Kuerschner), 19. Christus erscheint
zwei Juengern (Sattler), 20. Himmel-
fahrt (Schneider), 21. Erwaehlung des
Matthias (Fischhaendler), 22. Ezechiel
(Tuchmacher), 23. Antichrist (Paerber).'
(1)

These dramas later degenerated somewhat, being changed into the Moralities, which tried to bring home some great moral truth. They were also changed into farces, so as to get the people at the fairs where they were shown to listen to them. But it cannot be denied that they were a great power in giving Biblical knowledge to the uneducated laity, and thus had a distinct value.

It can be seen, then, without a doubt, that the Middle Ages in general were not as dark as they have been previously portrayed; the Bible was not an unknown book in the hands of the clergy and laity of the Medieval period. It is, of course, difficult to say just in how far this knowledge of the Bible permeated all the classes of the Middle Ages; that is something which was not put down on paper. But it can be shown that Bibles and parts of Bibles actually did exist and were used, that both the clergy and the laity in many instances knew the Bible, and that there were definite attempts to educate the laity in the Bible. In fact, we are inclined to believe that the Bible was known more and used more than the sources we have treated would indicate. And in this sense it is not true that the Bible was a closed book during the Middle Ages.

(1) Most, op. cit., p. 301.

While it is true that the Bible was an open book to many people during the Middle Ages in one sense, it is equally true that the Bible was a closed book to the great majority of the people of the Middle Ages in another sense. It was a closed book to the people of the Middle Ages because of the doctrine of the Church, because the knowledge and use of the Bible was held to be non-essential by the Church, and because the Church perverted the teachings of the Bible, making a law out of the Gospel of salvation through faith in Christ.

It has often been claimed by men of Protestant persuasion that the reading of the Bible in translation was absolutely forbidden by the Church of the Middle Ages, and that its reading by the members of the laity is still forbidden today in countries which are predominantly Catholic. As proof of this claim the so-called Bible prohibitions are adduced.

The first of these prohibitions consists of three letters written by Innocent III to the members of the diocese of Metz, to the Bishop and Chapter of Metz, and to the abbots of Cistercium, Morimond, and de Christa, in the year 1199. The first of these letters is the "Cum ex coniuncto" to all the Christians of the diocese of Metz, written July 12, 1199:

*"Significavit novis venerabilis frater
Metensis episcopus per litteras suas quod
tam in diocesi quam urbe Metensi laicorum
et mulierum multitudo non modica tracta
quodammodo desiderio scripturarum, evan-
gelia, epistolas Pauli, psalterium, moralia
Iob, et plures alios libros sivi fecit in*

Gallico sermone transferri, translationi huiusmodi adeo libenter, utinam autem et prudenter, intendens, ut secretis conventionibus talia inter se laici et mulieres eructare praesumant, et sibi invicem praedicare: qui etiam aspernantur eorum consortium qui se similibus non immiscent, et a se reputant alienos quiaures et animos talibus non apponunt: quos cum aliqui parochialium sacerdotum super his corripere voluissent, ipsi eis in faciem retituerunt, conantes rationes inducere de scripturis quod ab his non deberent aliquatenus prohiberi. Quidam etiam ex eis simplicitatem sacerdotum suorum fastidiunt; et cum ipsis per eos verbum salutis proponitur, se melius habere in libellis suis, et prudentius se posse id eloqui submurmurant in occulto. Licet autem desiderium intelligendi divinas scripturas, et secundum eas studium adhortandi reprehendum non sit sed petius commendandum, in eo tamen apparent merito arguendi, quod tales occulta conventicula celebrant, officium sibi praedicationis usurpant, sacerdotum simplicitatem eludunt, et eorum consortium aspernantur qui talibus non inhaerent. Arcana vero fidei sacramenta non sunt passim omnibus exponenda, cum non passim ab omnibus possint intelligi, sed eis tantum qui ea fidei possunt concipere intellectu... Tanta est enim divinae scripturae profunditas, ut non solum simplices et illiterati, sed etiam prudentes et docti non plene sufficiant ad ipsius intelligentiam indagandum. Propter quod dicit scriptura: Quia multi defecerunt scrutantes scrutatio. Unde recte fuit olim in lege divina statutum, ut bestia quae montem tetigerit, lapidetur; ne videlicet simplex aliquis et indoctus praesumat ad sublimitatem scripturae sacrae pertingere, vel eam aliis Praedicare." (1)

The other two letters, "Ea est in fovendis", to the abbots of the monasteries in the diocese of Metz and the letter "Sicut ecclesiarum", to the Bishop and Chapter of

(1) Quoted in Neu, op. cit., source materials, p. 90., Rost, op. cit., p. 73f.

Metz contain essentially the same thing as the letter we have quoted. There can be no doubt that these letters do not forbid the reading of Scripture in the vernacular, but that, quite to the contrary, they state that the reading of Scripture is to be commended. These letters do, however, inveigh against the method in which the Scriptures were used by the people of the diocese of Metz, using the French translations without regard for the priests, and permitting unauthorized men and women to preach.

During the 13th century the first real prohibitions against the reading of Scripture in the vernacular came into being. The Synod of Toulouse declared in its fourteenth canon in the year 1229:

"Prohibemus etiam, ne libros veteris testamenti aut novi laici permittantur habere, nisi forte psalterium vel breviarum pro divinis officiis aut horas beatae Mariae aliquis ex devotione habere velit. Sed ne praemissos libros habeant in vulgari translato arctissime inhibemus." (1)

This prohibition was directed against the "heretical" sects of the Cathari, Albigenses, and Waldenses, who had translated the Bible into the languages of Southern France and Northern Spain, and had, in their translation, incorporated their doctrines. But we cannot consider this edict as a universal Bible prohibition, but merely as a prohibition of the use of the translation of these "heretical sects."

During the 13th and 14th centuries, many other edicts of like character appeared, directed against the use of trans-

(1) Quoted in Neu, op. cit., source materials, p. 91f; Rost, op. cit., p. 76.

lations written by people who were considered to be heretics.

The most sweeping of these prohibitions is the Edict of

Berthold, Archbishop of Mainz, which was given March 22, 1485:

"Etsi ad mortalium eruditionem divina quadam imprimendi arte ad singularum codices abunde facileque perveniri possit, compertum tamen habemus, quosdam homines inanis gloriae aut pecuniae cupiditate ductos hac arte abuti, et quod ad vitae hominum institutionem datum est ad perniciem et calumniam deduci. Vidimus enim Christi libros missarum officia continentes et praeterea de divinis regibus et apicibus nostrae religionis scriptos, e latina in germanicam linguam traductos nec sine religionis dedecore versari per manus vulgi... Dicant transanimo, an ne lingua germanica capax sit eorum, quae tum graeci tum et latini egregii scriptores de summis speculationibus religionis christianae et rerum scientia accuratissime argutissimeque scripserunt? Fateri oportet idiomatis nostri inopiam minime sufficere necesseque fore, eos ex suis cervicibus nomina fingere incognita, aut, si veteribus quibusdam utantur, veritatis sensum corrumpere, quod propter magnitudinem periculi in litteris sacris magis veremus. Quis enim dabit idiotis atque indoctis hominibus et femineo sexui, in quorum manus codices sacrarum litterarum inciderint, veros excerpere intellectus? Videatur sacri evangelii aut epistolarum Pauli textus, nemo sane prudens negabit, multa suppletionem et subauditionem aliarum scripturarum opus esse. Occurrerunt haec, quia vulgatissima sunt. Quid putabimus de his, quae inter scriptores in ecclesia catholica sub accerrima pendent disputatione? Multa afferre possemus de quibus tamen ad propositum pauca ostendisse sufficiat. Verum cum initium officinae huius artis imprimendi codices in hoc aurea nostra Maguntia, ut vera eius appellatione utamur, divinitus everserit, hodieque in ea politissima atque emendatissima perseveret, iustissime eius artis decus a nobis defensabitur. Nostra etiam intersit divinarum litterarum puritatem immaculatam servari, unde... mandamus, ne aliqua opera, cuiuscunque scientiae, artis vel notitiae, e graeco, latino vel alio sermone, in vulgare

germanicum traducant, aut traducta, quovis commutationis genere vel titulo distrahant, vel comparent, publice vel occulte, directe vel indirecte, nisi opera deinceps imprimenda ante impressionem et impressa ante distractionem per ... doctores et magistros universitatis studii in civitate nostra Maguntina, aut doctores et magistros universitatis studii in oppido nostro Erfordiae ad hoc deputatos fuerint visa et patenti testimonio ad imprimendum vel distrahendum admissa." (1)

But even in this decree the Archbishop did not want to interfere with the Bible itself. In fact, the reason offered for his edict was to preserve the purity of the Bible. He wanted to protect those committed to his charge from a degrading of scripture by "criminal, shameless, foolish, and unlearned men," who are only moved by the desire for fame and money. He was convinced that the German language could not correctly reproduce the profound thoughts of the Greek and Latin authors.

It must be admitted that there was no general prohibition on the part of the Roman Church against reading the Bible in the Medieval period. The early popes had, in fact, encouraged the reading of scripture in the vernacular, but in the later period of the Middle Ages such reading was discouraged, because most of the translations were done by men belonging to "Heretical" sects. We surely can not place blame on the Romanists for discouraging the reading of works done by heretics, although we might object to the strong measures resorted to in enforcing such prohibitions. The punishment

(1) Quoted in Neu, op. cit., source materials, p. 93f.

for infringement of these edicts was usually death, as was inflicted upon a man in England who possessed a translation of the Epistle of St. James, and upon three men who spent the night reading a translation of the Scriptures. But to censure the Catholic Church for not encouraging the reading of what from their point of view was heretical is unjust. We ourselves certainly do not encourage our people to read the Douay version of the Bible; in fact, we discourage this practice as much as we possibly can.

But nevertheless there can be no doubt that Rome discouraged, and, if their claim to be unchangeable is correct, still discourages the reading of Scripture by the laity, on the ground that the Bible is an obscure book, that can be interpreted only by those who are skilled in such interpretation, the priests.

"Is the Bible a book intelligible to all? Far from it; it is full of obscurities and difficulties, not only for the illiterate, but also for the learned." (1)

The method of interpretation used by the Romanists does away with the *sensus literalis*, and teaches instead the *sensus moralis*, and particularly the *sensus allegoricus*.

"Die Anwendung dieses Auslegerverfahrens erforderte aber ein sehr groszes Masz von Gelehrsamkeit und Scharfsinn und begruendete dadurch den katholischen Satz von der Dunkelheit und Schwerverstaendlichkeit der Bibel. Besteht dies katholische Urteil zu Recht, dann ist die Bibel zu einem Volksbuch voellig ungeeignet. Kann sie das nie werden, ist sie nur der Kirche und ihren gelehrten Dienern zur Ausuebung des Hirtenamts anvertraut, dann

(1) Gibbons, James Cardinal, Faith of Our Fathers, Baltimore, John Murphy Co., 1917, p. 85.

sind auch Uebersetzungen in der Sprache des Volkes gar keine Notwendigkeit. Schon Gregor VII. befuerchtete, die Heilige Schrift wuerde am Ansehen im Volke verlieren und manche in Irrtuemer stuerzen, wenn man der Masse ihre Geheimnisse preisgebe." (1)

Because of the fact that the Bible was held to be an obscure book, its spread among the people was definitely discouraged among the members of the common classes. The prohibitions listed above prohibited only the use of unauthorized translations, it is true, but it seems that some then conveniently forgot to authorize any translations.

"Die katholische Kirche selbst stand allen Bestrebungen, die Bibel in die Volkssprache zu uebersetzen, mit aeuszerster Zurueckhaltung gegenueber. Sie tat von sich aus nie etwas, das sich mit jedem Jahrhundert staerker regende Bibelbeduerfnis zu stillen. Sie liesz es hoechstens stillschweigend geschehen, dasz Bibelverdeutschungen entstanden und gelesen worden." (2)

This teaching of the obscurity of Scripture is well borne out in the Bull Unigenitus, which was issued in 1713 by Clemens XI, which condemns unreservedly the following theses of the book "Le nouveau Testament en Francois avec de reflexions morales sur chaque verset etc.", or "Abregè de la morale de l'Evangile, des Actes des Apostres, des Epistres de S. Paul, des Epistres Canoniques, et de l'Apocalypse, ou Pensées Chretiennes sur le Texte de ces Livres sacrés etc.":

"Es ist zu allen Zeiten, an allen Orten und fuer alle Klassen der Menschen unmetalich und noethwendig, mit der heil.

(1) Risch, op. cit., p. 11.

(2) ibid., p. 12.

Schrift sich bekannt zu machen, den Geist, die frommen Gesinnungen und Geheimnisse derselben zu lernen.

"Die Lesung der heil. Schrift gehoert fuer Jedermann.

"Die Dunkelheit der heil. Schrift kann den Laien nicht entschuldigen, sich der Lesung derselben zu enthalten.

"Der Sonntag soll von den Christen durch Lesung frommer Buecher, vor allen aber der heil. Schrift geheiligt werden. Es ist verderblich, einen Christen von der Lesung derselben zu enthalten." (1)

Nor can there be any doubt whatsoever that the doctrine of the Church that Scripture is not the only source of doctrine and life, but that tradition stands on an equal footing with the inspired word served to discredit the Bible in the eyes of the laity and kept them from reading it. It was the pope and the councils alone who determined precisely what the doctrine of the Church was, and under those circumstances it is easily understandable that the common people viewed the Bible with indifference, since the Church told them what to believe, and without the Church's decrees, they did not know what to believe. Cardinal Manning says:

"We neither derive our religion from the Scriptures, nor does it depend on them."

(2)

Thomas F. Coakly writes:

"The Catholic Church existed before the Bible; it is possible for the Catholic Church to exist without the Bible, for the Catholic Church is altogether independent of the Bible. The Bible does not give any systematic, complete, and exhaustive treatment of the doctrines of Christ. In many respects

(1) Eisenschmid, L. M., Roemisches Bullarium, Neustadt a. d. O., J. K. G. Wagner, 1831, p. 287f.

(2) Quoted in Engelder, Th., ed., Popular Symbolics, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1934, p. 155.

it is, like a stenographer's notebook, partial and fragmentary, to be supplemented later on in more elaborate detail by other agencies. Christ never wrote a word of the Bible. One might naturally expect him to have set the example by writing at least some portions of the Bible if he intended his followers to take their entire religion from it. Christ never ordered his Apostles to write any part of the Bible. We might well expect such a command from him if he desired the members of his Church to have recourse to the Bible for their religion. Christ could not have intended that the world should take its religion from the Bible, since so many millions of the human race today, to say nothing of past ages, cannot read or write." (1)

Under those circumstances and in accordance with such a doctrine of the Church, the statement made by Miss Singmaster is certainly correct:

"The Bible was a sealed book, not by any fiat of the Church, but because it was regarded with indifference. Theologians had interpreted it with such skill and perspicuity that their comments were believed to be more valuable for the priest than acquaintance with the original. In far greater degree it was the interpretation of the Church that the layman needed to concern himself with." (2)

Finally, the Bible was a sealed book during the Middle Ages to the great mass of the people, because the Church had perverted the Gospel, making of the sweet message of salvation through faith in Christ a nova lex. True to the doctrine later expressed by the Council of Trent, the Church insisted that works are necessary for salvation. The Council

(1) Quoted in Engelder, op. cit., p. 155f.

(2) Singmaster, Elsie, Martin Luther, Philadelphia, United Lutheran Publication House, 1939, p. 9f.

of Trent, Sessio VI, Canon XXI, says:

"If any one saith, that Christ Jesus was given of God to men, as a redeemer in whom to trust, and not also as a legislator whom to obey, let him be anathema."
(1)

And we may be sure that the emphasis was placed on the doctrine of works, for the greed and venality of the clergy throughout the medieval period is well known. In fact, Cardinal Gasquet says:

"As the historian of the German people, Janssen, points out, the truth is that the entire social order of the Middle Ages 'was established on the doctrine of good works being necessary for the salvation of the Christian soul.'
(2)

Under those circumstances the fact that the laity knew their Bible, no matter how well, made little or no difference, because the doctrine of the Church perverted the Scripture, and the emphasis upon the legal made the knowledge of the Gospel of no effect. It was here that a Reformation was needed, and it is in the fact that Luther changed the emphasis from works to faith that his greatness and the greatness of the Reformation lies.

And in this sense the words of Luther taken from his "Tischreden" and quoted in the introduction to this thesis certainly apply. In this sense it may truly be said that the Bible was unknown under the papacy, that during the Middle Ages the Scripture "hat unter der Bank gelegen." Dr. Reu

(1) Waterworth, J., The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Chicago, The Christian Symbolic Publication Society, 1848.

(2) Gasquet, op. cit., p. 246.

comes to the following conclusions in determining the truth of Luther's statement, and we believe that these conclusions very well summarize the proofs that the Bible was unknown.

"1. The Bible, either in manuscript or in printed form, was not available in a sufficient number of copies during the Middle Ages and particularly during the last centuries of that period.

2. Partly as a result of this scarcity the clergy often possessed only a very deficient knowledge of the contents of the Bible or lacked it altogether.

3. Very erroneous ideas prevailed concerning the contents of certain books of the Bible, as for example, concerning Romans; the names of the prophets were unknown to many and the psalter as a book that was comprehensible only to the most distinguished theologians.

4. The Bible was not properly valued for the consciousness of its significance and its superiority to all other theological literature had been lost. It was not recognized and valued as the primary source of Christianity and the sole foundation of the Church but was smothered in the mass of surrounding theological writing, and its understanding was conditioned by the interpretation of the Church." (1)

Although in the medieval period Bibles were published in manuscript and printed form, although many of the clergy and laity possessed a good knowledge of the Scriptures, although the Bible was held in the highest reverence by both the clergy and the laity, although the entire thought and life of the Middle Ages centered around the Church and its religion, it is nevertheless true that the Bible was a closed book to the people of this period. And herein lies the greatness of Luther, and herein it may be truly said of him that

(1) *Reu, op. cit., p. 65.*

he gave to Christendom an open Bible, not so much because he caused the Bible to be spread to all the people, but because he recognized it as the sole source and norm of doctrine and life, and because he recognized and taught the fact that the Bible shows the way to salvation, not through our own works, but through faith in the atoning work of Christ alone. For that the Christian Church today can never be grateful enough to our Great God, who gave to the world a man who could open the heretofore closed Bible, and insure every sinner of immediate access to the Throne of Mercy, not through the merit of works, but through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

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