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### The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages

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THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology,  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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June 1952

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

There is quite a difference of opinion as to the extent of the Middle Ages. We will take the middle ground and roughly limit this era to the years between 500 A. D. and 1500 A. D. This procedure is to be preferred above others which begin or end an era with a certain person or event, because an era is not ushered in overnight, but is rather a gradual and often barely perceptible process. There will be a few instances in the course of this thesis where material extending a number of years either way beyond the above chronological boundaries will be presented, in order to establish the necessary continuity.

In addition to this chronological treatment, the subject is also treated topically, beginning with systematic and exegetical medieval theology. A resume of the translations into other tongues then follows. Where possible, a few observations are included which make some particular translation noteworthy. This section on translations is followed by a chapter on the use and study of Scripture in pedagogical activities. A concluding chapter presents material dealing with the use of the Bible among the laity.

It will at once become evident that in the chapter last mentioned two schools of thought are very much in evidence. The one school contends that Scripture was



widely circulated among the laity, and the other contends that very few of the laity ever had access to Scripture or any part of it. We have presented the arguments of both schools, at the same time presenting any fallacies and/or weaknesses in the respective contentions.

A major problem encountered in the preparation of the thesis was the almost embarrassing paucity of material. This deficiency of material, however, only serves to prove the necessity for treatment of such a topic. During this era the lamp of learning flickered low, and books were at a premium. Was the Bible used at all during this time? If so, by whom? Did the populace as a whole feed on it, or did their share consist exclusively of legends of the saints, papal formulations, conciliar pronouncements, and monkish piety? To answer these questions fully, with full attention given to the numerous and most enticing ramifications and sidelines, would be more in the scope of a doctoral dissertation. In this thesis we shall merely attempt to reproduce general impressions and views gleaned from secondary sources exclusively.

This is the plan and outline of the thesis. It is brief, but only because medieval scholarship, both American and European, has heretofore left this field relatively unexplored and untouched. What has so far been done has served merely to scratch the surface, and our thesis, therefore, only reflects the sources upon which it is based.



## CHAPTER II

### MEDIEVAL HERMENEUTICS AND EXEGESIS

#### General Background

#### Rise of the Allegorical Method

No one will deny that Scripture, directly or indirectly, played a large part in medieval life and thought. It played an important and varied role especially in the monastic system. Smalley has this to say of the relation between the Bible and monasticism:

The Bible was the book of the professed religious; lectio divina was a traditional part of the monastic routine. When a religious order distrusted learning, its reading was "holy" without being "serious" in a scientific sense; on the other hand, an order friendly to learning produced Biblical scholars; the ninth-century Benedictines, the Victorines, the friars. Therefore the history of Biblical scholarship depended on that of religious organization and reform.<sup>1</sup>

Noteworthy also was the influence of Aristotle and Aristotle's style and system on medieval Biblical scholarship. Received from the Greek through the Arabic and finally into Latin, his works were read with avidity, and his techniques were most studiously applied to Biblical exposition. Smalley sums up his influence thus, referring to the medieval student: "Aristotle caused him to see

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<sup>1</sup>Beryl Smalley, Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1941), p. xiv.



Scripture as freshly as he saw all creation."<sup>1</sup>

However, the study of Scripture apparently was not confined exclusively to the monastery. Scripture seemed to be fairly common also among the populace, and Rand's use of the following excerpt from Jerome seems to bear this out:

It is generally admitted that only a doctor should practice medicine and only a carpenter should build a house. The art of searching the Scriptures is the only one that everybody is sure he possesses. The Scriptures are common property for the loquacious old woman, for the loony old man, for the long-winded public lecturer, for every Tom, Dick and Harry to preempt and tear to pieces and teach before they learn them. Some with knit brows and an array of big words, philosophize inter mulierculas. Some learn--good Lord deliver us--from women what they teach to men. And, as if that were not enough, they acquire a certain facility...they can wrest from Scripture any meaning that they wish to find there. As though we were not familiar with Homer-centones and Virgil-centones, and had not learned to call Virgil a Christian without Christ for singing "Now comes the Virgin, Saturn's reign returns, and a new race drops down from lofty heaven (Virg. ec. IV, 6-7). All that is childish stuff...<sup>2</sup>

This letter of Jerome indicates several very noteworthy trends which were obviously in evidence already in the fifth century, and which continued long into the Middle Ages. One was the tendency to read personally desirable meanings into Scripture. The other was the tendency to put Christian interpretations on the words of Homer and Virgil, as, for example was done with the above references to "the Virgin"

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. xv.

<sup>2</sup>Edward K. Rand, Founders of the Middle Ages (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1941), pp. 117-118.



and the "new race".

Jerome's phrase "they can wrest from Scripture any meaning that they wish to find there" seems to portend a peculiarly medieval practice, and one which still exists in modified forms today. This practice gave us the well-known fourfold interpretation of Scripture--the literal, moral, mystical, and anagogical interpretation. This practice, we are told, began as early as Ambrose, who first introduced and popularized this particular practice.<sup>1</sup>

Ambrose himself exemplified his own principles in his De Abraham, which he addressed to his confirmation class. In this particular work he attempted to portray Abraham as the ideal man, and the wedding gifts of bracelets and earrings presented to Rebecca as good works and pious attention, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

Theodore of Mopsuestia began, at about the same time, another profoundly important trend. He is generally credited with being one of the first to observe hermeneutical principles. He gives close attention to particles, moods, and general terminology. Although he places great emphasis on contemporary Biblical life, he has no use at all for Origenistic allegory.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>F. W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (New York, Dutton, 1886), pp. 215-216.



At the time of Gregory the Great, however, Theodore's influence was negligible, and Ambrose's allegorical method held sway. Evidence of Ambrose's method is to be found in Gregory's Moralia in Job, which is an allegorical commentary on the book of Job. In this commentary Job is made to typify Christ, while Job's wife typifies the temptations of the flesh, and Job's counsellors typify the heresiarchs.<sup>1</sup> This commentary seems to have been the signal for the general production of commentaries, all employing the allegorical method. From now on through to the Reformation a very elaborate system of commentaries is built up, including glosses and questiones. Furthermore, scholars also wrote commentaries on the commentaries, and generally added to the huge and confusing bulk of exposition and interpretation of Scripture. As to the nature and content of these many and variegated commentaries, Smalley has the following excellent summary to offer:

We then discover that what we should now call exegesis, which is based on the study of the text and of Biblical history, in its widest sense, belongs to the "liberal exposition". The "spiritual exposition" generally consists of pious meditations or religious teaching for which the text is used merely as a starting point. It follows that so long as this conception of Bible studies holds good, we shall have many commentaries containing little exegesis....We are invited to look not at the text, but through it.<sup>2</sup>

From the seventh century on, even the greatest

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<sup>1</sup>Rand, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Smalley, op. cit., p. 2.



intellectual lights are merely compilers. Originality was little known. As a natural result systematic theology was, like the morality of this period, without any relation to Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Role of the Glosses and of the Glossa Ordinaria

The eleventh and twelfth centuries produced all sorts of compilations and compilations of compilations. These collections of interpretations were not only indiscriminate and illogical in their mixture, but they were also entirely devoid of hermeneutical principles.<sup>2</sup> The most notable of these compilations was the Glossa Ordinaria, erroneously believed to have been the work of one Walafrid Strabo. It is an abridgement of all the patristic commentaries on all the books of the Bible. Despite its deficiencies, however, its fame put this work into every monastic library in the twelfth century.

Although it was only a compilation, it was a "source of primary importance to students of the Bible for many years".<sup>3</sup> There has been considerable doubt as to the authorship of the Glossa Ordinaria, but we do know that Anselm of Laon (d. 1117) is the main author. He was responsible for the Gloss on St. Paul and the Psalter, and per

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<sup>1</sup>Farrar, op. cit., p. 245 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 251 f.

<sup>3</sup>J. P. Whitney, et al., "Germany and the Western Empire", Vol. III, The Cambridge Medieval History, ed. H. W. Gwatkin (Cambridge, The University Press, 1930), pp. 521-522.



haps also for the Gloss on the Gospel of St. John. His brother, Ralph, is responsible for the Gloss on St. Matthew, while Anselm's pupil, Gilbert the Universal, compiled glosses on the Pentateuch and the Prophets. Gilbert accomplished this some time before he became bishop of London in 1128. The other collaborators are unknown.<sup>1</sup>

As was already mentioned, the Glossa Ordinaria is a compilation of material from various sources. We know that Anselm and his assistants worked about 1100-1130, and this is accordingly the approximate time when the Glossa Ordinaria was compiled. The Gloss was the successor of the glossalia, which it finally superseded. Meanwhile, the Vulgate was accumulating much prefatory matter which, in turn, centered in the prologues of Jerome. Other explanatory matter in the form of glosses, all of which varied from copy to copy, were being produced in abundance. The eighth- and ninth-century scholars were especially active in producing these glosses, and the eleventh-century scholars followed their example. Gradually this apparatus grew in volume as successive layers of glosses came to overlay the text.

Lanfranc's glosses on the Pauline Epistles received two additional sets of glosses, one ascribed to St. Augustine, and the other to Ambrose (Ambrosiaster). This com-

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<sup>1</sup>Smalley, op. cit., p. 339 f.



bination, in turn, served as "expositor" to some anonymous scholar, who quotes it in his commentary as glossa. This same expositor was then merged into two other big collections. These contained glosses ascribed to Berengar and Drogo. Responsibility and whatever credit there is for introducing the Glossa Ordinaria as the standard commentary goes to Gilbert de la Porree, a pupil of Anselm, and to Peter Lombard. Gilbert made an expansion of the patristic glosses in Anselm's Gloss on St. Paul and the Psalter, which expansion then became known as the Media Glosatura. Peter Lombard also expanded the Gloss on these two portions of Scripture, while carefully preserving the Anselmian text as a nucleus. This compilation is now known as the Magna Glosatura, believed to have been written between 1135-6 and 1142-3. About a generation later, lectures on Scripture were glossing the Gloss or the Magna Glosatura. As far as can be determined, the earliest example of such a gloss on the Gloss is a series of lectures given by Peter Comestor on the Gospels, probably delivered before he became Chancellor in 1168. He himself simply refers to it as Glossa.

From about the middle of the twelfth century a glossed Bible normally contained the same set of prefaces and glosses, which comprised the Gloss itself. Minor variations, of course, were always to be found in the different copies, but no gross changes or additions are in evidence. The Gloss, originating in Paris, was spread throughout



Christendom, and finally accepted as the standard work.<sup>1</sup>

We have sketched the story of the Gloss in somewhat greater detail, because it epitomizes medieval academic procedure in dealing with commentaries on Scripture. It shows also how the works of the great minds of previous generations were held almost in veneration.

#### Successive Decrease in Original Contributions

Since about 908 A.D., no important commentaries, and even no compilations of any importance, appeared, aside from the Glossa Ordinaria and the Magna Glosatura. This situation prevailed in the cathedral schools as well as in the monastic schools. War and the Viking invasion are insufficient explanations. The real reason for this decline in Biblical scholarship was a shift of interest. The emphasis was now being placed on the liturgy, at the expense of study. With the liturgical offices multiplying, the lectio divina moved into the choir. Creative energy was expended in the interest of greater invention in religious and liturgical poetry and drama. The abbots at the famous monastery at Cluny were more interested in the dramatic and emotional aspects of Scripture. The cathedral school teachers, on the other hand, gave their preference to the arts and sciences over theology. But, when original exegesis was revived towards the middle of the eleventh century,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 42 f.



the long preparation was beneficial in the final analysis. Commentators of this century brought to their studies a fresh awareness of the difficulties to be faced, along with new and more forceful techniques to meet these difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

#### Contributions of the Victorine Tradition

A study, regardless of how sketchy, must include some account of the Victorines and those who kept their tradition alive. Of the Victorines, Andrew, Hugh, and Richard of St. Victor, the first two are especially prominent, and hence engage our interest.

#### Andrew of St. Victor

Andrew of St. Victor is to be remembered for several reasons. He believed that Scripture should be expounded "according to the surface of the letter", and is therefore the first Western commentator to attempt a purely literal interpretation of the Old Testament. Perhaps for this reason especially he is known as a "second Jerome". He had a very high regard for Jewish interpretation as being plain-er, simpler, and more intelligible.<sup>2</sup> However, following Augustine in the conviction that each text had to have a literal meaning, he fell into the incorrect assumption that the literal meaning of a text must of necessity be what the Jews say of it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 29 f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 140-142.



Like Aelfric in his vernacular homilies, and Christian of Stavelot in his commentary on Matthew, Andrew also explained Scripture in terms of everyday life. But, whereas Aelfric wrote for the parish priest and laity, and Christian wrote for the "simple-minded" brothers of his particular monastery, Andrew restricted his work to the intellectuals. The novelty of his procedure lies in adapting the methods of elementary education to the scholar, substituting straightforward comparisons for subtle and ingenious ones heretofore considered proper only for a clerkly audience. In addition, he used topical and classical allusions, not to distract or to divert, but to fix attention more closely on the text.<sup>1</sup>

His chief importance and greatest claim to our interest, however, is his use of Jewish tradition, as well as Jewish exposition. "Literal exposition" as he conceived it was a real science, and "he went into the vast, uncatalogued store-room of Hebrew learning".<sup>2</sup> For this reason also he is considered the forerunner of modern Biblical philology, and the father of lexicons and concordances.<sup>3</sup>

#### Hugh of St. Victor.

Hugh of St. Victor's contribution to Biblical scholarship in the Middle Ages was of a somewhat different nature. He taught that learning must be fitted into the three-fold

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 155.



exposition, viz., the literal historical sense, the allegorical sense, and the tropological sense. A special course of studies was recommended as preliminary to the investigation of each sense. A thorough reading of Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Kings, Chronicles, the Gospels, and the Acts is recommended as preparatory to a study of the first sense. To prepare for a study of the second sense, Hugh advised the student to begin with the books of the New Testament which are richest in doctrine. These would be Matthew, John, the Epistles and Revelation, then the Hexameron, the Law, Isaiah, the beginning and end of Ezekiel, Job, Song of Solomon, and Psalms. What geography and history are to the first sense, doctrine is to the second sense. For Hugh, the object of the lectio divina is knowledge and virtue, the former being covered by the first two senses, the latter by the third. For the study of the third sense, certain parts of the Bible and St. Gregory are useful. The confusing aspect of all this is that Hugh has "history", "allegory", and "tropology" refer both to the subject matter of Scripture as well as to the method of exposition.<sup>1</sup>

Like Andrew, his predecessor, Hugh also had very high regard for the letter of Scripture, although for him it is merely the handmaiden of allegory. His own words will clarify his position in this matter as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 62-63.



The mystical sense is only gathered from what the letter says in the first place. I wonder how many people have the face to boast themselves teachers of allegory, when they do not know the primary meaning of the letter... Do not despise what is lowly in God's word, for by lowliness you will be enlightened to divinity... Read Scripture then, and first learn carefully what it tells you was done in the flesh.<sup>1</sup>

Later, in his Prologue to Ecclesiastes, Hugh's regard for the letter of Scripture seems to have increased, even at the expense of allegory and tropology, as is evidenced by the following quotation:

All Scripture if expounded according to its own proper meaning will gain in clarity and present itself to the reader's intelligence more easily. Many exegetes, who do not understand this virtue of Scripture, cloud over its seemly beauty by irrelevant comments. When they ought to disclose what is hidden, they obscure even that which is plain... And so, in this work, I do not think that one should toil much after tropologies or mystical allegorical senses through the whole course of the argument...<sup>2</sup>

Yet, strange as it may seem, Hugh of St. Victor's Eruditio Didascalia hopelessly perverted the theory of exegesis, obscuring the meaning with a multiplicity of words, no originality, no references to the originals, and trivialities everywhere in evidence.<sup>3</sup>

The "Biblical-Moral School"; Magistri Sacrae Paginae

The Victorine tradition of concern for the letter of Scripture and scholarly attention thereto was continued by the Magistri Sacrae Paginae at Paris. Here at the univer-

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Farrar, op. cit., p. 252 f.



sity they changed the lectio divina into the academic lecture course. Of these "Magistri" the three most famous and most widely read and copied were Peter Comestor (d. ca. 1169), Peter the Chanter (d. 1197), and Stephen Langton (d. 1228), all of whom comprise what Mgr. Grabmann is pleased to call "the Biblical-moral school." While other Paris masters left glosses on the Psalms and the Pauline Epistles, these three made original contributions to the study of Scripture as a whole. The Comestor left his Histories and Gospel glosses, while the Chanter and Langton contributed a vast series of glosses covering the Old and New Testaments.<sup>1</sup>

Although this "Biblical-moral" school continued the Victorine tradition, yet, compared with Hugh of St. Victor's spiritual exposition, the "Biblical-moral school has much more originality. On the other hand, however, Hugh's exposition is less artificial in its technique. The difference in the type of content is due to a difference in aim. The aim of these Paris masters is to train the scholar for an active career, not to help the religious individual in his meditations. The difference in technique, on the other hand, is due rather to the rapid and unprecedented technical development of the twelfth century, and especially to the rise of the distinctio.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Smalley, op. cit., p. 156 f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 205.



### The Distinctio

The distinctio is the most highly evolved form of a spiritual dictionary, which is different in that it schematizes. It is a descendant of the patristic commentaries and their alternative interpretations of the same word, and also of other older lists of Biblical words with their meanings. The Formulae Spiritalis Intelligentiae of St. Eucher of Lyons and the Clavis Scripturae of the pseudo-Melito are examples of these old lists. It is actually a table of meanings for each word, according to three or four senses, each illustrated by a Scripture text. The meanings are then elaborated by listing the properties and/or qualities of the thing designated by the word, together with the interpretation thereby suggested. It is really a very convenient way of grouping together the lore of natural history and the legends of the bestiary. To illustrate, "The raven is black, he feeds on carrion, he cries 'cras, cras', hence he signifies the wicked, blackened with sin, who feed on vanity, who procrastinate."<sup>1</sup> These distinctiones were collected and sometimes arranged alphabetically (e.g., the Chanter's Summa Abel, and Distinctiones Monasticae), and sometimes as a commen-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 202 ff.



tary on the text of the Psalter. An example of the latter is the Propositinus and Peter of Poitiers' Distinctiones supra Psalterium.<sup>1</sup>

#### Langton's Contributions

In connection with the three great leaders of the Biblical-moral school, the Comestor, the Chanter, and Langton, it is to be remembered that their continual aim is always to go back to originals for full knowledge. Especially is this tendency noticeable in Langton, whose method is to make the Gloss his starting point, and then to check the extracts by their originals.<sup>2</sup> He has a passion for reconciling his authorities, thereby turning his lectures into a sort of concordantia discordantia glosarum.<sup>3</sup> Langton seems to delight in emendations and collections of alternatives. With regard to variations, Langton feels that as long as the sense is more or less the same, the actual wording need not concern us overmuch. He usually contents himself with giving two readings, and then suspends judgment. His reader or his audience make their own choice of the two readings presented.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 202 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-179.



An excellent resume of Langton's views on Scripture, the failures and shortcomings of the Biblical-moral school, and also the remedy for these failures is contained in the following excerpt from Smalley:

Langton still lives in an Augustinian world of mirrors and reflections. Scripture, like the visible world, is a great mirror, reflecting God, and therefore all and every kind of truth. Scripture, like man, has a soul, how much more important than the body or letter!

While this is assumed, not all the common sense of Langton can detect the flaw in the spiritual expositions; not all the scholarship of Andrew can switch people's attention on to the letter. It is significant that the "spiritual" excerpts from Langton's glosses were much more popular than the literal. The change could only come about by scholars' starting from a fresh assumption.<sup>1</sup>

At this point, another expository phenomenon deserves explanation. We refer to what is known in medieval ecclesiastical history as the Quaestiones. They are especially evident in the works of Manegold, Bruno, Anselm (1033-1109), and Ralph of Laon. Gilbert the Universal, in his continuous gloss on the Psalter, takes Bruno's commentary as his "expositor", and expands it into a definitely quaestio form.

Quaestiones now multiply in number, in relation to the size of the commentary. The length thereof is also increased by the use of dialectic, each pupil enlarging on his master.

Hence, a new type of exposition is in evidence. It is composed of two distinct elements. The running explanation

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 218.



is interrupted by theological questions (quaestiones), which the text or the exposition thereof have suggested. An example is the Magna Glosatura of Peter Lombard on the Pauline Epistles. It is full of quaestiones suggested by the Gloss of Anselm, which Lombard has incorporated into his work.

The next logical stage is a commentary composed altogether of quaestiones, with no explanatory notes at all, excerpted from their original work and issued separately. The quaestiones are then transferred to an altogether different kind of work. An example of this procedure is given in the Sentences, which has quaestiones taken without much verbal change from the Magna Glosatura.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Scholastic Viewpoint

At this chronological point in history it would be well to refer to Peter Abelard's views on Scripture, since he plays such an important role in medieval theology. He feels that any errors present in Scripture are the result of erroneous citations and faulty translation. However, like a number of others after him, he also makes a distinction between important and unimportant elements in Scripture. "By doubting we arrive at the truth."<sup>2</sup>

Bonaventura (1221-1274) presumably interprets Scripture

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 50 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Farrar, op. cit., p. 260 ff.



with Scripture, but actually this is merely an indiscriminate use of "parallel" passages. This method was not at all original with him. Of interest is his application of the Psalter to the Virgin Mary.<sup>1</sup>

The thirteenth century, of which the two scholars just mentioned are notable representatives, is, for Biblical studies, a time of beginnings. It is characterized on the one hand by an extravagance, and on the other by a sanity unparalleled in earlier centuries, as is evidenced by the works of Bonaventure, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas. In the realm of spiritual exposition we find here death and decay; in the literal sphere, new life.<sup>2</sup> Although the Franciscans in their philosophy kept closer than the Dominicans to St. Augustine, Aristotle influenced their Biblical studies to quite a great extent.

#### Decline of the Philonic Tradition

At some point in the thirteenth century, the commentators finally "step back through the looking glass" out of their world of reflections into everyday life. The first impulse for this change seems to have come from religious experience. The Philonic tradition gradually loses its appeal, collapsing into sheer fantasy even before Maimonides and Aristotle supplanted and discredited it. The "letter" of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 272-273.

<sup>2</sup>Smalley, op. cit., pp. 219 and 221.



Scripture has captured the affection as well as the intellect. However, the great schoolmen, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventura were not primarily Biblical scholars. Albertus Magnus approached Scripture as a philosopher, and the other two approached Scripture as theologians. This preoccupation with Aristotle, which is so characteristic of Scholasticism, enabled the Dominicans to effect a change in exegetical principles. At the same time, however, this preoccupation tended to prevent this new principle from bearing fruit.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most outstanding contributions of thirteenth century Scholasticism are a revelation of the text of the Vulgate and a number of Biblical concordances, produced especially by the English Dominicans.<sup>2</sup>

#### Bacon's Contributions.

Roger Bacon (1214-1294), however, denounced the Scholastic approach to Scripture generally. Specifically, he denounced the arbitrary analysis by chapters, as well as the arbitrary concordances and rhythms. He himself preferred Hugh of St. Victor's method. Bacon's contribution to Biblical scholarship is three-fold, and may be summarized as follows:

1. He compiled useful lists of current errors, false

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 240-241.

<sup>2</sup> Whitney, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 743.



etymologies, etc., taken from the various aids to study.

2. He laid down rules both for the study of the original and for the restoration of the Latin.

3. Most important of all, he composed Greek and Hebrew grammars, guaranteeing to teach enough Hebrew or Greek for reading purposes within three days by a certain method.<sup>1</sup>

### The Summa of Aquinas

Should we attempt to understand just what or why Bacon criticized, we might briefly epitomize the entire Scholastic system by referring to the Summa Theologica of Scholasticism's most famous exponent, Aquinas.

The Summa opens with a statement of the whole problem of the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture and their relationship. It takes the familiar distinction between words and things from the De Doctrina Christiana and fits it into an Aristotelian framework. Here God is the principal author of Holy Scripture, with the human writers expressing their meaning by words. God, however, can also express His meaning by "things", i.e., by historical happenings. The literal sense of Scripture, therefore, is what the human author expressed by his words. The spiritual senses are what the divine author expressed by the events which the human author related. Since the Bible

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<sup>1</sup>Smalley, op. cit., p. 244 f.



is the only book which has both a divine and a human authorship, only the Bible can have both a literal and a spiritual sense. The problem of what is included in the letter thus solves itself. If "letter" is defined as the whole intention of the inspired writer, it makes no difference whether he expresses himself in plain language, or symbolically, or metaphorically. The literal sense, according to Thomas, was not the figure of speech, but its content, that which it figured. The spiritual sense thus was not derived from the words of the writer, but from the sacred history in which he was taking part, and whose meaning at the time was known only to God, its Author.<sup>1</sup>

#### Defects of the Summa and of Scholasticism

The Summa as a whole, however, is characterized by a lack of originality. It merely repeats what the Fathers had said earlier. There are excesses of exegesis, long and verbose, not to mention irrelevant comments on Scripture, and especially the juxtaposition of passages whose verbal similarity depends only on the Vulgate. An excellent example of this is the systematization of the Epistles into a pattern to fit abstract doctrines.<sup>2</sup>

Another authority scores the Schoolmen even more severely in the following words:

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>2</sup>Farrar, op. cit., p. 270 f.



For having regard to their (Schoolmen's) system as a whole, it cannot be too clearly understood that to the Bible, in the sense in which the Reformers began to know it, Scholasticism was almost entirely a stranger. What these dialecticians looked for in their Vulgate was something so remote from that which men sought and found in the Bible of a later day, that to all intents and purposes we might be dealing with two totally different books.<sup>1</sup>

Actually, Scholastic exegesis resembled the Rabbinic style in that both adhered to their respective oral traditions. The unscriptural view of inspiration referred to above (p. 23) was borrowed from the Rabbis and Alexandrians, and supported by methods borrowed from the pagan philosophers, especially Aristotle.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps a brief resume of the defects in Scholastic exegesis before treating another phase of medieval scholarship would not be out of place here. These, then are the most outstanding defects in Scholastic Biblical scholarship, according to Farrar:<sup>3</sup>

1. Traditional and superstitious conception of inspiration; never any reference to the circumstances under which different parts were delivered.

2. Vassalage of philosophy within the bounds of the Church's dogma on behalf of papal tyranny, usurpations, etc.

3. Lack of equipment on the part of the writers; poor educational background.

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<sup>1</sup>H.W. Hoare, The Evolution of the English Bible (London, John Murray, 1901), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Farrar, op. cit., p. 273 f.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 180-181



4. Neglect of philology; imperfect translations, glosses, etc.
5. Arbitrary juxtaposition of texts from Latin versions.
6. Use and abuse of dialectics, sophistry, and logomachy.
7. Barbarous language; obscure and meaningless words.
8. Micrological subtlety; "unwholesome and vermiculate questions" (Bacon).
9. Worst of all, the four-fold, and sometimes even seven- and eight-fold interpretation.
10. Scripture thus became a sealed book, subjected to all papal and ecclesiastical aberrations.

#### Chapter Division

A word on the division of Scripture into chapters would not be out of place here. In lieu of standard chapter divisions, it was a common practice to divide each book into large sections with a summary of the contents at the head of each. These sections were numbered and known as tituli. Various other systems of division were also in use, some giving fewer, some giving more chapters than our present system. The official text of Paris, as a matter of fact, was already closely akin to our present arrangement, and was gradually modified until as at present. Through the Paris text this particular division became the standard everywhere. Stephen Langton is generally given the credit for this modern capitulation. He probably made this arrangement some time toward the end of his teaching



period.<sup>1</sup>

The common practice of referring systematically to chapters seems to have been begun around 1225 by Philip the Chancellor. Later, various systems of subdividing the chapters were tried, which ultimately led to the present arrangement in verses. Hugh of St. Cher, who organized the drawing up of Bible concordances, may also have been the first to refer to these subdivisions of chapters by letters of the alphabet.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1340) in the history of Biblical scholarship is nowhere more clearly indicated than in the little couplet which one finds in almost every work of this period on this topic, viz,

Si Lyra non lyrasset,  
Luther non saltasset.

While this is undoubtedly an overstatement, it is not stretching a point to say with Smalley that

He (Nicholas of Lyra) did more than any other writer to break down the tyranny of ecclesiastical tradition and to overthrow the blind belief in the bad method of many centuries...After the death of Nicholas of Lyra there was no important addition to the study of Scripture till the dawn of the Reformation.<sup>3</sup>

Although Nicholas did not completely abandon the Scholastic viewpoint, still using, for example, the "mystical" sense of Scripture, and although he made this "mystical"

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<sup>1</sup>Smalley, op. cit., pp. 180-181.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 277.



sense dependent on the literal sense, he nevertheless made a most worthwhile contribution. This "Jerome of the fourteenth century" is to be remembered for his utilization of the studies of the French and Spanish Jews. Often he preferred Jewish interpretations to those of the Fathers. Sometimes he even put forth his own interpretation. He preferred especially the studies of Rashi (d. 1170), and Maimonides (d. 1204). Nicholas, the Doctor planus et utilis, had sufficient erudition to see that many of the available manuscripts were corrupted. He also had the vision to see the importance of the original languages. His "rule of the thumb" was Scriptura loquitur secundum modum nostrum loquendi.<sup>1</sup>

#### Decline of Scholasticism.

After Nicholas, poor exegesis and patristic tradition again became the order of the day. Savonarola's comments were, of course, exclusively practical. John Gerson lays down some excellent principles, but makes them dependent on the Church's authority. Other exegetes of this period who deserve only passing mention here are Picus of Mirandola, who made use of Platonism and Kabbalism; Tostatus (d. 1454), who is remembered for his poor use of Hebrew and irrelevant, useless questions; Turrecremata (d. 1468), who blindly followed tradition, and Jacob Perez of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 274.



Valentia (d. 1492), who mixed tradition with the poorest forms of Rabbinism. The one noteworthy exception to this rather discouraging array of bad exegesis is John Wessel (d. 1489), whom even Luther appreciated.<sup>1</sup>

Another possible exception is Jacques Lefevre de Etaples (Faber Stapulensis, b. ca. 1455), who is responsible for a translation of the entire Bible into French. But, even more important, he applied a lively critical sense to the study of Scripture, and revised the text of the Vulgate according to the Septuagint. He himself actually made no innovations contrary to tradition, yet always made a practice of referring hearers to the actual words of Holy Writ in a spirit of devotion. Guiraud summarizes Lefevre's contribution as follows:

So Lefevre de Etaples, without perhaps being fully aware of the tendency of his teaching, encouraged his pupils to the free interpretation of the Scripture, fired their own imaginations, and, while himself remaining a Catholic priest devoutly attached to the Church, prepared them for Protestantism.<sup>2</sup>

The decay of Scholasticism had begun already some time before this with Duns Scotus (d. 1308), who dissolved the union between faith and science. He, together with Raymond Lull (d. 1315), showed that the entire system dealt with words, not with things.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Farrar, op. cit., p. 278 f.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Guiraud, "The Later Middle Ages", European Civilization, Its Origin and Development (New York, Oxford University Press, 1935), Vol. III, p. 676.

<sup>3</sup>Farrar, op. cit., p. 279.



Not long after Duns Scotus another voice was raised in behalf of Sola Scriptura, that of John Wycliffe. He considered Scripture the final court of appeals, and in 1379 produced his "On the Truth of Holy Scripture".<sup>1</sup> We shall study his work more thoroughly under the heading "Translations". Before leaving the topic of hermeneutics and exegesis, we shall consider briefly the work of the Jewish scholars in this particular field.

#### Jewish Schools and Their Contributions.

Throughout the Middle Ages Hebrew seemed to be preferred as study over Greek. At any rate, more progress was made in the former than in the latter. There are several reasons for this state of affairs. First, Hebrew was more accessible. Then, for some inexplicable reason, it seemed to exert a greater fascination. Third, the approach to the New Testament was theological and devotional; it could not be scholarly, because no new information presented itself. But, on the other hand, Jews were always in evidence, and they were a storehouse of information. Then, too, Jerome was supposed to have preferred Hebrew, and Jerome always exerted influence. Fifth, native inclination and the patristic tradition persuaded the scholar that his best guide to Scripture was the study of Hebrew and rabbinics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hoare, op. cit., p. 80 f.

<sup>2</sup>Smalley, op. cit., p. 264.



## Karaim

The different schools of thought regarding the interpretation of the text which were referred to above were reflected also in the Jewish ranks of interpreters. One of the more outstanding schools which later became a sect was that of Karaism. It was founded by Anan ben David (f. ca. 760), and is also known as the "Religion of the Text" from its insistence on the return to the letter of Scripture and complete repudiation of the Talmud. Thus giving great impetus to the study of the Bible, it held the Torah to be binding for all time, and insisted especially on an ultra-strict, excessively severe observance of the Sabbath. The Karaites renounced all ties with their opponents, whom they dubbed "Rabbanites". After Anan's death, schism arose in the Karaite sect. This schism, in turn, caused the Karaites to study the Bible even more closely in order to strengthen their position against the Rabbanites. With this ardent Bible study went a knowledge of Hebrew grammar and of the Massora, which, in turn, produced many commentators on the Bible. The Rabbanites, on the contrary, produced little literary work.<sup>1</sup>

Early in the eighth century the enthusiasm of the Arabs for their language and the Koran was reflected in turn in

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<sup>1</sup>Heinrich Graetz, History of the Jews (Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1941), Vol. III, p. 136.



the Jewish love for Hebrew and the Old Testament. But, in order to recover what had been lost for centuries, vowel signs were needed in those passages especially which were not familiar through frequent public reading. The vowel signs as we know them in our Hebrew Bibles today were invented either in Babylonia or in Tiberias, the punctuators being guided partly by tradition, and partly by their sense of language, or "Sprachgefühl". Of course, a natural result of this vowel system was a grasp and understanding of Scripture by the common people. Hebrew was now no longer a dead language. The barrier between the learned (Chacham) and the unlearned (Am-ha-arez) was being broken down.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Rational School.

Up until this time two systems of exegesis had been in use, the Halachic and the Midrashic. The former was an authoritative exposition of the Old Testament to determine the rule (halacha) of life. This ceased, however, with the close of the Talmud in 500 A.D. The Midrash was of a homiletical nature, which treated Scripture as a peg upon which to hang moral doctrine and edifying tales. Now a third was added by Rashi (1040-1105), the literal, or rational system. This system was stimulated by a grammar and a dictionary in Hebrew compiled by Spanish Jews. This third system, it should be noted, does not

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 111-112.



constitutes a break with tradition. Although this third system often conflicts with the Halachic method, it never excludes it. This movement, the literal method, although continued by such outstanding men of Rashi's school as Joseph Kra, Rashbam, Eliezer of Beaugency and Joseph Bekhor, ended later in the twelfth century in favor of strict orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> Three important characteristics of this third school are to be especially noted, viz.:

1. A fondness for explaining Scripture by referring to the country of their residence;

2. Freedom and frankness in criticizing and disagreeing with their respective predecessors and contemporaries, and

3. The use of the vernacular (French).

Most important was the attempt of rationalism or naturalism to reduce Biblical miracles to normal and natural phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

#### Ibn-Ezra, Maimonides, Nachmani

A brief survey of the lives of the most famous scholars of this era will suffice to summarize the Jewish contributions to Biblical scholarship.

Abraham ben Meir Ibn-Ezra of Toledo (1088-1167) wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch, making it his task to fix

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 122 ff.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



the natural meaning of the text. He wrote in a very artistic form, and, although he mentioned the four common methods of interpretation (literal, moral, mystical, and anagogical), he also expressly avoided them. Because of this work, Ibn-Ezra became the leader of a school noted for its temperate, careful and scientific exposition of the Bible. By opposing the obscurity of Agadic explanation, he became the leader among the few enlightened minds of that time. Although Ibn-Ezra denounced every variation from the Massora as heretical, yet he seems to doubt the authorship of the Pentateuch, suggesting that certain passages in the Torah are insertions made at a later date. He only hints at this conclusion, however, without making any definite statements.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is the beginning of higher criticism.

Moses Ibn-Maimun (Maimonides, 1135-1204), "Light of the West", "Eagle of the Rabbis", attempted to harmonize reason and revelation, denying the existence of heaven and hell, most of the miracles, prophecy, and direct communication with God. By taking such a stand, he caused a wide split in Judaism, although even today he is still venerated as a physician and a scholar.<sup>2</sup>

Moses Nachmani (d. ca. 1270), a Spanish rabbi exiled in 1267, went to Palestine, where he was especially success-

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 487 f.



ful in arousing interest in Holy Writ "of which the Oriental Jews were entirely ignorant". For this purpose, Nachmani composed his Commentary on the Bible, and especially his chief work, the Exposition of the Pentateuch, which, although of Kabbalistic bent, has only slight references to the Kabbala in this particular work. After Nachmani, the attention of the Spanish rabbis was devoted almost exclusively to the Talmud, and Bible study and philosophy were forgotten.<sup>1</sup>

Medieval hermeneutics and exegesis therefore fall into four outstanding phases<sup>2</sup>; namely,

1. The first phase which is characterized by the rearrangement, comparison, and discussion of the Latin Fathers, with exceptional attempts to tap other sources, the Greeks and the Jews.

2. The second phase is characterized by a study of the classical works on grammar, rhetoric and dialectic, and their application to Scripture. This coincided with the revival of theological discussion in the eleventh century, and hence, attention to doctrine at the expense of scholarship.

3. The third phase, beginning in the twelfth century, was inspired by a fresh reading of Augustine, Gregory and Jerome. Here is evident a spiritual interpretation, which conveys mystical and religious feeling and teaching. A

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 607-609.

<sup>2</sup>Smalley, op. cit., pp. 266-267.



literal interpretation, signifying interest in Biblical history and in the original form and meaning of the sacred text, is also evident. This leads to a study of Hebrew and the rabbinic traditions and contact with the contemporary school of Rashi.

4. The fourth phase begins with the reception of Maimonides and the philosophical works of Aristotle. The twelfth century rediscovered Biblical scholarship, and the thirteenth century rediscovered exegesis.



## CHAPTER III

### SCRIPTURE TRANSLATIONS

In this chapter we propose to examine Biblical scholarship from the viewpoint of translation, since Scripture obviously cannot be studied unless one is familiar with the tongue in which it is written. Admittedly Latin predominated throughout the Middle Ages. This no one denies. Yet what of the vast untutored multitudes who never entered a monastery or a nunnery?

This question troubled many noble spirits also in that bygone era, and their attempts to put Scripture into the vernaculars, attempts which in many cases approach the heroic, are the subject of this chapter.

Perhaps the earliest, as well as the crudest attempt along that line was that of the poet and singer Caedmon (fl. ca. 670 A. D.), who is called the "Amos of English literature".<sup>1</sup> As with many other personages of this era, he, too, is enveloped in a haze of ancient fact and fancy, of history and fantasy, of circumstance and visions. As the legend goes, Caedmon was told in a dream by the Virgin that he should sing the story of God's goodness to man. Never having had the benefits of even rudimentary education, Caedmon was at first understandably skeptical. Repeated

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<sup>1</sup>Hoare, op. cit., p. 24 ff.



assurance, however, on the part of his supernatural visitor soon overcame his doubt as well as that of his contemporaries, and his status was summarily changed from that of swineherd to court singer. Hoare characterizes him as follows:

He was a poet, probably of mixed Celtic and Saxon blood, and the earliest of our English singers. To the music of his native harp the Bible story, in the form of a poetic paraphrase, begins to pass out of its old Latin into its new English dress...his poetry was, in truth, the only Bible of the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>1</sup>

At about this time, Caedmon's more famous and learned countryman, the Venerable Bede, also translated into Anglo-Saxon the Gospel of St. John. From his choice of the Fourth Gospel as the object of his labors, scholars have assumed that the other three were already translated.<sup>2</sup> This, however, leaves room for doubt. The story goes that Bede, old, sick and decrepit, expecting death any day, managed to dictate the last verses of his translation to the faithful scribes who stood by. History, as well as our knowledge of the man's piety, puts this story within the realm of the highly probable. This, however, would militate against the contention that the other three Gospels were already translated.

Alfred the Great (849-901) began a series of translations of certain portions of Scripture. These translations were often prompted by motives other than the desire to give the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 31



people Scripture in their own tongue. Alfred, as part of his program of reviving the native literature, translated, or caused to be translated, the Ten Commandments, which were then placed at the head of his Book of Laws. This, together with an unfinished version of the Psalms, seems to have been his contribution.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest translations of the Gospels in this period are interlinear in form, like Alfred's versions of the Psalms. One of these interlinear versions, done by "Aldred, a priest of Holy Isle", somewhere in the middle of the tenth century, is the now famous "Lindisfarne Gospels", so called because they were copied out by Eadfrith, bishop of Lindisfarne. About a generation later, MacRegol, an Irish priest, produced the equally famous "Rushworth Gospels", and also an Anglo-Saxon gloss.<sup>2</sup>

Toward the end of the tenth century, Abbot Aelfric produced an Anglo-Saxon translation of the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Esther, Job, part of Kings, and Judith and Maccabees. He did this for the specific purpose of arousing the patriotic spirit of the Danes.<sup>3</sup> We think of good Bishop Ulfilas' reason for refusing to include the books of Kings in his Gothic version of the Bible, fearing that its reading would only increase the warlike spirit of his people! To

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 32, f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



repeat, even translators of the Bible are not without their ulterior motives.

The Norman conquest seems to have left the stream of versions and translations untouched. The "Ormulus" (early thirteenth century), "Cursor Mundi", as well as a rhymed "Story of Genesis and Exodus" appeared, all in Norman-French.<sup>1</sup>

A really scholarly attempt to issue a critical version of the Old Testament was made by Saadiah ben Joseph of Fayyum, Upper Egypt (892-942). He is the founder of scientific Judaism among the Rabbanites, as well as the originator of religious philosophy in the Middle Ages. He translated the Old Testament into Arabic. To this translation he then added explanatory notes. The following are his three reasons for doing this:

1. He wished to make the Bible accessible to the people.
2. He wished to counteract the influence of Karaism, which tried to refute Talmudic Judaism through its exegesis.
3. He wanted to remove popular misconceptions and counteract the influence of the mystics "which rendered the words of the Bible literally, and thus gave an unworthy description of the Godhead."<sup>2</sup>

Ben Joseph favored the "philosophical idea, which conceives God in His exaltedness and holiness to be a spirit."

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>2</sup>Graetz, op. cit., pp. 189-190.



He thereby attempted to satisfy both reason and the Talmudic tradition. According to ben Joseph, the contradiction between the Bible and reason is only surface in nature. To belief his translation was to be dedicated.<sup>1</sup>

Another version, made about a generation before Wycliffe's, but very seldom mentioned, is that of John of Monte Corvino's translation of the Psalms and the New Testament into Tartar. John was the first archbishop of Peking, who is also responsible for a number of bishoprics and monasteries in China. He worked in the Far East from 1289 to 1328.<sup>2</sup>

John Wycliffe (d. 1384) seems to have been the first Englishman not only to conceive the idea of translating the whole Bible into English, but also the idea of actually putting the project into reality.<sup>3</sup> In fact, we have two complete versions of the Vulgate from Wycliffe. The first is very literal, attempting to produce as closely as possible the Latin idiom. As a result, this version is often obscure and unreadable. The second version is a free translation into running English, and is accordingly more intelligible to readers incapable of understanding the Latin construction. He seems to have begun the literal version, although there is no evidence that he actually did any of the translating himself. Instead, in Arundell's words, he

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Whitney, op. cit., p. 753.

<sup>3</sup>Hoare, op. cit., pp. 85-86.



"devised the expedient". The second version was probably begun by him during his lifetime, and seems to have been finished before 1395-97.<sup>1</sup>

Strange as it may seem, it was apparently in the land of the Reformation that the Bible had been most widely spread. According to one authority, German Bibles were among the most commonly printed books. About 100 editions made their appearance before 1500. Unfortunately, little or nothing is known of the translators and/or the revisers thereof.<sup>2</sup>

The accompanying table lists the translations alphabetically by languages, and is useful also in showing just which centuries saw the greatest activity in Bible translations. While the period between the seventh and the twelfth centuries saw numerous translations, a decided increase in the number of translations begins in the thirteenth century. The table also indicates that there are relatively few translations of the entire Bible, and that these translations are by no means confined to any one era or to any one family of languages.

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<sup>1</sup>Whitney, op. cit., Vol. VII, pp. 504-505.

<sup>2</sup>Guiraud, op. cit., p. 602.



## TABLE

TRANSLATIONS (Prior to 1450)<sup>1</sup>

<u>Language</u>	<u>Year of Trans.</u>	<u>Portion Translated</u>
Anglo-Saxon	7th Century	Caedmon's Paraphrases
Anglo-Saxon	8th Century	Bede's John 1 to 6,9
Anglo-Saxon	9th Century	Psalms
Anglo-Saxon	10th Century	Gospels
Arabic	8th Century	Psalms
Armenian	5th Century	Entire Bible
Bohemian	9th Century	Entire Bible (?)
Catalan	14th Century	Psalms
Catalan	15th Century	Entire Bible
Dutch	12th Century	Acts
Dutch	13th Century	Entire Bible
English	14th Century	Entire Bible
Ethiopic	6th or 7th Cent.	Entire Bible
French	13th Century	Entire Bible
German	11th Century	Song of Solomon
German	13th Century	Matthew in part
Low German	11th Century	Psalms
Georgian	5th Century	Entire Bible
Gothic	4th Century	Most of Bible
Hungarian	15th Century	Gospels, Pss., S. of S.
Icelandic	13th Century	Parts of Ex. & Deut.
Italian	13th Century	Gospels
Latin	4th or 5th Cen.	Vulgate
Norwegian	14th Century	Historical Books
Persian	14th Century	Parts
Polish	14th Century	Gospels
Provencal	12th Century	New Testament
Romance	12th Century	Parts
Slavonic	9th Century	Bible (?)
Spanish	13th Century	Pent., Pss., N.T.
Swedish	15th Century	Paraphrase of Pent.
Vaudois	14th Century	New Testament

<sup>1</sup> Eric North, ed., The Book of a Thousand Tongues,  
(New York, Harper & Bros., 1938), p. 37.



## CHAPTER IV

### PEDAGOGY

In addition to the material available on the cathedral and monastic schools, very little is known of the pedagogical propensities of the Middle Ages, where Biblical scholarship is concerned. What Butts has to say of medieval theology in general, also applies to Biblical scholarship, in the narrow sense. He summarizes the situation in the following words:

In the early Middle Ages theology, of course, had been an important study in the monastic and cathedral schools, but in the hands of the Augustinian theologians it had been closely interwoven with other studies rather than separated from them....In the thirteenth century, the introduction of Aristotelian science greatly influenced the faculties of arts and theology.<sup>1</sup>

Bible study and Biblical pedagogy, like theology, were almost inseparably joined with Neo-Platonic concepts and Aristotelian logic. Just how far Neo-Platonic concepts and Aristotelianism influenced medieval Bible study, however, is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that these two influences gradually declined in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and finally met their Waterloo in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras.

Cassiodorus (c. 490-583) laid down some interesting

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<sup>1</sup>R. Freeman Butts, A Cultural History of Education (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1947), p. 192.



requirements for his Calabrian monastery at Vivarium. Before one could be considered qualified to ascertain the meaning of the sacred books, he must be able to examine and compare the older versions, both Greek and Latin. After he has fixed the text, he can begin to interpret. Cassiodorus made a further contribution along this line by writing a companion to Biblical studies in the form of a Latin version of Josephus' Antiquities. Even more popular, however, was his voluminous commentary on the Psalms, together with a valuable though incomplete version of Clement of Alexandria's notes on the Catholic Epistles. He especially stressed "orthography", which today would also include grammar. At the ripe old age of 93, he wrote De Orthographia, at the same time recommending a number of older writers on the subject.

Cassiodorus was also not averse to the use of supplementary material, historical and geographical, as aids to Bible study. At his behest, Epiphanius translated into Latin the historical works of church historians Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret, calling the translation Historia Tripartita.<sup>1</sup>

In Britain, Biblical pedagogy seemed to be progressing, if we can take Bede's word for it. In Book IV of his Opera Historica<sup>2</sup> he mentions the fact that Archbishop Theodore of

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<sup>1</sup>Whitney, op. cit., pp. 486-487.

<sup>2</sup>Bede, Opera Historica, trans. J. E. King (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), Vol. II, pp. 12-13.



Tarsus and Hadrian the Abbot taught the people sacred as well as secular knowledge, thereby attracting other scholars to them, "so that there were enough teachers of Scripture available for anyone who wanted to learn". Bede himself, the author of a translation of a portion of St. John into Anglo-Saxon, realized the necessity for continuous study of Scripture. He felt this especially necessary for the clergy, and, in a letter to Bishop Egbert, exhorted him to a diligent study of the Bible, especially, for obvious reasons, to a study of the letters to Timothy and Titus.<sup>1</sup>

If the bishops and abbots were urged to study Scripture, monks and nuns were no less exhorted. Jerome's famous letter to Laeta, with interesting sidelights on his own opinions, is worth quoting in part, at least. The quotation is given here as found in Ulich's Three Thousand Years of Educational Wisdom.

Let her begin by learning the Psalter and then let her gather rules of life out of the Proverbs of Solomon. From the Preacher let her gain the habit of despising the world and its vanities. Let her follow the example set in Job of virtue and of patience. Then let her pass on to the Gospels, never to be laid aside once they have been taken in hand. Let her also drink with a willing heart the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. As soon as she has enriched the storehouse of her mind with these treasures, let her commit to memory the prophets, the Heptateuch, the books of Kings and of Chronicles, the rolls also of Ezra and Esther. When she has done all these, she may safely read the Song of Songs, but not before....Let her avoid all apocryphal writings.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Ulich, Three Thousand Years of Educational Wisdom, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 168.



Gregory the Great (540-604) believed that education in Scripture should emphasize Christian morals. Consequently he wrote Moralia in Job, an allegorical commentary on Job. It was written to show the right way of living here and now. Gregory has Job typifying Christ, Job's wife typifying the temptations of the flesh, and Job's counselors typifying the heresiarchs.<sup>1</sup>

Abelard (1074-1142) wrote to Heloise a letter similar in import and object to Jerome's quoted above. It, too, suggests a course of instruction for female monastics. Abelard, however, seems to have felt the necessity for even more education than Jerome deemed necessary. Hebrew and Greek, Abelard advised, should also be included in the women's curriculum. Since the teaching of Scripture in the secular schools had by this time become subservient to the liberal arts, Abelard proposed a return to the scholarly ideal of the old lectio divina and cites as his authority Jerome, as quoted above.<sup>2</sup>

He seems to have felt very strongly about education of the youth for economic purposes, and holds in very high esteem the Jewish love of Scriptural learning for its own sake, as is evident from the following quotation:

If the Christians educate their sons, they do so not for God, but for gain, in order that the one brother, if he be a clerk, may help his father and mother and

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<sup>1</sup>Rand, op. cit., p. 31

<sup>2</sup>Smalley, op. cit., pp. 55-56.



his other brothers. They say that a clerk will have no heir and whatever he has will be ours and the other brothers'. A black cloak and hood to go to church in, and his surplice, will be enough for him. But the Jews, out of zeal for God, and love of the Law, put as many sons as they have to letters, however poor, and if a Jew had ten sons, he would put them all to letters, not for gain, as the Christians do, but for the understanding of God's law, and not only his sons, but also his daughters.<sup>1</sup>

By the time the eleventh and twelfth centuries arrived, Biblical scholarship in the cathedral schools and elsewhere had declined. The tendency among the masters of the era was to identify exegesis with theology, the Psalter and the Pauline Epistles being their favorite subjects of attention. Original work on the Law, the Old Testament historical books, the Prophets, Gospels and Acts seems to be lacking altogether. This resulted from the reception and use of Aristotelian logic, canon and civil law. These outside interests, together with the urgent need for speculation and discussion, produced an atmosphere of haste uncondusive to specialization in Biblical scholarship. The masters of the cathedral schools had neither the time nor the training to specialize in a very technical branch of Bible study, and, of course, the students reflected this condition. Even the last of the great monastic schools, the one at Bec, was no exception. Its renowned master, Lanfranc, was a lawyer and a logician. The works of his pupil, Anselm of Canterbury, mostly philosophical in nature, seem to have eclipsed the Biblical works, now lost.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 54.



Another pedagogical device, common today, but unknown in learned works before the twelfth century, is the use of exempla. Up until this time, exempla were considered necessary and proper for lay instruction. The Chanter is the first to introduce exempla systematically into his lectures, thereby bringing a method of elementary education into the classroom. Perhaps he was thinking of the lay congregations to whom his pupils would preach. He has a very high regard and a healthy respect for exempla, as is evident if one reads the following quotation:

Exempla, proverbs and other devices are, so to speak, the spices of the spiritual exegesis. The real subject of the lecture is the technique of the exegesis itself, how to grind the corn of Scripture into the bread of tropology.<sup>1</sup>

The thirteenth century was also the backdrop for what, to the modern viewpoint, was a rather unusual method of instruction. The bachelarius biblicus, or pupil-teacher, had the task of reading and contruing the text and the gloss in lectures for beginners, while the master expounded the doctrinal content to the more advanced students. Under this system Lanfranc and Anselm composed and read aloud their own textbooks, at the same time giving their own magisterial interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while Scripture was by no means entirely forgotten or ignored in the schools, its position was definitely

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 212, f.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



secondary to canon law, logic, and systematic theology.

CHAPTER 7

THE BIBLE AND THE CHURCH

In this chapter, two schools of thought are represented. The one contends that the Bible was widely used by the medieval laity, and the other contends that it was not. The arguments for each are set forth in the order.

According to the Ecclesiastical History, the reading of the Scriptures was in vogue in churches as well as their explanation in the sermons of the priests. As a result, the laity managed to procure their own copies of portions of Scripture, which included suggestions for use in private meditations of home. Figures are cited to show that just prior to 1501 the number of copies of the Bible had been printed and placed upon the book-shelves. Of these, 113 editions were in Latin, 54 were in German, 26 in Italian, 24 in Dutch or Flemish, 7 in French, 4 in Spanish, and one edition in Croatian. Each edition contained about 500 copies. With the exception of 11 Latin editions, which were to have been used in churches for public reading, all were printed with commentaries.

<sup>1</sup>John P. Lehmann, "The Bible as Meditation Book of the Medieval Laity", *Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 101, (Sep. 1939), p. 296.



## CHAPTER V

### THE BIBLE AND THE LAITY

In this chapter, two schools of thought are represented. The one contends that the Bible was widely used by the medieval laity, and the other contends that it was not. The arguments for each case are herewith presented in that order.

According to the *Ecclesiastical Review*,<sup>1</sup> the reading of the pericopic systems in church, as well as their explanation in the sermons, did not satisfy the piety of the people. As a result, the laity managed to procure their own copies of portions of Scripture, which included explanations for use in private meditations at home. Figures are cited to show that just prior to 1501 249 editions, consisting of 124,500 copies, had been printed and placed upon the book-market. Of these, 133 editions were in Latin, 54 were in German, 26 in Italian, 24 in Dutch or Flemish, 7 in French, 4 in Spanish, and one edition in Croatian. Each edition comprised about 500 copies. With the exception of 13 Latin editions, which seem to have been used in churches for public reading, all were provided with commentaries. According to this same periodical, 395 editions (264,000

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<sup>1</sup>John M. Lenhart, "The Bible as Meditation Book of the Medieval Laity", *Ecclesiastical Review*, Vol. 101, (Sep. 1939), p. 196.



copies) of the Psalter were published from 1457 until 1520, in addition to 20 editions of the seven penitential psalms.<sup>1</sup> The Psalterium Abbreviatum S. Hieronymi seems to have enjoyed extensive popularity. It consisted of verses selected from certain psalms and embellished in some editions with woodcuts and borders. Five editions in Latin and two in Italian were issued before 1500 in handy volumes of from 100 to 120 pages. "The artistic makeup as well as the content shows that these booklets were intended for the use of the laity."<sup>2</sup>

Additional proof for the widespread use of the Bible among the laity is offered by citing the fact that all the commentaries on Job, the Prophets, and the Gospels are supposed to have been used for purposes of meditation.

Lenhart adduces further proof in the following words:

The historical books of the Old Testament were intensively studied in school in the summaries compiled by Peter Comestor, Peter Aureoli, and others. Adults surely read these Bible Histories for edification also.<sup>3</sup>

This same authority proceeds to draw his conclusions on the basis of some more statistics to the effect that about 704,500 copies of parts of the Bible were printed in Europe from 1466 to 1520. At this time about 130 million people lived in Europe. After he has deducted from this number  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million clergy and nobility who used only

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 212.



printed books, and deducting also 15% of the total population as being children under 6 years of age, and hence unable to read, Lenhart concludes that there was about one meditation-book to every 156 adults, and a Biblical prayer book in every nine families. Parts of the Bible used as textbooks in school and as service books in church, together with reprints used for miscellaneous purposes, are not included in the above reckoning.<sup>1</sup>

Added to this statistical evidence, we have a statement from Smalley as follows, "The Bible was the most studied book of the Middle Ages. Bible study represented the highest branch of learning."<sup>2</sup> Hoare records the fact that 170 copies of the Bible or parts thereof have survived for more than 500 years, most of them written between 1420 and 1450. The large majority of surviving manuscripts are "of pocket size, and were obviously intended for ordinary folk, and for their daily use. The testimony of Foxe, if we can rely on it, is in a similar direction. Considerable sums, he says, were paid even for detached sheets, and as much as a load of hay for the loan of a whole Testament for an hour a day."<sup>3</sup>

The evidence seems to favor the belief that the Bible was the common property of the laity of the Middle Ages.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 217 f.

<sup>2</sup>Smalley, op. cit., Introduction, b.

<sup>3</sup>Hoare, op. cit., p. 90 f.



However, most of the dates quoted above for the production of all these parts of Scripture begin, at the earliest, in the fourteenth century. Nothing is said of earlier eras. Again, the population figures, as well as the exact number of editions circulated, are admittedly guesswork and estimates, and should therefore be taken for such.

Furthermore, it is needless to point out not only the great possibility for inaccuracy, but also the mere fact that a certain number of copies or editions did exist, in no way reflects on the personal piety of the people. Witchcraft and Kabbalism (the use of Scripture for incantation purposes) were very widespread at this time, and must also be taken into account. Also, at the time when Wycliffe's versions appeared, detected copies were seized and destroyed. Again, the payment of a load of hay, as mentioned above, for the use of a Bible for one hour, would also seem to indicate that the Bible was then yet quite a rarity.

People as a general rule don't especially go out of their way for the common and the ordinary, as witnessed by the popular apathy toward Scripture today. Archbishop Arundel declared, in a statute of 1408, that it was illegal to read any of Wycliffe's writings and/or translations within the province of Canterbury, unless "such work shall have been first examined, and unanimously approved, by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hoare, op. cit., p. 90 f.



Two centuries or more previous to this decree, lay men and women in Lorraine, in the Metz diocese, held private group meetings for the purposes of reading a French translation of certain books of the Bible, and, to their undying credit, refused to discontinue this practice, even after repeated disdainful admonitions by their parish priests. Innocent III declared that the mysteries of the faith were not for all men.<sup>1</sup>

The Albigensian movement resulted in the definite prohibition by the Council of Toulouse (1229) of Bibles among the laity. If, as Hoare points out<sup>2</sup>, Biblically-educated clergy were considered the exception to the rule, then grave doubts about the Biblical training of the laity and their familiarity with Scripture must be maintained.

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<sup>1</sup>Gwatkin, op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 20

<sup>2</sup>Hoare, op. cit., p. 87.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The study of the Bible in the Middle Ages is indeed an involved story, and one that will long remain incomplete. Certain facts, however, are apparent as a result of the foregoing study.

It seems to be certain that indeterminate numbers of the laity did possess the Bible, or parts thereof. It is also certain that it was difficult, often impossible, to obtain a Bible, or a part of it, especially before the invention of printing.

Even the scholars were often sidetracked from a thorough study of Scripture by glosses, quaestiones, exempla and other devices. Insufficient credit, however, seems to have been given the Jewish scholars, who devoted tremendous energy and learning to the study of Scripture. Nor was their labor lost on their Gentile contemporaries. The Massoretic vowel-points are a good example of their contributions.

While it is true that Scripture was not and could not have been too freely circulated, yet it was not always chained down to a monastery library. Until more evidence from yet untouched manuscripts is forthcoming, any conclusions which may be drawn must rest on these facts.



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