

EDITORIAL

WE ended our July Editorial on GOD'S WORD WRITTEN by saying that a fatal division between God's Word and man's word is introduced into Holy Scripture by non-Catholic Biblical scholarship, owing to its insistent denial of inerrancy. The elimination of this division can only be effected by the authority of Christ in his Church, under the leading of the Holy Spirit. In the long run and finally what is God's Word to men and what God's Word says to them can only be decided by the teaching *magisterium* of the Church, divinely safeguarded from error.

In the long run and finally; for the guidance of the Holy Spirit is not restricted to the definitive decisions of the teaching Church. The whole process, within the divine Society, by which the meaning of God's Word and its fuller implications have been reduced to definition during the course of the Church's life through the centuries, is governed by the Holy Spirit, who indwells the Church. In accordance with Christ's promise he leads the members of the Mystical Body 'into all truth', and by doing so builds up Christ's mind in them.

For the *depositum fidei*, the truth which Christ committed to the care of his Church, embodied in the inspired Scriptures, is the possession of all its members, and each of us, according to his status in the body, has his particular responsibility towards it. Thus every member of Christ in his Church, from the Pope to the humblest learner, scholars and theologians together with the simple and unlettered, the busy and preoccupied, even the uninterested, every baptized Christian, belongs primarily to the *ecclesia discens*; we are all here to be taught the word of Life by the Spirit. This learning is under the guidance of the *ecclesia docens*, the teaching Church. But the teaching Church, like any good teacher, is only a guide in her teaching, an inspiration, a stimulus; the work of learning, if it is to bear fruit, must be done primarily by the learner, and the learner must learn always by docility and obedience what the Spirit has to teach. This process of learning, of being led by the Holy Spirit into all truth, is basically a personal matter; it takes place in the mind and heart of each individual member of the Body of Christ.

But it also forms, by communication, a common mind, a common possession of truth by the faithful as a whole. This we call the mind of the Church, which contains the truths of revelation explicitly held and understood. It also possesses, through the indwelling Spirit, a continuous insight into those truths, by worship, meditation and study. These activities within the body bring to the surface, from time to time, by the penetration of faith, what has hitherto been implicit and unrecognized in them. In this way, residing in the minds of the faithful, at any period of the Church's history, besides the truths of faith, which are recognized as such, there are many ideas, opinions, speculations and beliefs, arising from the Faith, which are not *de fide*, but are piously believed.

From time to time one of these may come to be accepted in the common mind of the Church, by a divinely guided instinct, as being so clearly implicit in the truths of God's revelation already *de fide*, that they must be held to be themselves revealed. The task of decision in this matter lies with the *ecclesia docens*, the episcopate throughout the world in union with the Holy See. When the episcopate teaches by its universal consent that a truth is contained in the deposit of Faith, this truth is said to be taught by the ordinary *magisterium* of the Church. What is universally believed in the mind of the Church, by the divinely guided instinct of the faithful, comes, in this way, to be universally taught by its divinely guided teaching authority, diffused throughout the world. A further step in this process occurs when it is *defined* by the supreme authority of the Church, through a General Council confirmed by the Pope, or by the Pope alone, himself defining with that authority.

The whole body of the faithful in the Church then, possesses the Scriptures, the inspired record of God's revelation, and continuously and in every age ponders upon what it possesses, and lives by its pondering. In this pondering the voice of the teaching Church, proclaiming the gospel, must be our guide at whatever level in the Church's life our pondering takes place. At one level the scholars are at work, making use of the strict empirical methods of numerous branches of scientific knowledge and research; archaeology, linguistics, history and literature; the study of ancient civilizations, their ways of thought and modes of expression. The object of this kind of pondering on the Word of God

is to establish with exactness its original text and to interpret the meaning of the text as it stood in the minds of the sacred writers. For from the Scriptures thus presented to them the theologians at another level draw the material of their particular science; they ponder upon the deposit of Faith. The formulations of the Church in her dogmatic definitions, like those of the theologians whose science prepares the ground for them, are not the Faith itself, they are *articuli fidei*, articulations of the profound *mysterium fidei* contained in the Scriptures. They are designed to render that mystery more easily perceptible to the weakness of human understanding.

These articulations, when *de fide*, are of course immune from error, but they do not exhaust the fullness of the truth, which is the revelation itself; they are directive and admonitory, guiding the minds of the faithful, keeping them on the high road of truth and from straying down the bye-roads of false emphasis and error. The fullness of truth is contained in the revealed mystery itself, which no man can fully penetrate.

At a third level the faithful ponder the mystery of faith contained in Scripture in liturgy and worship. Here the work of the scholar aids them and the theologian is their guide. Yet ultimately the penetration into, and the deepening understanding of, the mystery of faith is a personal growth, within the life of the Mystical Body, each person contributing his quota to the whole. This is what we mean by growth in holiness; the power of the unction of the Holy Spirit, causing by its inflow the presence of sanctifying grace and the issue from this of the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity perfected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The chief material, so to say, upon which the Holy Spirit works in our souls is the truth communicated to us by God's revelation in the written Word, confirmed and guided by the Word spoken, the Apostolic preaching of the Church. Hence the meditative reading of the Scriptures, *lectio divina*, is the unique groundwork of sanctity; by it we penetrate into, and grow in understanding of, the mystery of our redemption, and its fruit will be our preaching of that mystery with power by the example of our lives.