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BRIEF STUDIES

OBSTACLES TO BIBLE READING IN THE HOME

Every Christian knows, at least in theory, the importance of the Word. He knows that it is basic for creating faith, renewing the heart, and nurturing the sanctified life. But this knowledge is not generally matched by a corresponding practice. What is the present status of the use of the Bible in the home? There is no denying that the Bible is used in the homes of our members. The point at issue is, Is there enough of it? Of what quality is the use? It is obvious that any generalization is precarious. What is true of one situation may not be true of another. But in spite of this some observations may be set forth.

The Bible, to be sure, is the world's best seller, yet this is hardly indicative of how much it is read and how well it is read. Every pastor knows that the Bible is not being read as it ought to be. It is studied even less. Pastors are aware of this as they visit the homes of their parishioners. When they meet their members in the Bible class, they become aware that even an elementary knowledge is frequently lacking. The same condition is reported by leaders in youth camps.

Recently two pastors, one a city pastor and another from a suburban congregation, conducted an interesting survey, trying to determine to what extent the Bible was being used in the homes either as a basis for family devotions or for personal reading. The pastor of the suburban church limited his study to those who regularly attended church. That should mean from the very ones where the best showing might be expected. The canvass was made in such a way that no names were revealed. Out of a total communicant membership of five hundred thirty-four, a sampling was made of one hundred seventy-four. Concerning home devotions, thirty-four per cent indicated that they read the Bible daily, thirty-five per cent occasionally, seventeen per cent seldom, and thirteen per cent admitted that they did not use the Bible at all. The same survey showed that reading the Bible for personal edification fared no better. Thirty-four per cent indicated that as a rule they read the Bible daily, forty-three per cent only occasionally, sixteen per cent seldom, and seven per cent not at all.

The second survey was taken in a city congregation and only from such communicants as were members of different adult organizations

in the church, such as the ladies' aid, the Walther League, voters' assembly, Sunday school teachers, etc. This again was limited chiefly to those who were in regular church attendance. The sampling included one hundred eighty-eight out of eight hundred sixteen communicants. Forty per cent read the Bible regularly in family devotions, thirty-three per cent occasionally, ten per cent seldom, and seventeen per cent not at all. This same group indicated that they read the Bible for personal reading according to the following score: thirty per cent read it regularly, forty-one per cent occasionally, nineteen per cent seldom, and ten per cent did not read it at all. In analyzing the survey according to the different organizations, certain facts stand out which give us cause for great concern. Among the young married people, those who are establishing the homes and raising the families, twenty-seven per cent were not reading their Bibles. In fact, all the younger members of the congregation indicated a similar situation. Sixty per cent of the Senior Walther Leaguers were not participating in home devotions, plus thirteen per cent who seldom participated. To this we add the fact that thirty-three per cent of these same Leaguers seldom read the Bible personally, plus another twenty per cent who were not reading it at all.

Any analysis or criticism of these surveys will not raise the figures. Knowing that there is a tendency even in surveys in which the answers are given anonymously to present a better picture than is actually the case, a realistic appraisal might even lower these figures. To what extent one may generalize from these two random surveys is a moot question. At any rate they give cause to consider.

What keeps the average Christian from using his Bible more regularly? At the bottom of the trouble is, of course, sinful flesh, which regards this a chore. Yet one cannot dismiss the matter with such a ready excuse. There are many other factors which lend a helping hand to this natural inclination, making the task more formidable than it might be. These difficulties must be recognized, and help must be given to overcome them if the pastor hopes to bring about some improvement. What are some of these common excuses? Perhaps the one most frequently heard or sometimes left unsaid is, "I am tremendously busy." Coupled with this is the size of the Bible, which seems formidable enough to frighten many away, so that they do not even begin to read, much less study it. This reason may not be sincere, yet many a person really believes it and thus justifies himself. Whether people are busy in big things or little things is really immaterial if it serves as an excuse. But perhaps the Bible is not as formidable as

it appears when one begins to regard it not as one book but as a collection of books. Even the term "book" is not to be understood as one ordinarily regards the term, for many of the books are the size of tracts and pamphlets. How long would it take the average Christian to read some of these books? A conservative estimate for an ordinary reader shows that twenty-eight, that is almost half, can be read in thirty minutes or less. In fact, fourteen of them can be read in less than fifteen minutes. Six others can be read in less than an hour. Certainly this is not a formidable task.¹ The Book of Genesis, which is the second-longest in the Bible, exceeded only by the Book of Psalms, comprises but fifty-three pages and can be read in about an hour and a half.

Another common excuse for many is that they cannot understand the Bible. Perhaps there is much truth in this excuse, and there are a number of factors which lead people to this conclusion. One of these is part of the vicious circle. People find it hard to read it because they have not studied it. They lack familiarity. While there are some difficult portions in the Bible, there are as many and perhaps even more simpler selections. This number might be increased if the minimum of proper guidance and help were attainable.

But there are some physical factors which make Bible reading difficult. The one most frequently mentioned is the antiquated language of the King James Version. Let us not minimize this. It is a real handicap and deters people from studying the Scriptures, at least when they must do it on their own initiative. It is rather unfortunate that the mechanics of our own language have become obstacles. No one thinks of reading the German Luther translation as it originally appeared from his pen. It has been constantly revised. But we have strangely enough clung to an English version of the seventeenth century. Perhaps one of the reasons is that suitable translations in more modern versions are not available, though the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament with all its defects is one translation which we can recommend.

But the difficulties of translation are only a part of the mischief. Almost as serious, if not more so, is the fact that the Bible is usually printed according to such awkward typography. Poetry, prose, direct speech, quotations, are all written alike. Instead of a single column across the page we have two narrow columns separated by a margin of references. But the most uninviting factor in the format is the divisions of the books into verses which break into the thoughts and

sentences and often at the wrong places. The chapter divisions for the most part are equally unnatural and unnecessary, sometimes even appearing at the wrong place. This series of hurdles does not make for easy and ready Bible reading when all other books receive the best attention from the typographer, printer, editor, and author. No wonder that Bible reading seems so slow. "It is a great tribute to the slow motion imparted to it by the old chapter and verse divisions that it looks to most people like a month's work."² Perhaps for this reason Dr. Henry Weston is quoted as saying, "I hate these chapters and verses; reading a Bible in which I find them always reminds me of riding over a corduroy road."³ A modern printing job would make the English translation seem less antiquated and consequently more inviting for general reading.

Another reason commonly given and somewhat related to the others is, "I forget to get around to it." This is somewhat different from the excuse that there isn't enough time. Rather it is an admission of neglect and, what is perhaps more true, the failure to form a habit. When we tend to read the Bible at odds and ends during the day without any stated place or time, other tasks and interests usually have a way of crowding in. Some persistent souls have purchased for themselves small editions of selections of the Bible to be read while waiting for busses and streetcars and in the many delays that consume so much time in the days' program. This is, no doubt, a laudable habit, but most people prefer to do their reading in the privacy of their home. Consequently, without a set time and place, the few minutes before bedtime are most frequently the portion of the day used for this purpose. And yet, this time, convenient as it may be, is not conducive to good Bible study. Certainly our mind is no longer alert after a long day. It may be possible for the mind to take on some easy reading, but it is not prepared to plow through some of the more meaty sections of the Scripture. The Lord Himself implies that this is work when He refers to it as seeking after silver and searching for hid treasures. Bible study has rich rewards, but nevertheless it is preceded by some hard thinking.

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¹ Julian Price Love, *How to Read the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 16—18.

² Edgar J. Goodspeed, *How to Read the Bible* (Philadelphia: Winston, c. 1946), p. 39.

³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Study and Teaching of the English Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1910), p. 37.

IN THE SIGN OF BACH *

Offerings for Pastors, Organists, and Choir Masters

1. German musical life in the year 1950 will stand in special measure under the sign of Johann Sebastian Bach. The Evangelical Church of Germany must be aware of its prime responsibility to administrate the heritage of Bach well and to care for a suitable execution and character of the Bach Year; for in all of his creating and working, Bach was first of all a member of the Evangelical Church. Hence the bicentennial of Bach's death should not be left by the Evangelical Church to musical life outside the Church.

2. At the same time, however, we must warn against a faulty cult of a personality and a hero worship that turns backwards. To call Bach the "fifth Evangelist" testifies of a dangerous misunderstanding of his music: it serves the Gospel, but it is not the Gospel. Not the person of Bach, but his work is the important thing. Its importance, however, lies in the first place in its service to worship, that is, its relation to the Church Year and its search for "regulated church music to the honor of God" (cf. Bach's memorandum to the Council at Muehlhausen, 1708).

3. Despite the liturgical relevance of Bach's church music, however, we must not overlook that the elements of opera in it as well as texts which are too bound to special times can be made consonant with current forms of worship only with great difficulty and can therefore cause tensions. That is especially true of the cantata as Bach preferred to employ it.

4. The Bach Year should in no case lead to the presentation of the larger works of Bach by those who are not prepared for it. Church organizations should not enter into competition with public musical life, which commands more artistic personnel and better financial resources. Instead they should as far as possible serve one another, perhaps in this way that in the coming year able choirs and organists take over the observance of the Bach jubilee, if possible, for a whole area.

5. The majority of church choirs will find only the Bach chorale setting suitable to their capacity. Doubtless will they serve to convey even to the tiniest congregation a certain, even if by necessity incomplete, realization of the inner meaning of Bach's works. Characteristic

* Distributed in *Musik und Kirche* by the Rev. Dr. Walter Blankenburg, director of the Evangelical School of Church Music at Schluechten, in connection with the bicentennial of Bach. Published in *Evangelische Welt*, Bethel, Bielefeld, Vol. IV, No. 1, January, 1950, pp. 26—27; translated by R. R. C.

of them is the ringing truth of the words and the strong feeling of piety. They are a symbol of the voice of the congregation in the framework of the cantata and the Passion, but they themselves are not church hymns and require in view of the polyphony, for the most part, a slower and broader rendition than the congregation's singing. It must be remembered that instruments were fitted into their original pattern of tone.

6. An especially outstanding importance should be given to the organ works of Bach. Perhaps we can say that in the Bach Year the essential task should be to arouse the proper appreciation of Bach's organ work as liturgical art. In a time when we find the new mandate to permit nothing in worship which does not pertain to the essential task of the preaching of the Word and the song of praise, we must face anew the question of free preludes and postludes. While we must listen to Bach's organ preludes as witnesses to the text of the chorale, his free organ works are the play of the childlike believing, emancipated, self-forgetful, joyous, and yet humble child of God. This music does not serve self-glorification, but "*soli Deo gloria*, to God alone the honor."

7. The emphasis of Bach's creativity lies in the music related to the liturgy. However, we should not neglect to cultivate his music for the home and chamber; for in them breathes the same spirit as in his other works.

8. The Bach Year brings with it the danger of Bach big business. Many will take occasion to use the name Bach for enterprises in the grand style. The Church must guard against this with its own presentations, and it should not create the impression that it supports such big business, as, for example, through providing halls.

9. The Bach Year must also not create the impression that all year long only Bach music should sound forth. Bach's own music teaches us the facility with which Bach employed the artistic language of his own time, with what marvelous aplomb he took the most modern musical forms into the church service and placed them under the rule of "regulated church music." Thus he contributed to sanctifying his musical world. If Bach, as it is often done today, had fostered chiefly "old music," for example, that of Praetorius, Schuetz, and Schein, then he would not have arrived at historic importance and value. Therefore we will have Bach urge us to our inescapable responsibility for contemporary music and deal accordingly in the Bach Year itself.

A REFORMATION IN CATHOLIC BIBLICAL STUDIES?

We should note an important change in the Roman Catholic attitude toward Biblical studies. Until a few years ago the Catholic Church required an undivided loyalty to the Vulgate, which was prepared by Jerome in the fourth century. While he had done a solid piece of work, someone has counted 1,400 mistakes in it. In 1543—65 the Council of Trent declared under threat of a curse that the revised Vulgate was to be authoritative in the Church:

If any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema. . . . The same sacred and holy Synod . . . ordains and declares, that the said old and vulgate edition, which, by the lengthened usage of so many years, has been approved of in the Church, be, in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever. (*The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, translated by J. Waterworth, The Christian Symbolic Publication Soc., Chicago, p. 19.)

Happily the Church that lays down a curse can also take it away. In September, 1943, Pope Pius XII issued an Encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, "on Promotion of Biblical Studies," in which he says:

There is no one who cannot easily perceive that the conditions of biblical studies and their subsidiary sciences have greatly changed within the last fifty years. For, apart from anything else, when Our Predecessor published the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus*, hardly a single place in Palestine had begun to be explored by means of relevant excavations. Now, however, this kind of investigation is much more frequent and, since more precise methods and technical skill have been developed in the course of actual experience, it gives us information at once more abundant and more accurate. . . . The value of these excavations is enhanced by the discovery from time to time of written documents, which help much towards the knowledge of the languages, letters, events, customs, and forms of worship of most ancient times. And of no less importance is the discovery and investigation, so frequent in our times, of papyri which have contributed so much to the knowledge of letters and institutions, both public and private, especially of the time of Our Savior.

Moreover ancient codices of the Sacred Books have been found and edited with discerning thoroughness. . . . All these advantages which, not without a special design of Divine Providence, our age has acquired,

are as it were an invitation and inducement to interpreters of the Sacred Literature to make diligent use of this light, so abundantly given, to penetrate more deeply, explain more clearly and expound more lucidly the Divine Oracles. . . .

The Fathers of the Church in their time, especially Augustine, warmly recommended to the Catholic scholar, who undertook the investigation and explanation of the Sacred Scriptures, the study of the ancient languages and recourse to the original texts. However, such was the state of letters in those times, that not many,—and these few but imperfectly—knew the Hebrew language. In the middle ages, when Scholastic Theology was at the height of its vigor, the knowledge of even the Greek language had long since become so rare in the West, that even the greatest Doctors of that time, in their exposition of the Sacred Text, had recourse only to the Latin version, known as the Vulgate.

On the contrary in this our time, not only the Greek language, which since the humanistic renaissance has been, as it were, restored to new life, is familiar to almost all students of antiquity and letters, but the knowledge of Hebrew also and of other oriental languages has spread far and wide among literary men. Moreover there are now such abundant aids to the study of these languages that the biblical scholar, who by neglecting them would deprive himself of access to the original texts, could in no wise escape the stigma of levity and sloth. For it is the duty of the exegete to lay hold, so to speak, with the greatest care and reverence of the very least expressions which, under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, have flowed from the pen of the sacred writer, so as to arrive at a deeper and fuller knowledge of his meaning. . . .

Therefore ought we to explain the original text which, having been written by the inspired author himself, has more authority and greater weight than any, even the very best translation, whether ancient or modern. (Italics ours.)

“The correction of the codices should first of all engage the attention of those who wish to know the Divine Scripture so that the uncorrected may give place to the corrected” [quoted from Augustine]. . . . Nor is it necessary here to call to mind—since it is doubtless familiar and evident to all students of Sacred Scripture—to what extent the Church has held in honor these studies in textual criticism from the earliest centuries down even to the present day. . . .

If the Tridentine Synod wished “that all should use as authentic” the Vulgate Latin version, this, as all know, applies only to the Latin Church and to the public use of the same Scriptures; nor does it, doubtless, in any way diminish the authority and value of the original texts. . . . For there was no question then of these texts, but of the Latin versions, which were in circulation at that time, and of these

the same Council rightly declared to be preferable that which "had been approved by its long-continued use for so many centuries in the Church." Hence this special authority or as they say, authenticity of the Vulgate was not affirmed by the Council particularly for critical reasons, but rather because of its legitimate use in the Churches throughout so many centuries; by which use indeed the same is shown, in the sense in which the Church has understood and understands it, to be free from any error whatsoever in matters of faith and morals; so that, as the Church herself testifies and affirms, it may be quoted safely and without fear of error in disputations, in lectures and in preaching; and so its authenticity is not specified primarily as critical, but rather as juridical.

Catholic scholars have winced under the harness that hitched them to the Vulgate. The new, 1941, Catholic version of the New Testament, "translated from the Latin Vulgate," as the front page says, had to insert a "not" into the text of Matt. 8:30, because the Vulgate has a "non," even though no Greek manuscript has a negative here. In the next Catholic Bible a "no" may well become a "yes," not because the Word of God says so—Catholic scholars knew that long ago—but because a man in Rome says so.

The change that should result will not come like a prairie fire. The Church of Rome is as unwieldy as it is large. Even in 1949 Ronald Knox, who has surpassed everyone, Protestant as well as Catholic, in "originality" of translation (R. Ginn, O. P., in *Blackfriars*, 23, 1947, "Translation and Interpretation," pp. 565—70, says Knox' translation "is an interpretation rather than a translation, a sort of English Targum in fact"), writes in *The Trials of a Translator* (Sheed & Ward, N. Y., 1949), pp. X—XI:

The text which my version follows, and, wherever a clear lead is given, the interpretation which it followed, must be sought in the Vulgate, that is, in the primitive Latin rendering of the Scriptures as revised in the fourth century by Saint Jerome. This is the text officially used by the Church; and although Rome has recently given us a quite new psalter, it is not likely that the Vulgate as a whole will be dethroned from its position of privilege within my life time. I should be very far indeed from claiming that the Vulgate gives you everywhere an accurate interpretation of its original. But you must have a standard text; and the Vulgate is so embedded in our liturgy and in all our ecclesiastical language that a serious departure from it causes infinite confusion. . . . More than once, I have taken refuge in an ambiguous phrase, to by-pass the difficulty.

In his last statement he is referring to the differences between the Vulgate and the *textus receptus*. But here and there Catholic scholars

are happy to give up the assumption that the Bible speaks a kind of double-talk, the Vulgate rendering and the original meaning. They can without hurting their souls shift their loyalty from the Vulgate to the Hebrew and Greek originals.

Yet no Catholic is really free. It is significant that the Pope initiates the study of the original text: The Pontiff's authority is the ever-present background for any change in Romanism. And while the Pope has righted himself in regard to the relative importance of the original text and the translations, there is no improvement in Catholicism in regard to its low estimate of the Scripture text, including both the original and the translations. As long as the text is kept in a Babylonian Captivity of subservience to the arbitrary definition and invention of Catholic dogma, as long as the Pope is *die hoechste Instanz*, who can subtract from and add to the revealed truth, a Catholic student will have to bow first to his Pope and await his nod of approval, and only then may he turn to commune with the Scriptures. For him the Pope is in the middle of the sanctuary, and the Scriptures are in a side niche.

The Church with its head is considered more than a guardian of revealed truth: It is the chief source of the truth. While the Church will grant that people may without her help find the truth in the inspired writings, such people are unusually fortunate individuals who are ignorant of the Church as the divinely appointed teacher of the truth; and such individuals get only the crumbs that fall from the table spread by the Church. All people should, according to Catholicism, recognize the living teacher whom Christ ordained as the infallible and authentic interpreter of Scripture, and they must listen to what the Holy Spirit, as He is heard in the decrees of the Church, tells them.

A Lutheran and a Catholic student, sitting side by side and looking at the same page of Hebrew or Greek, will find that while they seem to be on the same ground, they are not quite on common ground: To the Lutheran student the text speaks altogether with its own voice; the Catholic student, apparently hearing the same voice, cannot be content until he hears the voice of his Church either coinciding with the text or, like a stronger radio station, crowding out the voice of the text.

We are delighted that a central obstacle has been removed for the Catholic Biblical scholar by the exaltation of the original text above the Vulgate. Previous loyalty to the Vulgate had reduced Catholic textual scholarship to something so unscholarly that it could in a large measure be ignored without a loss. But now the immense man and money power of the Catholic Church has been unshackled to do work

in the original texts, and there is a flourish of exegetical activity— as anyone may see it especially in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*— that promises to outdo the other Churches.

A historian would have to point out that Luther again has won a point. The Reformer's great emphasis on the study of the original text, even while he himself was incurably fond of the Vulgate, has broken down a barrier in the Church he meant to reform. May we hope that the truth, from which the Reformer took the veils of ecclesiastical tradition, will through the study of the original text have a mighty impact on that Church, here and there break down its human strongholds of error and autocratic power, and let the glory of God in the redeeming Christ shine in full strength on many a soul?

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NOTES ON COL. 3:14

"St. Paul is here not speaking of love as the means of our justification, nor does he speak here of personal perfection, but of the integrity common to the Church. For on this account he says that love is a bond or connection, to signify that he speaks of the binding and joining together, with each other, of the many members of the Church. For just as in all families and in all states concord should be nourished by mutual offices, and tranquillity cannot be retained unless men overlook and forgive certain mistakes among themselves; so Paul commands that there should be love in the Church in order that it may preserve concord, bear with the harsher manners of brethren as there is need, overlook certain less serious mistakes, lest the Church fly apart into various schisms, and enmities and factions and heresies arise from the schisms.

"For concord must necessarily be rent asunder whenever either the bishops impose upon the people heavier burdens or have no respect to weakness in the people. And dissensions arise when the people judge too severely concerning the conduct of teachers or despise the teachers because of certain less serious faults; for then both another kind of doctrine and other teachers are sought after. On the other hand, perfection, i. e., the integrity of the Church, is preserved, when the strong bear with the weak, when the people take in good part some faults in the conduct of their teachers, when the bishops make some allowances for the weakness of the people." Melancthon, *Apology, De Dilectione*, 110 ff. *Trigl.*, p. 182.