

THE SENSES OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Outline

1. The Literal Sense: (a) strict; (b) figurative.
2. The Spiritual Sense: What does it include?
3. The so-called "*Sensus Plenior*":
(a) arguments for it and its place as a sense of Scripture;
(b) arguments against it.
4. Toward a consistent terminology.
5. The Senses of Scripture in theological argument.

Some recent bibliography:

Bierberg, "Does Sacred Scripture have a *Sensus Plenior*?"
CBQ, 1948, 182-195.

Coppens, *Les Harmonies des deux Testaments*
Tournai-Paris, 1949, 145 pp.

Courtade, "Les Ecritures ont-elles un sens 'plenier'?"
RSR, 1950, 481-499.

DeVine, "The Consequent Sense"
CBQ, 1940, 145-155.

Gribomont, "Sens Plenier, Typique et Litteral"
EthL, 1949, 577-587.

Kehoe, "The Spiritual Sense of Scripture"
Blackfriars, 1946, 246-251.

Miller, "Zur Typologie des Alten Testamentes"
Antonianum, 1950, 425-434.

(Note: Unfortunately, the final draft of the summation of this seminar has been lost. Hence, we can publish only the following, preliminary draft.)

SUMMATION OF DISCUSSION

The subject of the discussion was restricted to the *Sensus Plenior*. It was found difficult to discover a satisfactory definition of this *sen-*

sus. However, a working definition was proposed by Father Cerny, S.S., namely—the sense which God intended and which the human authors did not know.

Father Bierberg, C.P.P.S., proposed for discussion the question whether this sense should be a special category or whether it should be included under either the literal or typical sense. He proposed as his opinion that, it should not be included under the literal sense, because it was not necessarily intended by the human author.

Granted that there was a *sensus plenior*, the question was proposed by Father Griffin, S.J., as to who was to discover this sense, and what the method would be. Father Cerny pointed out that since revelation is its source, it must be discovered in tradition.

Then the difficulty arose as to which passages of Scripture would be susceptible to a *sensus plenior*. Father Bierberg pointed out that according to Coppens' latest view, this sense had to be restricted to those passages which are inspired and contain revelation; and hence, could not be applied to those passages which are merely inspired.

The next point of discussion, which occurred between Father Bierberg and Father Griffin, was whether or not the *sensus plenior* is a special sense of Scripture. Both agreed that it was not to be placed in a special category. Father Bierberg contended that it must be reduced to the spiritual sense (i. e., understanding the term "spiritual sense" in a broader fashion than "typical sense"). Should it be literal or spiritual? Father Bierberg argued that it could not be literal, because the literal sense can undergo no growth beyond its significance in the human author's mind, and because the *sensus plenior* is a new development of the past ten years, and therefore must be reduced to one of the traditional senses.

Father Bierberg showed that some difficulties were liable to be found between scripture scholars and theologians in regard to this sense, in view of the fact that many scripture scholars do not seem to be favorable to the *sensus plenior*, while many theologians seem inclined to favor such a sense.

In the light of this difference of opinion among scholars, Father Cerny suggested that, a fully documented paper on this problem be

discussed by the Theological Society, in order to make some advance toward a solution, especially since the problem has implications pertinent to doctrinal development.

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