

will finally proceed to seek reception into the Church. Large rallies are held of all who come to the classes, and the free, frank and friendly atmosphere generated by these means between converts and those still enquiring, and especially between the official platform and the enthusiastic audience, is something to be felt for its capacity and promise to be understood. An army of the very best kind of priests' is wanted for the forward movement America needs, as well as for ordinary parish work.

So there we bid farewell to our survey, but never to diminish, as we hope only to increase by it amongst others, our interest and sympathy, our admiration and hope for the Catholic Church in the States. God continue to bless and prosper it, as indeed God must be thanked that it stands already in that land of new adventure and still somewhat doubtful attainment, a rock amid stormy seas and sinking sands.

W. E. ORCHARD.

THE PROBLEM OF PROPHECY

(*A letter written during the Great War.*)

DEAR X,

The questions you put require delicate handling. I will first of all set them down and then humbly adventure upon an answer.

'In the *Dublin Review* Fr. Thurston writes that St. Vincent Ferrer worked miracles in support of his contention that the end of the world was then imminent. And yet the Church tells us that God cannot deceive. What else did He do on that occasion?

'My confessor maintains the dogma that God cannot deceive; but he says that this need not necessarily mean that under no circumstances whatever God may not have reasons of his own for making an exception. This staggers me altogether; and has led to my giving up the sacraments. How can I go on with this doubt in my mind? If God who is Truth can sometimes deceive, how can I ever know when He is not doing so?'

There are two points of enquiry: (a) Some prophecies though vouched for by miracles seem to be false; (b) God sometimes seems to deceive us by false prophecies.

I.

Some prophecies, though vouched for by miracles, seem to be false.

It is to be remembered that this seeming difficulty is not peculiar to the prophecies of the saints, such as St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Bernard, and others. St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross, approaching the subject along the theological and the mystical paths, point out the classical examples of Jonas prophesying the destruction of Nineve, and of the unfulfilled prophecies of Isaias and Jeremias.

One of the most satisfactory replies to the difficulty is to be found, strangely enough, in the mystical work, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, by St. John of the Cross. The five chapters, xvi-xx, are such consummate wisdom that they should be re-published by themselves in the interests of orthodox and common-sense mysticism. It is to their further value that in all their teaching they follow St. Thomas Aquinas, who, as we are told on Carmelite authority, was the teacher of St. John of the Cross.

The very titles of these chapters are significant:

- xvi. On imaginary apprehension, supernaturally represented to the fancy. They cannot be proximate means of union with God.
- xvii. Of the ends and way of God in communicating spiritual blessings to the soul through the Interior Senses.
- xviii. How souls are injured because their spiritual directors do not guide them aright through these visions. How these visions, though from God, become occasions of Error.
- xix. Visions, Revelations and Locutions, though from God, may deceive. Proofs from Holy Scripture.
- xx. Proofs from Scripture that the Divine Locutions, though always true, are not always certain in their causes.

Fr. Zimmermann, O.C.D., is our warrant for saying that St. John of the Cross, 'though not what one would term a scholar, was intimately acquainted with the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas.'¹

The chapters in which St. John of the Cross deals with unfulfilled prophecies are little more or less than a commentary on two articles of the *Summa* entitled:

'Whether a prophet always discerns between what he says through his own spirit and what through the spirit of prophecy.'

'Whether anything that is prophetically known and announced can be false.'

(*Summa Theologica* 2^a 2^ae Pars., Qu. 171, Art. 5 and 6.)

¹ *Essays on The Development of Mysticism in the Carmelite Order* (London, Baker, 1906, p. 13).

We may gather a few principles from these two masters of the soul :

1. Prophecies or revelations, when vouchsafed by God, are not ends in themselves. They are meant to issue, not in some mental satisfaction, but in some moral improvement. Their chief aim is not to give us pleasure or even to afford us information, but to make us better.

2. In every vouchsafed and uttered prophecy there is the substantial element in the prophecy and the non-substantial element in the prophecy. For example, there is the substantial and non-substantial element in the prophecy of the coming Messiah. That the Messiah was to come belonged to the very substance of the prophecy and revelation. But the manner, time and other circumstances of his coming belonged to what was non-substantial. So, too, it would seem that some early Christians thought the world was soon coming to an end.

3. In every received revelation there is the revelation as given and the revelation as received. Man's mind is not merely passive under a divine communication; it is extremely active. In its activity it can impart into the truth revealed elements that are not of the substance of the revelation. This is the consoling doctrine of St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross.

4. To illustrate this from the life of St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. : As you may know, he lived at a time when the Church suffered the unique trial of seeing three claimants of the Papacy. So obscure was the question that even the saints themselves were divided. St. Catherine of Siena thought one claimant was Pope; St. Vincent Ferrer was a warm supporter of another.

At the height of the schism St. Vincent Ferrer, who had been a professor rather than a preacher, had a wonderful vision. He saw God prepared to strike the sinful world. He saw antichrist actively stirring up the souls of men. No wonder his vision was of so sombre a character that it drove the saint to the brink of death. When antichrist does come he can scarcely find the Church and world in a worse state than when the unity of the Church, its best witness to the world, was represented by three claimants.

It was clear to the Saint that he must quit his professor's chair in the school-room and even his preacher's pulpit in the church in order to go out into the highways and the byeways with a message of 'Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.'

The chief end of his vision and of his preaching was the moral conversion of the people. As a matter of history it is probable that