

JAMES ALBERIONE

OPERA OMNIA

“READ THE SACRED SCRIPTURES”



G. D. P. H.

“READ THE SACRED  
SCRIPTURES”

THEY SPEAK TO YOU OF JESUS CHRIST

*(From the Gospel of St. John 5:39)*

*Ten Hours of Adoration on the Holy Bible  
conducted by M. J. ALBERIONE, S.S.P.*



Edited by ANGELO COLACRAI, SSP  
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Original title of the book: *“Leggete le SS. Scritture”*

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## SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AD	<i>Abundantes divitiae gratiae suae</i>
CEI	<i>Conferenza Episcopale Italiana</i>
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
EMC	<i>Esercizi e meditazioni del Primo Maestro</i>
ER	<i>Esercizi e ritiri</i>
HM	<i>Haec meditare</i>
IA	<i>Ipsium audite</i>
MPM	<i>Meditazioni del Primo Maestro</i>
PCB	<i>Pontificia Commissione Biblica</i>
Pr D	<i>Predicazione sulla Diffusione</i>
RM	<i>Ritiri mensili</i>
SPa	<i>Spiritualità paolina</i>
UCAS	<i>Unione Cooperatori Apostolato Stampa</i>
UPS	<i>Ut perfectus sit homo Dei</i>



## PRESENTATION

*Read the Sacred Scriptures (LS)* is a book of biblical catechesis, born out of a cycle of instructions that made up the meditation material of ten “hours of adoration,” guided by Don Alberione in the Church of St. Paul in Alba. The evening celebrations of some solemnities, like the first Sunday dedicated to Jesus Master, offered the occasion for celebrating together the Eucharist and the divine Magisterium, with the solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and the commented reading of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The contents of those ten instructions were then distributed into thirty chapters and enriched with many examples and readings, in such a way that they served as daily meditation for an entire month.<sup>2</sup>

### *History of the text*

The publication in printed form of the *LS* was made in Alba, at the new printing press of the Daughters of St. Paul (by then present also in Rome and in Messina, as one could read at the bottom of the cover). The edition is without any date, and could as well be considered “anonymous” inasmuch as it does not bear the author’s name or the necessary episcopal *imprimatur* or any indication of time.

Nonetheless, the printing took place in 1933, as a circular letter of Don Alberione to the Daughters of St. Paul, dated 22 November 1933 shows: “...*The book of visits [hours of preached adoration] on the Bible is already printed.*” During that year, issued was a mimeographed text on the Scriptures that continued the lessons of catechism held between 1926 and 1928, and then printed as appendix to the book *Spirituali Esercizi alle Maestre* of October 1936.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. “Devozione a Gesù Maestro,” “Adorazione eucaristica e Culto del Vangelo,” in *Gesù il Maestro, ieri, oggi e sempre*, Excursus storico-carismatico, Società San Paolo, Roma 1997, pp. 86-101.

<sup>2</sup> On the “Mese del Divin Maestro”, cf. *Gesù il Maestro...*, op. cit., pp. 94-98.

<sup>3</sup> These pieces of information, like those that follow, are derived from a letter of Sr. Antonietta Martini FSP (1937-2003) to Angelo Colacrai, dated 6 April 1999. – On 13 November 1932, Don Alberione preached on the Sacred

We find a significant confirmation in *Abundantes Divitiae* by Don Alberione himself. Writing in 1953 regarding the Gospel and the need that the Sacred Book come into every home, that devotion be directed to it, that it be preached and that it be above all lived, the Author recalled how, since the first years of his priesthood, he had the habit of explaining the sacred text during the Eucharistic celebration. He added: “*Hence the thirty adorations made much later at Saint Paul’s that were preached and written [and later published] on Scripture in general and on the Gospel in particular*” (AD 140-143).<sup>4</sup>

After that first edition of the *LS* a reprint almost immediately followed, wherein corrections were made on the principal deficiencies of the text, with the introduction of the *Imprimatur* signed by the bishop, Luigi M. Grassi, and dated 1-XI-1933; with the addition, at the end of the book, of a declaration by the internal reviewer, Maestro Robaldo, with this also dated – 1 November 1933 – followed by the *Nihil obstat* of Msgr. Chiesa, Francesco.

Hence, the book *LS* is born at a time marked by two important documents on the reading of the Bible: the encyclical letter *Providentissimus Deus* by Leo XIII (1893), of which we shall speak below, and the encyclical letter *Divino afflante Spiritu* by Pius XII (1943), the two encyclicals that have contributed to ripen among Catholics the science and spirituality of the Bible, its ascetical application and pastoral use.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Compilation: author and structure***

As has been mentioned, the *LS* came out without any indication as to its author. Either in the cover or in the frontispiece,

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Scriptures and faith, published in three installments in *UCAS* 1933 (*Unione Cooperatori Apostolato Stampa*) of February (p. 9), March (p. 6) and April (p. 8). The same meditation, as some others on the Bible, was also published in mimeographed form (cf. *MPM/c, Meditazioni del Primo Maestro* 1932, General Archives of the Daughters of St. Paul).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. AD 138: “In August 1907, he organized three Bible Sundays. He explained [the Bible] in a catechetical fashion and with catechetical applications.”

<sup>5</sup> Such maturation would reach an authoritative and normative expression in the II Vatican Council, marked by *Dei Verbum* (*DV*), promulgated in 1965. This dogmatic constitution would become the *magna charta* of theological and pastoral use of the Bible.

the author's name is substituted with the abbreviation G.D.P.H. (*Gloria Deo, Pax Hominibus*) that usually qualified the books published in collaboration. The preface is signed by the compiler, M. Ghiglione, ssp.

Even so, it is unquestionable that the author is James Alberione, in the sense explained by the compiler. At the original preface, signed M. Ghiglione S.S.P., we read: "*Invited by the very beloved Primo Maestro [Don Alberione] to take notes from the hours of adoration that he would have guided on the Bible, in order then to arrange them and to publish them, I gladly accepted... I tried to jot down, as much as I could, literally, the words of the Father, while adding to them some saying or event drawn from the Sacred Scriptures, from the holy Fathers, from the writings of the Supreme Pontiffs...*"

The "reflections" of the first four hours of adoration and of a part of the fifth, were published also in the bulletin, *Unione Cooperatori Apostolato Stampa* (1933-1934).<sup>6</sup>

The *structure of the work* and the division of the material are characteristic of Alberione's style. Faithful to his own method, Don Alberione articulated his discourse after the trinomial scheme "TRUTH-WAY-LIFE." Thus the three points of every instruction were orderly gathered and distributed into the *three parts* of the book: I. *The Bible and faith (Truth)*; II. *The Bible and morals (Way)*; III. *The Bible and cult (Life)*.

We have another testimony, much later but more detailed, by the same compiler:

"*Ariccia, 17.6.1981.*

*I. The notes taken down for the printing of 'Leggete le Sacre Scritture' [Read the Sacred Scriptures] were written on paper by me, and not recorded... I remember that I begged the Primo Maestro that, while preaching, he did not speak so fast, so that it would be possible for me to write down in pencil almost everything. The same manuscripts were typewritten by me and brought to the Primo Maestro. I recall that once in a while he noted words that he did not understand well, and he corrected everything.*

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. A. DAMINO, *Bibliografia di Don Giacomo Alberione*, Roma 1994, Edizioni dell'Archivio Storico Generale della Famiglia Paolina, pp. 36-38.

*II. The additions made by me were the biblical quotes that the Primo Maestro, more or less, advised me to prepare; I used to show him five or six and he chose the most suitable ones. Similarly, he advised me to find for him some examples of persons who, while reading the Bible, knew how to draw fruits and conversion out of it; he, too, chose the most suitable ones.*

*III. It was the Primo Maestro himself who advised me to make three chapters for the three points of each hour of adoration (faith, morals, worship; Way, Truth, and Life); in that way, the book came out with thirty chapters, fit for a month of meditations on the Bible.*

*IV. As I have said, the Primo Maestro read and corrected the first typewritten draft, and suggested – before passing the original for printing – that the Servant of God Can. Chiesa and Fr. Robaldo<sup>7</sup> read it.*

*V. You are asking me which of the text is more faithful: that of the book or that of the magazine ‘Unione Cooperatori’; well, I believe that of the book because, with the magazine, one was often forced to summarize” (Signed: don Ghiglione).<sup>8</sup>*

The specimens we have in our hands, of the first edition and of the reprint (November 1933) respectively, show *some variations* that deserve to be marked.

1. On the cover of the first edition, aside from the title, the Gospel quote (with mistaken reference) and the publisher (Pia Società Figlie di San Paolo, Alba - Messina - Roma), a sketch in blue also appears, reproducing the symbol of the Bible: an

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<sup>7</sup> Fr. Giovanni Evangelista Robaldo (Gorzegno di Cuneo 1896 - Rome 1977) was a faithful interpreter of Don Alberione’s intention regarding bible publishing, especially of the Gospels, enriched with catechetical notes. He edited some fifteen different editions of the Holy Book, suited for specific ages and categories of persons, from children to mothers at home, from religious to parish communities, from engaged couples to military personnel...

<sup>8</sup> Fr. Battista Ghiglione (Entracque di Cuneo 1908 - Alba 1992) entered the Society of St. Paul on 6 November 1922 and made his first profession of the vows in 1930, taking the religious name Girolamo. A perpetually professed member since Christmas 1934, he was ordained a priest on 21 December 1935. He was vice master, formator, community animator in different Pauline houses and responsible for many publications. From 1960 to 1962, he collaborated as an archivist in the Pontifical Commission for the Press and Entertainment, in preparation to the Vatican Council II.



open book, wrapped by a cloud, with the dove of the Holy Spirit hovering above.

– In the reprint, such a sketch is in yellow; the Gospel quote is corrected; the order of the publisher's location is changed as well (Alba - Roma - Messina), and at the back, an advertisement, inviting the acquisition of the new Italian Bible translated and commented on by Tintori, is shown.

2. In the text, the reprint is enriched with new elements:

- The *Imprimatur*, reproduced in handwritten signature *Aloysius M. Grassi B.[Barnabite]*, dated *Albæ Pompejæ 1-XI-1933-XI* [=11th year of the Fascist Era];
- some twenty illustrations outside the text, with gospel scenes and portraits of sacred writers;
- an added 16-page folio, containing the liturgical texts of the masses of the Evangelists;
- the index of the volume (absent in the first edition);
- and on the last page, a declaration by G.E. Robaldo, reviewer; plus the *Visto: nihil obstat* by Can. F. Chiesa.

At the General Historical Archives of the Pauline Family, two other samples of the *LS* are kept. They bear some differences of layout with respect to the reprint we have already mentioned and even between them. This leads us to think that the first edition of the work had at least three reprints. Unfortunately, it is not possible to establish their succession, since also these samples lack any chronological reference, if we accept those of the *Imprimatur* and the *Nihil obstat* that are common to all.

A second edition of the *LS* was published in 1937, always in Alba, under the care of Fr. Fedele Pasquero,<sup>9</sup> who, aside from putting as a premise a long introduction with a summary review of all the books of the Bible, notably retouched the text by eliminating or adding passages, and by transferring others to different locations.

The present edition for the *Opera Omnia* collection reproduces the text of 1933.

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<sup>9</sup> A Pauline priest (Corneliano d'Alba 1911 - Albano Laziale 2001), a doctor in Sacred Scripture, edited numerous biblical publications, among which the *Nuovissima Versione della Bibbia [Newest Version of the Bible]* from the original texts, ed. San Paolo 1967-1980.

### *Title and sources*

To identify the *sources* of the *LS*, aside from the bible text translated from the *Vulgate*, is a very difficult undertaking. We shall try to do it at the footnotes as regards the names of persons and of quoted authors. Just once, on page 72, a book is mentioned, while not mentioning its author and title, probably a recent publication (about the years 1931-1932), from which context one could say that it is limited to the *Acts of the Apostles*. It seems to us, however, that in any case, Don Alberione drew his pieces of information, for the introduction of the individual books of the Bible, from one or more manuals of General Introduction to the Holy Scriptures.

As regards the *title*, the question might arise whether the formulation had been suggested by Don Alberione or chosen by the compiler: he was only 25 years old when he wrote the preface and signed himself *M. Ghiglione S.S.P.*, not yet a priest or a perpetually professed member.

Nonetheless, the current title is inspired by the words of Jesus in debating with the Jews: “*You search the scriptures because you think you have eternal life through them; it’s exactly they that testify on my behalf*” (Jn 5:39).

This passage, which already furnishes a key for reading the *LS* is herein used in the *adaptive*<sup>10</sup> sense. Even so, Don Alberione here does not take lightly the studiousness of the Jews, characterized as those who read assiduously and who scrutinize the sacred text. The author’s intention is to underline the importance of the reading of the Bible, and the verb “read,” used by Jesus in an indicative mode, is transformed into the *imperative*, or into an invitation: *Read the Scriptures, because doing so is indispensable!*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “The *adapted* sense... is the meaning we give to the words and to the phrases of the Bible. This sense can be more or less true, and more or less appropriated, according the rightness of intention and the degree of knowledge of him who does it.” (*LS* p. 42)

<sup>11</sup> A “Pauline” invitation to the reading is found in Col 4:16: “And when this letter is read before you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and you yourselves read the one from Laodicea.” Here, “read” in Greek is in the aoristic conjunctive, with the exhortative value. In this grammatical form, the verb *read* is not found in any other passage of the New Testament.

### ***Fundamental themes of the book***

The immediate goal of Alberione's preaching, and of the subsequent publication of the written word, was to inculcate some principles and attitudes held essential for every Christian, and more so for every religious called to the apostolate. For example:

- a) the urgency of a *spiritual* reading of the Bible, more than an academic study;
- b) the value of reading done together;
- c) the need for relating the Scriptures to the community and apostolic life;
- d) the suitability of reading under this light the *whole* Sacred Scriptures.

With this premise, we can group together the central theme of the *LS* into the following principal headings:

1. *The Bible, book of the Holy Spirit*. "The Holy Spirit's work as regards the Sacred Scriptures is threefold: first of all, He moved, gave light and assisted the sacred writers so that they might write without any error, everything and only what He willed, freely, in a suitable form, and without any error. In the second place, He enlightened the Church founded by Jesus Christ so that by virtue of the same Spirit she might keep them whole and genuine, infallibly interpret them, and communicate them to her children. But that is not all: it is also necessary that the Holy Spirit move men to read, incline their hearts to love the sacred book, open their minds to understand it according to the teachings of the Catholic faith, and that He may give them the grace of practicing what they may have read therein. Let us therefore invoke the Holy Spirit and let us ask that we may understand... Furthermore, let us ask the Divine Master for forgiveness for having so many times preferred to read human books instead of the Bible; and to have preferred conversation with people rather than with God." (pp. 9-10)
2. *Humanity's book*. "The Holy Bible has this purpose: it sets before the reader's eyes, as in a magnificent movie, the entire humanity with its great qualities and defects, its failures and ignorance, in order to teach it how it must regulate its life, win over passions, and acquire virtues in order to be crowned victorious in heaven one day." (p. 16)

3. *A father's letter.* "God addresses this letter of his to all, and what a distorted heart one would show, who, having received a letter from his faraway father, does not care to open it and read it!" (pp. 19-20) Meanwhile "we should read the Bible with immense affection and devotion, as a child far from his parental home reads the letter of his father. The Bible, in fact, is a letter the Heavenly Father sends to his children, all men. Let us read it! In it we shall find the way to Heaven." (pp. 32-33)
4. *Bible and Catechism.* "So that the reading of the Bible may be effective and useful for our soul, it is not necessary to have long critical and historical notes; few words, useful to connect the Scriptural text with parallel truths in Sacred Theology and in the Catechism, would be enough. Let us pray so that the Lord may soon raise up that person who will make such a commentary that would be of very great effectiveness to souls." (p. 51)
5. *A pastoral and apostolic Code* "Priests and clerics, open that most sacred book. There you have your code of conduct, your rule of life. There you shall learn how to save souls." (p. 73) "The young man who reads the Bible with such an intention, shall see ahead of him limitless horizons." (p. 69) "All must read the Sacred Scriptures, but the Apostle of the Press more than anyone else, before anyone else, and more constantly than any other, in order that he may not be a blind man guiding the blind. He who reads the divine book takes on the divine language, speaks the divine language, and acquires divine effectiveness." (p. 100) "One called to the Press Apostolate and does not read and assimilate the divine truths of the Bible, sets himself outside his vocation. Indeed, he could do some work of apostolate, but it will not give life to souls. It will be a mere parade, something external and nothing more." (p. 317)

### ***Readers: disciples of the Word***

According to Don Alberione, he who reads the Scriptures becomes a convert and transforms himself into an authentic disciple and apostle like Paul. Without the reading of the Bible, on the other hand, a reader would not have a genuine religious, Catholic, spiritual, apostolic, and universal identity.

In preaching devotion to the Word of God, blessed Don Alberione had before him the teachings and example of Jerome,<sup>12</sup> the saint for whom the reader of the Bible is “he who transmits the message from the author’s mouth to the disciple’s hearing.” (*Eph* 53:2) He exercises the ministry of lector and teacher, like Jesus Master.

In order to carry out such a task, he needs to be a “prudent, diligent, interested, zealous, and informed” disciple: the five notes that qualify Jerome’s biblical spirituality. The reader of the Bible is further qualified by a spiritual *discipline*, a search expressed by three verbs: “*to interrogate, to inquire, to comprehend.*” This search, or continuous interrogation of the written page – which resembles much the prayer of the searcher as taught by Jesus<sup>13</sup> – is an adventure of the intelligence, a sanctification of the mind. In this journey, the Church’s tradition is the *fertile ground* that allows one to achieve the understanding “of Holy Scripture in the spirit in which it was written,” according to the expression of Vatican Council II. (*Dei Verbum* 12,3)<sup>14</sup>

Aside from Jerome, Don Alberione has had as inspirer the magisterium of the Church of his time. He, in fact, quotes the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* by Leo XIII.

Published in 1893 “to encourage this excelling study of the sacred Letters and to lead it to conform more to the needs of the present times,” the encyclical affirmed above all the need to intensify studies on the Bible in order to adequately *defend* the Scriptures as God’s inspired word and source of salvation for all. Because of this, the Bible had to stay at the center of preaching. Among the Fathers of the Church was the most concrete example of high consideration for the Scriptures, considered as “a very rich treasury of heavenly teachings, perennial font of salvation, a fertile field and a pleasant garden in which the flock of the Lord is wonderfully refreshed and recreated.”

<sup>12</sup> Don Alberione often quotes him; cf. especially pp. 213, 245, 247.

<sup>13</sup> Mt 7:7-8: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” (cf. Lk 11:9f as well as Jer 5:1)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Il Grande Libro dei Santi*, [*The Great Book of the Saints*] Dizionario Enciclopedico, San Paolo 1998, II, pp. 947-957.

Things, however, did not go as the encyclical desired.<sup>15</sup> Among Catholics, the apologetic line prevailed rather than that of deepening of the biblical text, or of research and opening to new and more effective methods of interpretation. Rather than welcoming with an open heart historical studies and dialogue with philologists, archeologists, literary critics and, in general, the world of human sciences, normally there was preference to use biblical verses in order to demonstrate the dogmatic theses of the schools of theology inspired by Neo-Scholasticism.

From reading the *LS* we become aware that Don Alberione, also with a certain distrust for critical apparatus,<sup>16</sup> guided his Family beyond the defensive or apologetic position, regarding the Bible as the book of the believer and the apostle rather than of the scholar. The present work teaches us to read and to *bring up-to-date* the *text* of the *whole* Bible at home – and, even better, in church – so that it immediately becomes the book of salvation, or way, truth, and life to bring, by every means, to all of humanity of *today*.

### *New orientations*

To more strongly emphasize and better express the *bringing up-to-date* of the texts, upon which Don Alberione has always insisted, the Pontifical Biblical Commission, through the document *The interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, will intervene in 1993. We read: “The interpretation of the Bible, although a special task of exegetes, is nonetheless not their monopoly inasmuch as in the Church it involves some aspects that go beyond the scientific analysis of the texts. In fact, the Church does not consider the Bible merely as a complex of historical documents concerning her origins; she receives it as the Word of God that is addressed to her and to the whole world at the

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<sup>15</sup> The *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, by Pius XII (issued on 30 September 1943) would prove necessary. Other official documents would follow: the *Instruction Sancta Mater Ecclesia* of 1964; the *Dei Verbum* of Vatican Council II in 1965; and, of the PCB, *The interpretation of the Bible in the Church* in 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding this, let it be remembered that Modernism, drastically condemned by Pius X, was born with the passion at times exasperated of historical-critical studies. A. Loisy, who was placed in the index of forbidden books and excommunicated, was a bible scholar.

present time. This conviction of faith has as a consequence the effort to bring up-to-date and inculturate the biblical message, as well as elaborate the different manners of usage in the inspired texts, in the liturgy, in *lectio divina*, in the pastoral ministry, and in the ecumenical movement.” (n. 41)

In fact, Don Alberione promoted a reading of the Bible parallel to or mirroring the “signs of the times,” that is, an hermeneutics of the sacred text along with day-to-day history as reflected in the ‘newspaper.’ He always promoted together science, technological progress, and biblical faith within the great tradition of the Church.

Nevertheless, a biblical and ecclesial updating is necessary today even for the *LS*, less perhaps in the area of principles and declarations of intent, as in the area of orientations and, above all, practical suggestions. In fact, neither the world, nor science, nor the Church, have remained immobile since 1933. And Don Alberione, *today*, would not ignore the progress of the biblical as well as theological sciences.

Hence, with due respect for his charismatic intentions, and in homage to his new ecclesial dimension,<sup>17</sup> we consider urgent an updated re-reading of the *LS*, in the sense that it means continuing to walk ever with the Church and with the Pope.

The document on *The interpretation of the Bible in the Church* assists us in this subject by indicating a series of principles that lay the foundation for a correct “*practice of updating*”:

a) Bringing up-to-date is *possible*, because the biblical text, for its fullness of meaning, is valuable for all ages and for all cultures (cf. Mt 28:19). The biblical message can at the same time make relative and fruitful the value systems and the norms of behavior of every generation.

b) Updating is *necessary* because, although their message has lasting value, the texts of the Bible were written in view of circumstances in the past and in languages conditioned by different times. In order to manifest the meaning that they have for people of *today*, it is necessary to apply their message to the present circumstances and to express it in a language suited to the *present* time.

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<sup>17</sup> Don Alberione was proclaimed Blessed on 27 April 2003.

c) The updating has to take into consideration the *existing relationships between the Old and the New Testaments*, due to the fact that the New appears as the fulfillment and the transcending of the Old. The updating is effected in conformity with the dynamic unity thus constituted.

d) The updating is achieved thanks to the *dynamism of the living tradition* of the community of faith. This is explicitly situated in the prolongation of the communities wherein the Scriptures are born, have been conserved, and transmitted.

e) Updating *does not mean*, therefore, *manipulation of the texts*. It has nothing to do with projecting to the biblical writings opinions and new ideologies, but with sincerely seeking the light that they contain for the present time.

In its turn, however, updating presupposes *a correct exegesis of the text* that determines its literal sense. If the reader does not have personally a formation in exegesis, he must have recourse to good reading guides. In any case, updating requires at least *three stages*:

1. to listen to the Word starting from the present situation;
2. to discern the aspects of the present situation that the biblical text sheds light on or subjects to discussion;
3. to draw from the full meaning of the biblical text those elements that can translate the present situation in a manner that is fruitful and in conformity with the saving will of God in Christ.

Finally, this operation would lose all validity if it were based on theoretical principles that disagree with the fundamental orientations of the Bible, like rationalism that rejects faith, or atheistic materialism.

### ***An updated method of reading***

A Pastoral Note of the Italian Bishops' Conference, *The Bible in the life of the Church*, published in 1995 suggests "some norms for an ecclesial and vital reading of the Sacred Scripture," without, however, excluding "a healthy pluralism of methods." (n. 17)

These practical pointers are in reality drawn from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and from the mentioned document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.



Further underlined by the bishops is exegesis which, as a search for the literal or objective meaning of the sacred text, renders indispensable the use of historical-critical method, for as long as it could be fittingly integrated with other methods. Decidedly excluded, however, is the fundamentalist reading or any other purely subjective approach. We must, moreover, pay attention to the content and unity of the entire Scriptures, and hence to the mystery of Christ and of the Church. The Scriptures are read, in substance, in the living tradition of the entire Church: hence, we must be attentive to the analogy of faith, or the cohesion of truths among them in the totality of the plan of Divine Revelation.

In the same Note, the Italian bishops invite the readers to carry out a process of inculturation and updating of the sacred text, thanks to which the Word of God resounds as a word of salvation for today.

In no. 18 of the *Note* there are “concrete indications for a method of reading”:

a) *Pay attention to the literal meaning.* Inasmuch as the written Word participates in the mystery of the Incarnation, it is indispensable to seek above all and always the literal and historical meaning, or what God himself has intended to communicate through the biblical authors. For this purpose, one must make use of instruments for a correct exegesis in order not to fall into arbitrary interpretations.

b) *Compare a biblical passage with other texts of the Bible.* The unity of the saving plan of God, which the Holy Spirit reveals in the Bible, requires that each part be read in relation to the whole, that a single passage be compared with others; in particular, that the Old Testament be read under the light of the New, where it finds its fullest meaning, but also that the New Testament be read in the light of the Old in order to recognize “God’s pedagogy,” that sustains the entire history of our salvation.

c) *Read the text in the ecclesial and sacramental context.* Every encounter and use of the Bible to be authentic requires full agreement with the faith of the Church. When we read the Bible, we not only open a book, but we meet the Father, who in Christ and in the strength of the Spirit, truly speaks to us; and we truly hear the blessed Trinity if we have in us the attitude of

understanding and fidelity to the Church, which has its origin in the Father, is Christ's body and is the spouse of the Spirit.

d) *Read the text driven by the great questions of today.* Because they are the Word of the living God, the Sacred Scriptures are always contemporary and current for every reader: they enlighten him, call him to conversion, and comfort him. Through the reading of the past the Spirit helps us to discern the meaning that he himself gives to the problems and events of our time, enabling us to read the Bible with life and life with the Bible.

e) *Know how to correlate the Bible with life.* Like every word, even that of God accepts to enter our ways of communication that must certainly respect his transcendent mystery but cannot lessen the responsibility of the Bible's pedagogy and didactics, according to the needs of biblical literature and message and in correlation with the condition of the recipients.

### ***In conclusion***

*LS* is Don Alberione's work that more explicitly aims to give value to what was the ideal of his entire life and the *central goal* of his apostolic charism: *the word of God*, rendering the reading of the Bible familiar.

He stimulates us to *update ourselves with the Gospel*, suggesting the recovery of *lectio divina*, that age-old practice that was an essential part of monastic life inspired by *ora et labora*. Even blessed Alberione is convinced that without piety, *study*, apostolate, and poverty, the cart of apostolic life would come to a halt.

For the Pauline Family, and not only for it, the reading of the Bible has to be more important than the reading of the daily newspaper, the watching of TV, or the navigating of the internet. The Bible, let's say it again, is the letter that the Father sends to the world every day, precisely so that anyone who reads it may know that he is a child of God like Jesus Christ.

And we want to be such, both in our convictions and in our deeds.

*Rome, 27 April 2003.*

ANGELO COLACRAI, SSP

## REMARKS

1. The *text* proposed in this book is that of the first edition, edited by Fr. Girolamo Ghiglione (Alba, Pia Società Figlie di San Paolo, 1933). This text is integrally and faithfully reproduced except for some orthographic retouches in Italian (accents and the like).
2. The *editorial interventions* that are more notable concern the Latin passages and the biblical quotes. In particular:
  - The biblical passages of the “Canticles” (indicated by a “#”), published in the Latin version of the *Vulgate*, have been substituted by the corresponding Italian version, taken from the *Nuovissima Versione della Bibbia*, ed. San Paolo (In the English translation, the *New American Bible* has been used).
  - The individual biblical or patristic phrases, quoted in the always Latin text, have been translated in the footnotes, except when the translation is given, at least summarily, in the same text.
  - The *abbreviations* of the biblical books, and the *numbering* of the same, have been adjusted to the current system of reference.
3. The *footnotes*, whether historical, exegetic or explanatory, belong to the editor, except those marked by an asterisk (\*) present in the original edition.
  - All the biblical references that in the original were differently placed, in the text or in the footnote, have been integrated in the text.
4. The *marginal numbering* in bold type corresponds to the page numbering of the original edition. To such numbering we refer all the thematic references and the textual quotes, whether in the indexes or in the footnotes. The change of page, when it takes place in the middle of a paragraph, is marked with the sign “[”.
5. The biblical, analytical-thematic and general *indexes*, as well as the summary, are by the editor.
6. The *title of the chapters* and the related *current headtitle* carry the theme of the day’s reflection, following the index of the original edition.



G. D. P. H.

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**“LEGGETE LE SS. SCRITTURE,,**

**ESSE VI PARLANO DI GESÙ CRISTO**

*(Dal Vangelo di S. Giov. V, 39).*

**(Dieci Ore di Adorazione sulla S. Bibbia  
tenute dal M. G. ALBERIONE, S. S. P.)**

ALBA - ROMA  
PIA SOCIETA' FIGLIE DI SAN PAOLO

*Imprimatur*  
*+ Mgr. M. Grassi B*  
*Episcopus Albanus*  
*Albae Pompejæ 1. XI. 1933-X*

*Il sottoscritto, avendo letto per incarico del Primo Maestro della Pia Società S. Paolo il presente libro "Leggete le Scritture" dichiara non solo di aver trovato nulla contrario alla dottrina della Chiesa ed alla Tradizione, ma si augura e prega onde il Libro possa avere una larga diffusione, affinché siano molti ad essere invogliati a far loro pascolo quotidiano la Sacra Scrittura o almeno il S. Vangelo.*

Alba 1 Novembre 1933

**M. O. ROBALDO M. GIOV. EV.**

**Visto: Nulla osta alla Stampa.**

**MONS. CHIESA FRANCESCO R. D.**

*Photostatic reproduction of the handwritten Imprimatur of Msgr. Luigi M. Grassi, Bishop of Alba, of the declaration of the Maestro M. Giovanni Evangelista Robaldo and of the Nihil obstat of Msgr. Francesco Chiesa (that appeared at the reprinting, the first on p. 2 and the others at the end of the volume).*

*Upon invitation of the very beloved Primo Maestro of the Pious Society of St. Paul, Fr. James Alberione, that I take down notes from the Hours of Adoration that he would have guided for us on the Sacred Scripture, in order to then arrange them and publish them, I wholeheartedly accepted, certain that the Lord would have blessed this work undertaken only out of obedience and pure desire to give glory to God and to obtain peace for men.*

*I tried to convey literally as far as I could the words of the Father, adding only, now here, now there, some saying or event taken from the Sacred Scriptures, from the Holy Fathers, and from the writings of the Supreme Pontiffs.*

*The book was written with all that simplicity with which it was preached, and I tried to handle, more than the literary vest, the most exact rendition of the Father's thought, adhering as much as possible to his actual words.*

HOW THE BOOK IS DIVIDED. AS every *Hour of Adoration* is divided into three points, also the book was divided into three parts. The first part, that is, the first ten days of the month, is dogmatic and includes the first point of every Hour (Truth).

The second part is moral and includes the second point of every Hour of Adoration (Way). The third part instead is liturgical and includes the last part of every Hour of Adoration (Life).

For one who wanted to renew the full Hour of Adoration (mind, will, and heart), he should choose not the reflections of the day 1-2-3, which all three are dogmatic, but those of the day 1-11-21, and in the second | Hour, he shall choose instead the reflections of the day 2-12-22 and so forth.

*Each day includes:*

1. *Some biographical information about the Sacred Writers of the Holy Bible, in view of making them known, loved, and prayed to and thus to have necessary light to understand their writings and to practice them. During some days, these bits of information are wanting, due to the fact that concerning some of them there is no certain knowledge.*

2. *A brief notion about each of the 72 Books of the Sacred Scriptures that serves as introduction to their reading. Since, for brevity, it was not possible to treat separately each Book, this order was followed: all the books of the same author were grouped and treated together. Hence, one should not be surprised that some books, although very important, are treated very briefly.*

3. *The Reflection which includes not the whole Hour of Adoration, but only a third part of it. The first ten hours consider the Holy Bible in relation to faith; the following ten consider the Bible in relation to morals; those of the last ten days aim to inflame the heart toward prayer and veneration, in order to obtain the grace and strength to practice the divine teachings of the Holy Bible.*

*Each reflection is followed by the Example which demonstrates the effectiveness of the Bible, as well as the love that the greatest Saints had for it, while studying it, commenting on it, and defending it even to the point of giving their life for it.*

4. *A canticle or Hymn taken from the Sacred Scriptures, in the Latin language, so as to sing it in the manner of a Psalm, in praise and thanksgiving to God for having given the Holy Bible to humanity and for having taught, through it, the lost way of heaven.*

5. *A brief reading taken from the Old or New Testament so as to give the reader the convenience of immediately meditating on a passage of the divine Book and to derive from it a practical resolution for the day.*

7 6. *A prayer in Italian, also taken from the Sacred Scriptures, to enable the reader, by using the same divinely inspired words, to pray and have the strength to practice what he has read and in order that the Holy Bible may be read, meditated on, and lived by all men.*

7. *A good deed to be done during the day to honor Jesus Master.*

*Hence, each day consists of seven parts. The essential points, so that the Hour of Adoration may be complete and in conformity with those conducted by the Rev. Primo Maestro,*



*are: reflection with example, the canticle and prayer. The other parts can, however, serve as a very good instruction and introduction to the Holy Bible.*

*TO WHOM IS THE PRESENT BOOK ADDRESSED? – It is addressed first of all to the members of the Pious Society of St. Paul, near and far, so that all can read, meditate on and practice the wise and fatherly teachings dictated by their Father, in the presence of Jesus Master.*

*Secondly, it is addressed to all the beloved Cooperators of the Pious Society of St. Paul who want to conform themselves as much as possible to the spirit of the members of said Pious Society.*

*Furthermore, to all Priests and Pastors who desire to lead the souls entrusted to them to the pure source of truth and life, that is, to the Bible. They will be able find there material for ten very beautiful sermons and Hours of Adoration on the Sacred Scriptures.*

*Finally, it is addressed to all men, because all as children of God should know that their good Heavenly Father has sent them a letter: and that in the same is taught how to save themselves and reach Paradise.*

*Oh, if only the advice of Jesus: “Read the Scriptures... They are exactly the ones that speak on my behalf” could reach all and all could burn with love for Holy Scripture and read it, certainly all would find Jesus Christ and, with Him, the Truth, the Way, and the Life.*

M. GHIGLIONE S.S.P.

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Before beginning our reflections on the Sacred Scriptures, it is a must that we pray to the Divine Master so that after having promised us the Holy Spirit – “*Ego rogabo Patrem et alium Paraclitum dabit vobis*” – he may send him to us in great measure; and new creatures be created in us: – “*Emitte Spiritum tuum, et creabuntur*” – and thus we become capable of understanding and spreading the divine truths that we are about to reflect on: – “*Et renovabis faciem terrae.*”

The Holy Spirit’s work concerning the Sacred Scriptures is threefold: first of all He moved, enlightened, and assisted the sacred writers so that they might write without any error. In the second place, He enlightened the Church founded by Jesus Christ [so that], in virtue of the same Spirit, she may keep them intact and genuine, [while] she infallibly interprets them and communicates them to her children.

But that is not all: it is also necessary that the Holy Spirit move men to read, incline their hearts to love the sacred book, open their minds to understand it according to the teachings of the Catholic faith, and give them the grace to practice what they shall have read in it.

Let us therefore pray to the Holy Spirit by reciting the “*Veni, Creator Spiritus*” and let us ask to understand that the Bible is not an ordinary book, but a divine book and that in order to read it, neither the light of the sun nor that of an electric bulb are enough; neither the light of reason, but only a supernatural light. Furthermore, let us ask pardon from the Divine Master, here solemnly | exposed, for having so many times preferred the reading of human books to that of the Bible and for having preferred conversation with men rather than with God.

## HYMN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Veni Creator Spiritus,	Come, Holy Spirit, Creator, come
Mentes tuorum visita,	From your bright heavenly throne;
Imple superna gratia,	Come, take possession of our souls,
Quae tu creasti pectora.	And make them all your own.

Qui diceris Paraclitus, Altissimi donum Dei, Fons vivus, ignis, charitas, Et spiritalis unctio.	You who are called the Paraclete, Best gift of God above; The living spring, the living fire, Sweet unction and true love.
Tu septiformis munere, Digitus paternae dexteræ, Tu rite promissum Patris, Sermone ditans guttura.	You who are sevenfold in your grace, Finger of God's right hand, His promise, teaching little ones To speak and understand.
Accende lumen sensibus: Infunde amorem cordibus; Infirma nostri corporis Virtute firmans perpeti.	Oh! Guide our minds with your blest light, With love our hearts inflame And with your strength, which ne'er decays, Confirm our mortal frame.
Hostem repellas longius, Pacemque dones protinus: Ductore sic te praeviso, Vitemus omne noxium.	Far from us drive our hellish foe, True peace unto us bring; And through all perils lead us safe. Beneath your sacred wing.
Per te sciamus da Patrem Noscamus atque Filium, Teque utriusque Spiritum Credamus omni tempore.	Through you may we the Father know, Through you, the eternal Son, And you, the Spirit of them both – Thrice-blessed three in one.
Deo Patri sit gloria, Et Filio, qui a mortuis Surrexit, ac Paraclito, In saeculorum saecula. Amen.	All glory to the Father be, And to his risen Son, The like to you, great Paraclete, While endless ages run. Amen.

FIRST PART

THE HOLY BIBLE  
AND FAITH

(Truth)



## WHAT THE BIBLE IS

## MOSES

He was the great Prophet, the Lawmaker, and the Leader of the people of Israel, the author of five books that make up the Pentateuch.

He was born in 1530 B.C., that is, after the Pharaoh had already promulgated the edict that ordered the killing of every male child. His mother, Iacobet, seeing him handsome and elegant, trusting fully in God, placed him in a reed basket and had him carried by his sister Mary to the bank of the river Nile. The Pharaoh's daughter, upon finding him, felt compassion for him and, taking him up, ordered that he be brought to a Hebrew woman and raised at her expense. The charming little one, by divine disposition, was consigned to his own mother.

Becoming an adult, he was adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter who called him to the court where he remained until he was 40. Then, moved to pity by the slavery of his Hebrew brothers, he tried to free them: he flees from the court and enters the land of Midian. Here he sees a burning bush and hears God's command to free the Hebrews. So, he faces the Pharaoh, informing him of God's order, but the impious Pharaoh obstinately refuses. Finally, after ten very painful plagues, he allows the Hebrews to leave Egypt.

Awesome were the miracles done by Moses during this long journey; we remember only that he parted the waters of the Red Sea, made clear water flow from a rock, sweetened bitter waters, defeated the Amalekites, etc.

When the Hebrews reached the foot of Mt. Sinai, | Moses was ordered to go up the mount and there, amidst thunder and lightnings, receives directly from God the divine Law.

He died before reaching the Promised Land, at the good age of 120 years, that is, in the year 1450 before Christ.

This outstanding Sacred Writer of the first five books of the Sacred Scriptures, is undoubtedly the greatest and most glorious figure in the entire history of Israel. The Church honors him as a Saint on September 4.

## THE PENTATEUCH

The first five books of Sacred Scripture are, together, called the Pentateuch.

The first book is called Genesis because it tells the origin or genesis of the world and of the Hebrew people. The second is called Exodus because it describes the exit of the Hebrews from Egypt. The third is called Leviticus because it deals principally with the ceremonial Laws that refer to the worship of which those of the tribe of Levi are ministers. The fourth is called Numbers because it begins with the census of the people and of the Levites. The fifth is called Deuteronomy or second law because it contains a summary and a second promulgation of the Law already given to the people.

Let us observe more closely each of the books.

*Genesis* serves as introduction to the four following books of the Pentateuch and to the entire history of the people of Israel. It gives us a summary of humanity's history, from its origin until the call of Abraham; then it speaks to us of the story of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, until the death of this last in the land of Egypt, where his descendants become a people.

*Exodus* covers the time from Joseph's death to the second year after Israel's departure from Egypt. It shows us the people oppressed by the Pharaohs and freed by Moses by means of very great prodigies. It also informs us about the promulgation of the law on Mount Sinai, and the building of the Tabernacle.

*Leviticus*, apart from the two historical events of the consecration of Aaron and his sons, can be said to be made up entirely of laws and norms for the priests and for the individual and social sanctification of Israel.

*Numbers* narrate some principal events in the travels of Israel in the desert, starting from Mt. Sinai until the moment when she is about to enter the Promised Land.

**15** *Deuteronomy* is principally made up of three discourses pronounced in the plains of Moab fronting Jericho.

In them Moses, in order to persuade the people to observe the Law, calls to mind the benefits received from God or promised by him, and promulgates once more the principal divine precepts and adding to them a few others.

As we can see, the work of Moses constitutes a harmonious whole and all the parts are intimately connected among them.



## REFLECTION I

**What the Bible is**

*“Credita sunt illis eloquia Dei.”*  
(Rom 3:2)<sup>1</sup>

According to the etymology of the word, *Bible* means *the Book*, par excellence. It is composed of 72 books<sup>2</sup> divinely inspired containing the substance of the divine revelation.

St. Gregory thus asks: “What is Holy Scripture if not a long letter of the Omnipotent God to his creature?”

Man fell into the deepest abyss of evil, and had lost his way to heaven; but the good Heavenly Father, moved by compassion, comes to his help and decides to write to him this letter and thus point out to him anew the path of salvation.

Apparently this mysterious book seems to be mistaken with all other human books, and even more, its external form is often more modest and poorer than the aforementioned; but under this simple vest is hidden a world full of mysteries and sublime truths; contained therein are the destiny of humanity and the Wisdom of God:<sup>3</sup> just as, under | the species of the Eucharistic Bread is sacramentally contained Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> “To them (the Israelites) have been entrusted the revelations of God.”

<sup>2</sup> Normally in *LS* we refer to the 72 books of the Bible (e.g., pp. 6, 29, 97, 145, 281): 45 of the OT (in which the Letter of Jeremiah is not singled out) and 27 of the NT (see on p. 18 the list defined by the Council of Trent). A more exact subdivision includes 39 proto-canonical books and 7 deutero-canonicals, therefore 46 of the OT plus the 27 of the NT. In all it’s 73 biblical books according to the Catholic canon and even according to the Clementine Vulgate (cf. *Biblia Vulgata*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1995). The deutero-canonicals (Tobit, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach or Ecclesiasticus, Baruch with attached Letter of Jeremiah) have been purged from the Hebrew canon starting from the year 70 AD. The Protestants consider such books as apocryphal, like also various (deutero-canonical) passages added to Esther and Daniel.

<sup>3</sup> The theme of wisdom as God’s gift in order to understand and observe his will is frequent in *LS* (cf. pp. 54-55, 92, 105-106. On the matter, the constitution *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II affirms: “In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remain intact, the marvelous con-

Hence, we can say that the difference of the Bible as to other books is almost infinite: the latter are human, the Bible is divine.

1. – It is divine because it *has God for its author*. In fact, the true and primary author of the Sacred Scriptures are not the sacred writers like Moses, David, St. Matthew, St. Luke, etc., but the Holy Spirit. It is He who *inspired*<sup>4</sup> the writer to write all and only what was according to His holy will: the Sacred Writer is just an instrument in the hands of God, an instrument, however, that is intelligent, free, and most docile to the motions of the Holy Spirit.

2. – Considered in *general*, the Bible is divine because *it speaks to us about things divine*: in it we learn to know who God is, what are his attributes, how He is our beginning and our end. We know the why of our existence on earth, the absolute need to save ourselves, etc.

These are all problems of the greatest importance that always troubled and will trouble all humanity. In fact, who does not want to know where he came from and where he is going? All long to know the motive of their existence here on earth.

The Holy Bible has precisely this purpose: it sets before the readers' eyes, as in a wonderful movie, all humanity with its

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descension of eternal Wisdom is clearly shown, 'that we may learn the ineffable kindness of God and to what extent, in his concern and providence with regard to our nature, he has adapted his talk.' The words of God, expressed in human language, have made themselves similar to the speech of man, as already the Word of the eternal Father, upon assuming the weaknesses of human nature, made himself similar to man." (DV n. 13)

<sup>4</sup> LS refers continuously to the inspiration of Scripture (cf. pp. 30, 32, 88, 89, 201). Inspiration is the charism that makes the Bible a book different from others. On the matter, the constitution *Dei Verbum* on n. 11 affirms: "The divinely revealed truths that are contained and expressed in the books of holy Scripture were written through inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Holy Mother Church according to her apostolic faith considers as sacred and canonical all the complete books of both the Old and NT, with all their parts, because written through inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 20:31; 2Tm 3:16; 2Pt 1:19-21; 3:15-16) they have God as their author and as such they have been con-signed to the Church... Therefore "all Scripture divinely inspired is also useful for teaching, convincing, correcting, educating in justice, so that the man of God may become perfect and equipped for every good work." (2Tm 3:16-17)

grandeurs and defects, its failures and ignorance, in order to teach it how to govern its life, conquer its passions, and acquire virtues in order to be crowned one day a winner in heaven.

3. – Considered in *particular*, it is divine because *it bears in itself the mark of divinity* and because *it comes to us in a divine way*: in fact, the Bible, coming from Paradise which is the kingdom of truth, was inspired by God Who is Truth by nature and was made to be written without errors, and hence we are certain with the certainty of faith that everything that is narrated in the Bible is truth.

17

*It comes to us in a divine way*, that is, through the Church, a divine and infallible society like her Founder, Jesus Christ.

Sacred Scripture was not left to whatever Publishing House, but was entrusted by God to only one Publishing House: the Church, which infallibly interprets it, jealously watches over it, and with full rights determines the manner of printing it, annotating it, and interpreting it: and no one can, without precise ecclesiastical revision and the written permission of Bishops, can print and diffuse it. Thus Canon 1385 of the Code of Canon Law.

Not only that, but many times the Sacred Councils and the Supreme Pontiffs expressly intervened to give dispositions concerning the Holy Book.<sup>5</sup> Let us just remember the most beautiful Encyclical of Leo XIII, “*Providentissimus Deus*”<sup>6</sup> and that of Pius X, “*Pascendi Dominici gregis.*”

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. this paragraph with p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, on 23 April 1993, will express himself in a similar way when publishing the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PCB), *The interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, dated 15.4.1993: “Your work... offers me the occasion to celebrate with you two anniversaries rich with meaning: the centenary of *Providentissimus Deus* and the fiftieth of *Divino afflante spiritu*, both consecrated to biblical questions. On 18 November 1893, Pope Leo XIII, very attentive to intellectual problems, published his encyclical on studies of Holy Scripture, for the purpose, he wrote, “of stimulating and recommending them” and even of “directing them in a manner that better corresponds to the needs of the times.” Fifty years after, Pope Pius XII offered to Catholic exegetes, in his encyclical *Divino afflante spiritu*, new encouragements and directives. Meanwhile, the papal Magisterium had manifested its constant attention to scriptural problems by means of numerous interventions. In 1902

The Sacrosanct Council of Trent gives us the complete canon of the inspired books and threatens with excommunication anyone who dares to deny any of them. Here are its textual words:

18 “*The Sacrosanct and ecumenical Council of Trent, legitimately gathered in the Holy Spirit, under the presidency of the three legates of the Holy See, following the examples of the Most Holy Fathers, with equal sentiments of piety and reverence, receives and venerates all the books of the Old and New Testament, since both have God for their only author. Then it decided to annex to this Decree the list of the sacred books, so that no one may ever | doubt what are those that one receives from the Council. They are the following:*

From the *Old Testament*: the five books of Moses: that is, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy;

The book of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings,<sup>7</sup> the two books of Paralipomenon:<sup>8</sup> the first by Ezra<sup>9</sup> and the second by what is said to be of Nehemiah;

The book of Tobit, Judith, Esther, Job, and David’s psalter of 150 Psalms;

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Leo XIII created the Biblical Commission; in 1909 Pius X founded the Biblical Institute. In 1920 Benedict XV celebrated the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Jerome’s death with an encyclical on the interpretation of the Bible. The vivid impulse thus given to biblical studies has found full confirmation in Vatican II, so that the whole Church has benefited from it. The constitution *Dei Verbum* illumines the work of Catholic exegetes and invites Pastors and faithful to nourish themselves more assiduously with the Word of God contained in the Scriptures.”

<sup>7</sup> Now: 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings.

<sup>8</sup> Now: 1 and 2 Chronicles.

<sup>9</sup> The book that we know today as *Ezra* formed a single text with the one known as the *book of Nehemiah*, and in the Greek tradition of the Seventy (LXX) had the title *second book of Ezra*. In the Greek OT (the LXX) there appeared as *first book of Ezra* a Greek apocryphal that includes parts taken from a Hebrew text and others taken from the last chapters of Chronicles; in the *Vulgate* it is presented as the *third book of Ezra*. Only the text that the LXX presents as the *second book of Ezra* is recognized as canonical in the Hebrew Bible and in the Christian one, where it is subdivided in two parts that the *Vulgate* titles as the *first and second book of Ezra*; the modern editions call as the *book of Nehemiah* what has been long considered as the *second book of Ezra*.

The Proverbs, Ecclesiastes,<sup>10</sup> the Song of Songs, the book of Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus;<sup>11</sup>

Isaiah, Jeremiah with Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, the twelve minor prophets, namely: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi;

The two books of the Maccabees: the first and the second.

Of the *New Testament*: the four Gospels: according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Acts of the Apostles written by St. Luke;

The fourteen<sup>12</sup> Letters of St. Paul: to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, and to the Hebrews;

The two Letters of St. Peter; that of St. Jude; the three letters of St. John; one by St. James the Apostle, and the Apocalypse of St. John the Apostle. If anyone shall not receive these books in their entirety together with all their parts as in the Catholic Church they are wont to be read and contained in the old Latin Vulgate<sup>13</sup> edition, as sacred and canonical, let him be excommunicated.”

<sup>10</sup> *Ecclesiastes*, or *Qohelet*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ecclesiasticus*, or *Sirach*.

<sup>12</sup> Actually, they are thirteen, since the *Letter to the Hebrews* is no longer considered as part of the *Corpus Paulinum*.

<sup>13</sup> Vulgate or *Vulgata*: The Latin version of the Bible adopted by the Catholic Church, done by St. Jerome (IV century) who drew inspiration from the criterion of fidelity to the sense of the text. Of the *Vulgata* (thus called by Roger Bacon and Erasmus of Rotterdam) remain about 8,000 manuscripts. Criticized by various humanist scholars among whom is Erasmus, its validity was solemnly affirmed by the Council of Trent which in its fourth session (8.4.1546) declared it authentic. The same Council, however, started its own stylistic revision, by means of which there came about two new editions, the *Sistine* (by Sixtus V, 1590) and the *Clementine* (by Clement VIII, 1598). These showed among themselves about 3,000 variants. At the start of the XX century, Pius X entrusted to the Benedictines of the Roman Abbey of St. Jerome the collection and comparison between 8,000 manuscripts and many patristic citations of the biblical texts, to elaborate a critical text of the ancient *Vulgata*. Of this work there is now an accurate revision, the *Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrorum (editio Sacr. Oecum. Concilii II ratione habita, iussu Pauli pp. VI recognita, auctoritate Joannis Pauli pp. II promulgata*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1979).

19 4. – It is divine because it has a *divine object: Jesus Christ*. Human books generally are written by just one person and often they contain inaccuracies and contradictions; the Bible instead was written by about forty authors who, although so different from each other in talent | and distant from one another by centuries (e.g. between Moses, the sacred writer of the first book of the Bible and St. John, the writer of the Apocalypse, the last book of the Scriptures in order of time, about fifteen centuries intervene), in spite of all these, all the books comprising the Sacred Scriptures relate with marvelous accord; one confirms what the other says and no real contradictions are found in them in spite of all the efforts and researches of the adversaries to find them, and they form together just one book that has for end and principal object *Jesus Christ*.

The 45 books of the O.T. preannounce the Divine Redeemer and they describe his birth, life, work of redemption, death, glorious resurrection, etc.; and the 27 of the N.T. do nothing but confirm and extend what has been said by them; the Gospel of St. Matthew, in fact, is all demonstration of the fulfillment of the prophecies narrated by the O.T.

Face to face with such a spectacle of beauty and marvelous harmony, we cannot but exclaim: this book is not human, but divine!

5. – It is a divine book because it is *addressed to all men*. The Bible in fact is not for a class of persons only, as generally are all human books, but it is for everyone, since all men, having their souls to save, need to know the way to Heaven. The Divine Master himself commanded the Apostles to go to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creatures: “*Euntes in mundum universum praedicate Evangelium omni creaturae.*” (Mk 16:15)<sup>14</sup>

20 God sends this letter of his to all; and what a deformed heart one would show, who, | having received a letter from his far-away father, does not care to open it and read it!

\* \* \*

If the Bible therefore is a divine book, let us have it as it is; let us not put it on a shelf as any other book, but let us put it in

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<sup>14</sup> “Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature.”

the most honored place in the house, beside the Crucifix, in such a way that everyone can see, read, and kiss it.

How beautifully does the book of the Gospels lie on the altar! If in the Most Blessed Sacrament, under the species of the immaculate Host, there is Jesus Christ really present in Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, in Sacred Scripture there is Jesus Truth, under the guise of white paper.

This is why St. Augustine questions the Christians saying: “What seems to be greater for you, God’s Word or Christ’s Body? If you want to reply, you should say that the Word of God is not less than the Body of Christ. And so it is that just as we have so much care in administering the Body of Jesus Christ, so that not a single fragment falls from our hands to the ground, so we must take care that the Word of God does not depart from our hearts. Because it is not less a sin to neglect listening to the Word of God than to drop neglectfully the Body of Christ into the earth.”

And now, with the very words of the Scriptures, let us pray and thank God for having written us so precious a letter, while formulating a sincere desire to greatly respect the Bible, not only, but to turn to it every time we feel lost in the path of good.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Augustine converted while reading the Holy Bible.* – Nature and spirit battled in the young Augustine with | gigantic efforts. His ardent and impassioned heart was satisfied with nothing; his mind, which for many years had searched for truth in vain, was very much worried for not having found it. Finally, the moment of light came, the triumph of divine grace, effected by the fervent prayers and bitter tears of his mother St. Monica.

The restless Augustine was in Cassiciacum. In the silence of his garden, he repeatedly hears the mysterious words: “Take, and read!” Almost like a new Saul,<sup>15</sup> Augustine does not hesitate a moment; he stoops, takes the book that lay at the foot of a plant, and reads: “Let us live honestly as in daylight, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.” (Rom 13:13-14)

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<sup>15</sup> Saul is Paul the Apostle, while the name Saul in *LS* indicates normally the king of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin to which also Paul says he belongs, in that way claiming a regal title (cf. Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5).

These words from the letter to the Romans were enough for him. The young man, having awakened as from a deep sleep, accepts these words as an advice from heaven. He comes to himself and resolves to change his life for good.

When his friend Alypius, a moment later, entered the garden, he found him with his face between his hands and all in tears: he did not know that by then Augustine was no longer his friend in Manichæism, but a Christian.

We know the good that Augustine accomplished in the Church by means of his sermons but especially through his writings, of which we want to call to mind only the following: *The Confessions*, *The City of God*, *The Way to teach the ignorant*, the treatise on *Music*, those on the *Most Holy Trinity*, on *Grace*, etc., all of which are of immense value and are inexhaustible sources of doctrine because they are founded on the Holy Bible to which Augustine owed not only his conversion but also all his knowledge as he himself confessed.

A GOOD DEED – Recite to Jesus Master three *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys*, and *Glory be* so that the Holy Bible may enter all families and let the way of truth be found for so many souls.

#### CANTICLE OF MOSES [#]

22 I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;  
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.  
My strength and my courage is the LORD, and he has been my savior.  
He is my God, I praise him; the God of my father, I extol him.  
The LORD is a warrior, LORD is his name!  
Pharaoh's chariots and army he hurled into the sea;  
the elite of his officers were submerged in the Red Sea.  
The flood waters covered them, they sank into the depths like a stone.  
Your right hand, O LORD, magnificent in power,  
your right hand, O LORD, has shattered the enemy.

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[#] As already pointed out in the *Notices*, all the biblical passages of the “Canticles” contained in the Latin version of the *Vulgate*, have been substituted by the corresponding passages in the Italian version, taken from the *Nuovissima Versione della Bibbia*, ed. San Paolo. In the English translation, the New American Bible published in the Vatican website has been used.



In your great majesty you overthrew your adversaries;  
 you loosed your wrath to consume them like stubble.  
 At a breath of your anger the waters piled up,  
 the flowing waters stood like a mound,  
 the flood waters congealed in the midst of the sea.  
 The enemy boasted, "I will pursue and overtake them;  
 I will divide the spoils and have my fill of them;  
 I will draw my sword; my hand shall despoil them!"  
 When your wind blew, the sea covered them;  
 like lead they sank in the mighty waters.  
 Who is like to you among the gods, O LORD?  
 Who is like to you, magnificent in holiness?  
 O terrible in renown, worker of wonders,  
 when you stretched out your right hand,  
 the earth swallowed them!  
 In your mercy you led the people you redeemed;  
 in your strength you guided them to your holy dwelling.  
 The nations heard and quaked;  
 anguish gripped the dwellers in Philistia.  
 Then were the princes of Edom dismayed;  
 trembling seized the chieftains of Moab;  
 All the dwellers in Canaan melted away;  
 terror and dread fell upon them.  
 By the might of your arm they were frozen like stone,  
 while your people, O LORD, passed over,  
 while the people you had made your own passed over.  
 And you brought them in and planted them  
 on the mountain of your inheritance,  
 the place where you made your seat, O LORD,  
 the sanctuary, O LORD, which your hands established.  
 The LORD shall reign forever and ever.

(Ex 15:1-18)<sup>16</sup>

## READING

23

### **The creation of the world**

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.

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<sup>16</sup> In *LS* also verse 19 is included, but the *Canticle of Moses* ends here.

Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." Thus evening came, and morning followed - the first day.

Then God said, "Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other." And so it happened: God made the dome, and it separated the water above the dome from the water below it. God called the dome "the sky." Evening came, and morning followed - the second day.

Then God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear." And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land "the earth," and the basin of the water he called "the sea." God saw how good it was. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it." And so it happened: the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed - the third day.

Then God said: "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the fixed times, the days and the years, and serve as luminaries in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth." And so it happened: God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night; and he made the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky, to shed light upon the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed - the fourth day.

24 Then God said, "Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky." And so it happened: God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of swimming creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of | winged birds. God saw how good it was, and God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth." Evening came, and morning followed - the fifth day.

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds." And so it happened: God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. God saw how good it was. Then God said: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let

him have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.” God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.” God also said: “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the animals of the land, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the ground, I give all the green plants for food.” And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed - the sixth day.

*(Gn 1:1-31)*

### THE PRAYER OF MOSES

The LORD, the LORD, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in kindness and fidelity, continuing his kindness for a thousand generations, and forgiving wickedness and crime and sin; yet not declaring the guilty guiltless, but punishing children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation for their fathers' wickedness! If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company. This is indeed a stiff-necked people; yet pardon our wickedness and sins, and receive us as your own.”

*(Cf. Ex 34:6-9)*

## THE HOLY BIBLE IS INSPIRED

### JOSHUA

A worthy perpetuator of Moses' work, he finally led the people into the Promised Land.

His name was Hosea, and was the son of Nun, of the tribe of Ephraim. Moses designated him to be among the explorers of the Promised Land, while changing his name to "Josua" which means: "The Lord is our salvation" and it suited him who had to lead Israel into the Promised Land and to be the figure of Jesus Christ who leads souls into heaven.

God pointed out to Moses who would be his successor. The great leader, approaching death, introduced him to the people while encouraging him with these words: "Be brave and steadfast, for you must bring this people into the land which the Lord swore to their fathers he would give them; you must put them in possession of their heritage. It is the Lord who marches before you; he will be with you and will never fail you or forsake you. So do not fear or be dismayed."

After Moses' death, the Lord appeared to the new head of Israel and told him: "My servant Moses is dead. So prepare to cross this Jordan with all the people, into the land I will give the Israelites. As I promised Moses, I will deliver to you every place where you set foot... No one can withstand you while you live. I will be with you as I was with Moses: I will not leave you or forsake you."

26 Joshua obeyed, secure of the divine protection. With grand prodigy he crossed with all the people the River Jordan, casting terror among the Canaanites. Then, he advanced from | victory to victory and no one could ever resist Joshua's sword. In six years he won over and put to death thirty-one kings and took possession of the Promised Land.

He divided among the tribes the conquered land by casting lots on the territory that would go to each one. After having governed the people for eighteen years, Josua, seeing his end coming, gathered in Shechem the heads of the nation and made them swear to remain faithful to the God of their fathers.

And then he died in peace, at the age of 110 years, in 1442 B. C., it seems. The book that bears his name is commonly attributed to him.

## THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

We can say that it is the continuation of the books of Moses; or rather, many Fathers consider it as one with them, since it completes the Pentateuch. It narrates the conquest and partition of the Promised Land.

With Moses dead and Joshua elected as his successor, full of trust in God's help, Joshua let the people exit the camps. Having miraculously crossed the Jordan and thanked the Lord, the Hebrews set camp in Gilgal, to the east of Jericho.

This was a well-fortified city. The Lord, however, miraculously gave it to the hands of Israel by making its walls fall. At this point the story of Achan is told: he was stoned with his entire family for having taken possession of objects, thus violating Joshua's order.

They then conquered the city of Ai; and in another battle (memorable for the miraculous stopping of the sun) five Canaanite kings were conquered. The Gibeonites, however, who through deception had themselves spared, were condemned to serve the Hebrew people forever.

They then conquered southern and northern Palestine. Joshua thus vanquished thirty-one kings; but the occupation was not yet complete. The Lord nonetheless ordered Joshua to divide the land, naming the countries to be occupied. Hence, the part due to every tribe was determined, with their boundaries and cities. Only the priestly tribe of Levi, the one charged to serve the Lord, did not have any special territory, except some cities with their suburbs so that they might live there. Hence, the tribes that had had their own possession beyond the Jordan and had helped their brothers in the conquest, went back to their own territory.

Joshua had accomplished his mission. He retired to his own possessions; then, as death approached, he called all the leaders of Israel and gave them his last recommendations. Then he gathered all the people to whom he recalled all the benefits that

the Lord had granted to Israel, from the calling of Abraham until the last victories, and exhorted everyone to be faithful to their God. The book ends with the narration of Joshua's death.

The purpose of the book of Joshua is to demonstrate God's fidelity to his promises. God who obliged himself with the Patriarchs to give their descendants the Promised Land as their dwelling, kept his word: in fact, Palestine was conquered and divided among the twelve tribes of Israel.

## REFLECTION II

### The Holy Bible is inspired

*"Omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata."*  
(2Tm 3:16)<sup>1</sup>

All the seventy-two books that comprise the Holy Bible have God for their author: "*Deum habent auctorem.*" And yet we know with certainty the human author of the greater part of the books of Sacred Scripture.

28 Who does not know that the Pentateuch belongs to Moses? That the author of very many Psalms is David? Also, in the New Testament we know with certainty that the four Gospels have as authors St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. No one can ignore the origin of the letters | of the Apostles that the Church for centuries attributes to St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude.

Here we come across a difficulty.

How can the Bible be therefore a divine Book, while the books that make it up have been written by men?

The difficulty is easily solved.

The Bible has two authors: a *primary* author, and this is God, and many *secondary* authors, and these are those that God chose at different times, places, and circumstances, in order to manifest his word to the world. They are like intelligent and free instruments, or secretaries and scribes of God, whom, so to say, He deigned to inspire to write the letter to be sent to mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> "All Scripture is inspired by God."

Some applications shall better clarify how the Bible has two authors.

a) The books that today are printed in the world are immense in number. Daily, thousands and thousands of men work to print and diffuse books of every kind and format; books that deal with the most varied subjects: commerce, agriculture, mathematics, music, etc. These are all human and earthly subjects. There is, however, one that deals with supernatural and divine matters: the Bible; it is rightly called *the Book* par excellence, the *Divine Book*. Everything that the Bible contains is divine and was written through divine inspiration. This is confirmed by St. Peter when he says: "...human beings moved by the holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God." (2Pt 1:21)

It is of this divine book that God is especially concerned, since He Himself is its primary author.

b) You already must have considered many times how beside the four Evangelists is generally placed a symbol: a winged lion, for example, stands beside St. Mark; an eagle, beside St. John, etc. What do such symbols want to indicate? They precisely want to indicate the superior Power that assisted them while they wrote their Gospel.

29

c) Often we hear it said: on the altar priest so-and-so celebrates the Holy Mass; or else: that other Priest has finished celebrating; and similar statements, to say that who apparently celebrates the Holy Mass is a man. We, however, know that who truly works the thunderous miracle of the Transubstantiation, that is, he who really changes the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is God himself, through His minister, the Priest.

Just as in the Holy Mass there are accidental matters, for example: the ceremonies; and essential ones, such as the words of the Consecration; so one can say the same of the Sacred Scriptures: in them there are accidental things, like the style, the language, etc.; and essential ones, like the thought and the meaning of the phrases.

The first, that is, the accidental things belong and are proper of every sacred author. What difference in style there is, for example, between the Gospel of St. Matthew and that of St. Luke! This last, being a doctor and scholar, has an elegant and plain

style; St. Matthew, on the other hand, being a simple tax-collector, has a style that is a lot less elegant. Thus a learned and educated Isaiah will use sublime language; instead, a simple shepherd like Amos will have a style that is humble and rough.

All this, however, does not impede that God be the primary author of all the 72 Books of Sacred Scripture.

- 30** And that is a matter of faith. In fact, here is what | Pope Leo XIII says in his Encyclical “*Providentissimus Deus*”<sup>2</sup> of 18 November 1893: “...*the Church holds as sacred the books of the Bible, not because having been compiled by human effort alone, they were afterwards approved by her authority; nor solely because they contain revelation without error; but because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their author... And God, through supernatural power, so stirred and moved the sacred authors to write – and helped them while they wrote – that they correctly conceived in their intelligence and faithfully with their will desired to express, and in a fitting way truly expressed, only those things that He commanded. Otherwise, He would not be the author of the entire Holy Scripture.*”

In inspiring the Sacred Writers, the Holy Spirit exercised a three-fold function: he enlightened their minds regarding what they had to write; he moved their will so that they decided to write, and he assisted them while they wrote.

1. *He enlightened the Sacred Writers* on things they had to write so that they might write all and only those things that were according to his divine designs.

Many things which the Sacred Writer felt he was inspired to write already he could know. Or rather, it could be as well the case that, regarding that particular fact, the Sacred Writer knows more than what he feels inspired. St. John, in fact, at the end of his Gospel, says: “There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be written one by one, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written.” (Jn 21:25)

- 31** Then, at other times, the Sacred Writer ignores the things that he must write or he knows them confusedly; the Holy Spirit then reveals them to him and clarifies. All the Prophets, for ex-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. this paragraph with pages 17 and 109.



ample, ignored those things they predicted, and yet at a distance of many centuries, the things predicted by them came true to the letter. How could one explain, without admitting God's intervention, the fact that Isaiah, who lived more than seven hundred years before Christ, described the smallest details of the life and death of the Redeemer?

2. The Holy Spirit *moved the will of the Sacred Writer*, that is, acted in such a way that he decided to write. More than two hundred times we read in the holy Bible that God expressly commanded to write.

In Exodus, we read that the Lord said to Moses: "Write this down in a document as something to be remembered." (Ex 17:14) And to Isaiah: "Take a large cylinder-seal, and inscribe on it in ordinary letters..." (Is 8:1) Here we see how the Lord truly moved the will of the Sacred Writers to write.

3. The Holy Spirit *guided and assisted the Sacred Writer* while he wrote, so that he might not fall into error and wrote only and all that God willed.

How many things would we want to know, for example, about the private and public life of Jesus, of our Lady, and of St. Joseph! And yet, even if the Evangelists knew them, they nonetheless did not write about them! Why so? For the simple fact that the Holy Spirit did not inspire them to do so. It is, however, certain that all the things contained in the Holy Bible | have been written through divine inspiration: and this is a matter of faith. In fact, here is what the Vatican Council I says:<sup>3</sup> "If anyone will deny that the Books of Sacred Scripture, in whole or in part... are divinely inspired, let him be excommunicated."

32

St. Gregory Nazianzen even says that divine inspiration includes the accents and the shortest line: "*Usque ad apicem et lineam.*"

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<sup>3</sup> Called by Pius IX, Vatican Council I (December 1869 - July 1870), aside from the dogma of the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff on matters of faith and morals, sanctioned the doctrinal authority of the Bible. Don Alberione quotes herein the dogmatic constitution *Dei Filius*, which affirms: "If anyone will not accept as sacred and canonical all the books of Sacred Scripture, in all their parts, just as they have been accredited by the Sacred Council of Trent, or will deny that they are divinely inspired: let him be anathema." (can. 4, part II, *Della Rivelazione*)

Hence, we are certain that in the Bible there are no errors of any sort, not only against faith and morals, but also against science and history, because this would be unbecoming of God who is Truth in essence.

The Rationalists who in the past raised proudly their voices against Sacred Scripture, saying they have finally discovered in it an error against science, today bow down their heads and in humiliation say to themselves: God was right. And it will be so until the end of time, since the Lord will never contradict himself.

\* \* \*

It follows: a) that reading the Holy Bible, we must have the maximum respect and veneration for it and consider it as what it truly is, *the Divine Book*, having God himself as author.

b) In the second place, knowing that all the books of Sacred Scripture have been written through divine inspiration and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we must read them with all tranquility, certain of not finding errors of any kind in them but of finding in them substantial food for our souls.

To believe that in the Bible there are errors depends on believing as true what, instead, is simple hypothesis; as it happened with the rationalists, who proclaimed as science what science was not.

**33** c) In the third place, we must read the Bible with immense affection and devotion, as a son, far from his father's house, reads his father's letter. The Bible, in fact, as we have reflected yesterday, is a letter from the Heavenly Father sent to men his children.

Let us read it! In it we shall find the way to Heaven.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows and the Sacred Scriptures*. – Fr. Germano of St. Stanislaus tells us that St. Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows had great veneration for the words of Holy Scripture, veneration that shone forth even externally.

He read it and heard it read with great pleasure, and with head uncovered, at times on his knees. He fed on its great lines, especially on those that applied more to his spirit. He wrote them on loose cards so that it would be handy to have them in his Breviary or on the lectern during divine psalmody time in

choir; and he besought other religious of great maturity and skilled in Sacred Scripture to gather for him copies of such lines, and depending on opportunities he meditated on them with much profit; since his heart was raised in holy thoughts, he was fired with holy feelings and thought of holy aims.

*Let us also learn to have great respect and veneration for Holy Scripture.*

A GOOD DEED – Recite the third glorious mystery so that the Bible may be loved, read, and lived.

#### CANTICLE OF THE THREE YOUNG MEN [#]

“Blessed are you, and praiseworthy, O Lord,  
 the God of our fathers, and glorious forever is your name.  
 For you are just in all you have done;  
 all your deeds are faultless,  
 all your ways right, and all your judgments proper.  
 You have executed proper judgments  
 in all that you have brought upon us and upon Jerusalem,  
 the holy city of our fathers.  
 By a proper judgment | you have done all this because of our sins;  
 For we have sinned and transgressed by departing from you,  
 and we have done every kind of evil.  
 Your commandments we have not heeded or observed,  
 nor have we done as you ordered us for our good.  
 Therefore all you have brought upon us,  
 all you have done to us,  
 you have done by a proper judgment.  
 You have handed us over to our enemies,  
 lawless and hateful rebels;  
 to an unjust king, the worst in all the world.  
 Now we cannot open our mouths;  
 we, your servants, who revere you,  
 have become a shame and a reproach.  
 For your name’s sake, do not deliver us up forever,  
 or make void your covenant.  
 Do not take away your mercy from us,  
 for the sake of Abraham, your beloved, Isaac your servant,  
 and Israel your holy one,  
 To whom you promised to multiply their offspring  
 like the stars of heaven, or the sand on the shore of the sea.

For we are reduced, O Lord, beyond any other nation,  
 brought low everywhere in the world this day because of our sins.  
 We have in our day no prince, prophet, or leader,  
 no holocaust, sacrifice, oblation, or incense,  
 no place to offer first fruits, to find favor with you.  
 But with contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received;  
 As though it were holocausts of rams and bullocks,  
 or thousands of fat lambs,  
 So let our sacrifice be in your presence today  
 as we follow you unreservedly;  
 for those who trust in you cannot be put to shame.  
 And now we follow you with our whole heart,  
 we fear you and we pray to you.  
 Do not let us be put to shame,  
 but deal with us in your kindness and great mercy.  
 Deliver us by your wonders,  
 and bring glory to your name, O Lord:  
 Let all those be routed who inflict evils on your servants;  
 Let them be shamed and powerless, and their strength broken;  
 Let them know that you alone are the Lord God,  
 glorious over the whole world.”

*(Dn 3:26-45)*

## 35

## READING

**Joshua's final pleas**

Many years later, after the LORD had given the Israelites peace and all the surrounding nations had been subdued, when Joshua was already old and advanced in years, he summoned all Israel (including their elders, leaders, judges and officers) and said to them: “I am old and advanced in years. You have seen all that the LORD, your God, has done for you against all these nations; for it has been the LORD, your God, himself who fought for you. Bear in mind that I have apportioned among your tribes as their heritage the nations that survive (as well as those I destroyed) between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. The LORD, your God, will drive them out and dislodge them at your approach, so that you will take possession of their land as the LORD, your God, promised you. Therefore strive hard to observe and carry out all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, not straying from it in any way, or mingling with these nations while they survive among you. You must not invoke their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or worship them, but you must remain loyal to

the LORD, your God, as you have been to this day. At your approach the LORD has driven out large and strong nations, and to this day no one has withstood you. One of you puts to flight a thousand, because it is the LORD, your God, himself who fights for you, as he promised you. Take great care, however, to love the LORD, your God. For if you ever abandon him and ally yourselves with the remnant of these nations while they survive among you, by intermarrying and intermingling with them, know for certain that the LORD, your God, will no longer drive these nations out of your way. Instead they will be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge for your sides and thorns for your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD, your God, has given you.

“Today, as you see, I am going the way of all men. So now acknowledge with your whole heart and soul that not one of all the promises the LORD, your God, made to you has remained unfulfilled. Every promise has been fulfilled for you, with not one single exception. But just as every promise the LORD, your God, made to you has been fulfilled for you, so will he fulfill every threat, even so far as to exterminate you from this good land which the LORD, your God, has given you. If you transgress the covenant of the LORD, your God, which he enjoined on you, serve other gods and worship them, the anger of the LORD will flare up against you and you will quickly perish from the good land which he has given you.”

(*Jos 23:1-16*)

36

### JUDITH'S PRAYER

A new hymn I will sing to my God. O Lord, great are you and glorious, wonderful in power and unsurpassable. Let your every creature serve you; for you spoke, and they were made, You sent forth your spirit, and they were created; no one can resist your word. The mountains to their bases, and the seas, are shaken; the rocks, like wax, melt before your glance. “But to those who fear you, you are very merciful. Though the sweet odor of every sacrifice is a trifle, and the fat of all holocausts but little in your sight, one who fears the Lord is forever great.”

(*Jdt 16:13-15*)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *LS* refers to “Jdt XV, 16-19,” (Jdt 15:16-19) but it really refers to chapter 16 (not 15) as correctly indicated on p. 94. Furthermore, this quote refers to the *Vulgate* and in current translations, it corresponds to vv. 13-15.

## MEANINGS IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURES

## SAMUEL

We can say that he is the first of the prophets strictly speaking: he lived during the time of the Judges.

His father was Elkanah and his mother, Hannah, who, though advanced in age, received from the Lord a son who she promised to consecrate to the service of God. Samuel was in fact presented to the temple, where he grew in the fear of the Lord and in fulfillment of his duties.

Meanwhile, God, offended by the conduct of the sons of the High Priest Eli, let them die in battle. Their father, at the news of the misfortune, fell to the ground and died. The Lord, however, had elected another Priest: Samuel.

The new Priest and Judge of Israel was faithful to the Lord and wisely governed. He commanded that all the idols and foreign gods be taken away from the midst of the people and invited all to penance. The Lord forgave Israel and freed her from the hands of the Philistines.

He anointed Saul, the first king of Israel; he knew how to let him face, in due time, the divine censure. It was also he who consecrated the new king, David, but he was not able to see David's complete triumph.

Attributed to Samuel are the books of Judges and Ruth.

The books I and II Kings bear his name due to the big part he had in it.

## 38 THE BOOK OF JUDGES – RUTH – I, II KINGS

The Book of *Judges* speaks of the leaders who ruled over God's people from the death of Joshua (1442?) until the election of Saule<sup>1</sup> (1075). These leaders are taken out sometimes from one tribe, sometimes from another, and even from several tribes contemporaneously.

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<sup>1</sup> Saule è is another spelling for the name Saul, the first king of Israel.

The first two chapters describe the political and religious condition of Israel: continuous threats from neighboring peoples and abandonment of the Lord that left his people to the oppression of her enemies.

Then the episodes of some Judges are narrated: Othoniel, Ehud, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephtah, Samson.

As appendix, there is the story of the idolatry of the Danites and the crime of the men of Gibeah that caused the extermination of all the tribes of Benjamin.

The Book of *Ruth* is a small masterpiece that paints with exquisite finesse a scene of family life during the time of the Judges. Its topic is very simple: A man from Bethlehem, Elimelech, driven by famine, emigrates with his wife Naomi and two sons to the land of Moab where his two sons die after having married two Moabite women: Ruth and Orpah. After ten years, left without husband and sons, Naomi returns to Bethlehen, followed by Ruth who cannot separate herself from her mother-in-law. In Bethlehem, Ruth goes to glean in the field of Boaz, who marries her, and she begets for him Obed, the father of Jesse and the ancestor of David.

What is moving in the book of Ruth is Naomi's strong resignation, Ruth's piety and modesty, and Boaz's faith and generosity. These three beautiful persons shine out in a sweet background of domestic and religious feelings, reflecting divine goodness.

The I and the II Book of *Kings*: the four books of Kings<sup>2</sup> include the history of the chosen people from the oppression of the Philistines (which ends the Book of Judges) to the exile of Joachim in Babylon.

The first book, after having spoken about the terms of Eli and Samuel as judges, describes the institution of the royal dignity in Israel in the person of Saul who is later censured for disobeying God. In his stead would be elected David who pretty

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<sup>2</sup> *I, II Kings*: according to the Greek version of the Seventy (LXX) and the *Vulgate*. In reality, it refers to 1/2 Samuel. III/IV Kings correspond to 1/2 Kings. The two books of Kings constitute the natural sequel to the two books of Samuel. While 1/2 Samuel include the period that goes from the birth of Samuel to the death of David, 1/2 Kings refer to the events that take place between the appearance of the kingdom of Solomon, successor of David, and the fall of the monarchy of Judah, during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem (975-586 B.C.).

**39** soon demonstrates his worth and | excites the jealousy of Saul who persecutes him unjustly without ever succeeding to suppress him, while he himself, after being defeated by the Philistines, miserably perished, thus losing in a day his sons, his army his life, and his Kingdom.

The second book speaks of the kingdom of David in Hebron as it wars against Saul's son; then of the kingdom of David in Jerusalem with David's glories and disastrous sins, and ends with some fragmentary documents of various kind.

These two books that form a single work called Samuel show a marvelous unity and were done perhaps over the writings of the prophets Samuel, Gad, and Nathan.

### REFLECTION III

## Meanings in the Sacred Scriptures

*“Give me insight to observe your teaching,<sup>3</sup>  
to keep it with all my heart.”*  
(Ps 118/119:34)

We read in the Gospel of St. Luke: *“Tunc aperuit illis sensum ut intelligerent Scripturas”* (Lk 24:45);<sup>4</sup> Jesus opened the eyes of the Apostles so that they might understand the Scriptures. Let us therefore pray to the Divine Master so that he may also open our eyes, that we may understand them correctly.

**40** If we consider the Bible superficially, it appears to us like all the other books; and yet, what a difference! We know that under the cortex of the letter and the paper there is a whole world of sublime, universal, and eternal truths. Under the modest external garment we | see God's word. And we love the Bible not so

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<sup>3</sup> *Studiare* (insight to observe) means to dedicate oneself to knowing and observing the Law. In *LS* the study of the Sacred Scriptures is considered the foundation of theological studies (pp. 50, 51, 69, 78, 92, 281, 392, 303), of spirituality (pp. 227, 238, 247f, 261, 302-303), and of pastoral as a whole (pp. 69, 73f, 238, 247f, 274, 291, 317). Examples of saints are cited, saints who have become so through their study of Holy Scripture. Paul himself is one who knows the entire Bible (p. 230).

<sup>4</sup> “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”



much for its external form, but because it is God's word, the word of our most loving Father.

It is a must to distinguish in the Bible the letter and the spirit of the letter. The first, as St. Paul says, kills; the spirit on the other hand vivifies: "*Littera enim occidit, spiritus autem vivificat.*" (2Cor 3:6)<sup>5</sup>

Oh yes! The letter, if badly interpreted, can bring death to the soul. Thus it happened to many of the Hebrews who, having badly interpreted what the O.T. told of the future Messiah when he came into the world, refused to receive him: "*Et sui eum non receperunt;*" (Jn 1:11)<sup>6</sup> Not only that: they crucified him and God's anger weighed on their heads.

In order to comprehend well the meanings of the Bible,<sup>7</sup> it is necessary that we join the school of our infallible mother and

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<sup>5</sup> "...The letter brings death, but the Spirit give life."

<sup>6</sup> "...His own people did not accept him."

<sup>7</sup> The old exegesis, which could not take into consideration the modern scientific demands, attributed to every text of the Scriptures different levels of meaning. The most common distinction was that which also Don Alberione uses: between the *literal* meaning and the *spiritual* meaning. Medieval exegesis distinguished in the spiritual meaning three different aspects: the revealed truth, the behavior to follow and the final accomplishment. Thus, the famous couplet of Augustine of Denmark, of the XIII century: "*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, / moralis quid agas, quid speres anagogia*" (see note 11 on p. 293). All the effort of modern historical-critical exegesis aims at defining the *exact meaning* of a biblical text in the circumstances wherein it was composed. The problem is complex, and is not presented in the same manner as for the different literary genres (historical narratives, chronicles, parables, prophetic oracles, legislative norms, proverbs and sayings, prayers, hymns, etc.) – the PCB presents some principles on the matter:

1. *Literal meaning*: In general this meaning, not to be confused with "literalistic" or fundamentalist, is unique: "it is the one directly expressed by the inspired human authors" and is the fruit of divine inspiration. It is deduced from an exact analysis of the text within its literary and historical context. The task of exegesis is to conduct this analysis by using all the possibilities offered by literary and historical-archaeological research; without forgetting the dynamic character of many biblical texts. A modern reader of the Bible should try to clarify the orientation of thought expressed by the text, perceiving its more or less foreseeable extension, adding to its initial meaning new determinations. Also the literal meaning would seem then, from the start, to be open to further clarifications that are produced thanks to continuous "rereadings" in new contexts.

2. *Spiritual meaning*. Not to be confused with heterogeneous meanings, extraneous to the literal meaning. Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has

teacher, the Church, who, through the assistance of the Holy Spirit, shall guide us safely in the way of truth.

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A word without a meaning is like a body without soul, it is a *cadaver of a word*. St. Augustine says that man is poor in his words and these words ordinarily have but a single meaning, the literal meaning.

41 Since the Bible is God's letter, the syllables and the words of which it is made have as a consequence a divine meaning. It is in virtue of this meaning that the Sacred Book is enveloped by a luminous aura such that the Bible is | held by all to be the principal book that humanity possesses.

The meaning of the Sacred Scriptures is threefold: the literal, the mystical, and the accommodated.

The *literal meaning*, also called the *historical*, is that which is deduced from the natural meaning of the words according to their ordinary usage, and this can either be *proper* or *figurative*.

It is *proper*, when the words mean what is at first sight presented to the mind: for example, when Jesus tells the disciples

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established a radically new context, which sheds light, in a new manner, on the ancient texts and determines the change of meaning. As a general indication, "we can define the spiritual meaning, understood according to the Christian faith, as the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when they are read under the influx of the Holy Spirit in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life that results from it." This "paschal" context illumines the whole New Testament, which recognizes in it the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Hence, there exists a close relationship between the spiritual meaning and the literal one. The spiritual sense, however, is not to be confused with the "accommodated" meaning mentioned in *LS* (pp. 41-43), or with whatever subjective interpretation dictated by imagination or by intellectual speculation.

3. *Complete meaning. Sensus plenior* is defined as "a more profound meaning of the text willed by God, but not clearly expressed by the human author." It is equivalent to the "spiritual meaning" in case this is distinguished from the "literal meaning." Its foundation is the fact that the Holy Spirit, the principal author of the Bible, can guide a human author in the choice of his expressions in such a way that they express a truth whose full depth he does not perceive. Above all, with the canon of the Scriptures, a new context is created capable of making some potentials of meaning, left in the shadow by the original context, appear. In conclusion, the meanings of the Scriptures are to be sought in the literary and historical context of the texts, and in the new, spiritual, and ecclesial context wherein the Christian reader lives (cf. *L'interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*).

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem” (Mt 20:18) they were indeed going to the capital of Palestine.

It is *figurative* when the words are not understood literally, but figuratively. Thus, when St. John the Baptist, upon seeing Jesus coming, says: “*Ecce Agnus Dei*: behold the Lamb of God” (Jn 1:29), he takes the word “Lamb” figuratively. The Baptist did not want to mean that the Messiah was a little lamb, he wanted only to allude to his meekness, to his work of redemption, wherein Jesus, like a meek lamb, had to be immolated in reparation for the sins of men.

The *mystical meaning*, also called the spiritual or typical, is that which comes out not from the words, but from *things* expressed by the words; for example: when, on Holy Saturday, the Church at the end of every lamentation makes people sing: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return to the Lord your God”; it is clear that here reference is made not to the walls of the city, but to the soul far away from God.

Many times, the Holy Scripture uses the name | *Jerusalem* to indicate the soul, the Church, Paradise, and in all these cases the word “Jerusalem” has a mystical meaning.

42

Such a mystical meaning is also called *typical*, because often the thing it represents is like the type of another. Judith who cuts the head of Holofernes, is a type of the Most Blessed Virgin who crushes the infernal dragon.

The bronze serpent made by Moses was the type of Jesus Christ crucified and placed between heaven and earth as a sign of salvation for all men.

The *accommodated* meaning is not really a meaning that is in Sacred Scripture; it is the meaning that we ourselves give to the words and phrases of the Bible. This meaning can be more or less true, and more or less appropriate, according to the rightness of intention and the degree of knowledge of him who makes it.

For example: In Psalm 17, verse 27-28,<sup>8</sup> it is said: “Toward the sincere, sincere; but to the perverse you are devious.” How many times we use these words to say: With good people, you shall be good and with the devious, devious: that is, to express the proverb: *Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are!* But

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<sup>8</sup> Psalm 17 of the *Vulgate* corresponds to Psalm 18 in the Bibles translated from the original texts.

this would be an accommodated meaning, that is, adapted, because the words of the Psalm want to say instead that God is good, or *merciful* towards the good, and bad, that is, *severe*, towards the bad, when he punishes the latter and shows mercy to the former.

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In practice, what meaning should one have in reading the Bible?

43 Here it is: the reader must let himself be guided by the meaning that the words have in themselves, that is, by what the letter wants to say and then, if on some point he meets with obscurity or doubt, let him turn to the explanatory notes that every text must have at the foot of the page.

In short: stick preferably to the literal meaning, as the Church does when she chooses scriptural texts to prove theological truths. This meaning is evidently the true meaning of Holy Scripture.

With this, we do not intend to exclude or diminish the importance of the other meanings.

The *mystical* especially has very great importance. It was largely used by the Apostles, the Apostolic Fathers and much later was adopted by the Alexandrian School headed by Origen and by the Fathers of first class authority like St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and St. Gregory the Great.

The *accommodated* meaning has also its value, if used seriously and with due reverence. It is a sign of respect for the words of the Bible and at times a way for better expressing a truth; but it has no dogmatic value. First comes the literal meaning, then the mystical, then the accommodated.

In any case, the reader must always bear in mind that the sacred words of the Bible are divine and it is always God who speaks.

The Holy Bible should be read even when we do not understand: the Holy Spirit shall make us understand, or else create in us very precious spiritual and supernatural goods. He, as he did to the Apostles, will open our understanding to enable us to understand.

EXAMPLE. – *Sts. Saturninus and Companions, martyrs.* – At the beginning of the fourth century, under the Emperors Diocletian and Maximinian, persecution became more cruel not only against the persons of Christians, but also against sacred

places and the Sacred Scriptures. Christians were ordered, under pain of death, to surrender to the judges the sacred books.

The priest Saturninus of the city of Abitina in the proconsular province of Africa was arrested during this persecution. At that time, he was in a gathering of about fifty persons, among whom were four of his sons: Dativus, Telicus, Saturninus and Hilarion.

44

Loaded with chains, they were sent to Carthage to the proconsul Anulinus to be judged.

Asked if they were Christians and if they had taken part in the gathering, they openly professed their faith. Subjected to torture on the racks, they did not stop professing their being Christians and they invoked the help of God's grace so they could bear the torments: "*My Lord, Jesus Christ, come to my aid, have mercy on me, guard my soul, grant me the grace of patience.*" "*Hear me, O Lord; I thank you for the suffering you send me...*"

Marvelous was the confession of the martyr Emeritus, who, questioned by the proconsul if he had the Scriptures with him, answered: "*I keep them in my heart!*"

"Speak clearly," the proconsul shouted. "Do you have the Scriptures at home or not?"

"I keep them in my heart," the martyr repeated calmly. And added: "*Praised be Jesus Christ. Lord, help me because I suffer for your name and I willingly suffer; but do not allow that I should remain confused.*"

To the question of the proconsul, another confessor of that glorious group, Felix, frankly said:

"We have celebrated with great devotion the holy sacrifice, and *we have gathered to read the Divine Scriptures.*"

Thus Saturninus, through the pains of torture, exclaimed, "*I keep the Sacred Scriptures in my heart!*"

In the end, tired by the undefeated firmness of those confessors, the proconsul had them thrown to prison, where he let them die of exhaustion and miseries.

In this manner, for the name of Jesus Christ and in defense of the Sacred Scriptures, they won the palm of glorious martyrdom.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Today, in spite of human respect, I shall kiss many times the book of the Holy Gospel, professing to love it to the point of giving my life for it, if this were necessary.

45

## READING

**God orders the writing of his Law**

God said to Moses, “Write out this song, then, for yourselves. Teach it to the Israelites and have them recite it, so that this song may be a witness for me against the Israelites. For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey which I promised on oath to their fathers, and they have eaten their fill and grown fat, if they turn to other gods and serve them, despising me and breaking my covenant; then, when many evils and troubles befall them, this song, which their descendants will not have forgotten to recite, will bear witness against them. For I know what they are inclined to do even at the present time, before I have brought them into the land which I promised on oath to their fathers.”

So Moses wrote this song that same day, and he taught it to the Israelites. Then the LORD commissioned Joshua, son of Nun, and said to him, “Be brave and steadfast, for it is you who must bring the Israelites into the land which I promised them on oath. I myself will be with you.”

When Moses had finished writing out on a scroll the words of the law in their entirety, he gave the Levites who carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD this order: “Take this scroll of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD, your God, that there it may be a witness against you.

*(Dt 31:19-26)*

## CANTICLE OF THE THREE YOUNG MEN [#]

“Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever; And blessed is your holy and glorious name, praiseworthy and exalted above all for all ages.

Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, praiseworthy and glorious above all forever.

Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

**46** Blessed are you who look into the depths from your throne upon the cherubim, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever.

Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven, praiseworthy and glorious forever.”

*(Dn 3:52-56)*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *LS* shows “Dan. III, 51-56,” (Dn 3:51-56) but the quoted passage begins with v. 52.

## PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

I give you thanks, O God of my father; I praise you, O God my savior! I will make known your name, refuge of my life; you have been my helper against my adversaries. You have saved me from death, and kept back my body from the pit, from the clutches of the nether world you have snatched my feet; you have delivered me, in your great mercy from the scourge of a slanderous tongue, and from lips that went over to falsehood; from the snare of those who watched for my downfall, and from the power of those who sought my life; from many a danger you have saved me, from flames that hemmed me in on every side; from the midst of unremitting fire, From the deep belly of the nether world; from deceiving lips and painters of lies, from the arrows of dishonest tongues. I was at the point of death, my soul was nearing the depths of the nether world; I turned every way, but there was no one to help me, I looked for one to sustain me, but could find no one. But then I remembered the mercies of the LORD, his kindness through ages past; for he saves those who take refuge in him, and rescues them from every evil. So I raised my voice from the very earth, from the gates of the nether world, my cry.

*(Sir 51:1-9)*

## THE HOLY BIBLE AND DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

### JEREMIAH

Jeremiah, the son of Hillkiah, lived in the second half of the VII<sup>1</sup> century before Christ. He was called to the prophetic ministry during the reign of King Josiah. At that time, perhaps, he was not yet thirty years old.

Those times were very sad ones. Manasseh, guilty of idolatry into which the people had fallen, although he repented towards the end of his life, had left the kingdom to his son Amon. Under him, the moral and religious conditions of the people only became worse. Finally, King Josiah started the first reform of worship. It was then that Jeremiah began his mission as prophet and did not cease to preach until the holy city was taken. We do not know what his role was in Josiah's reform, but it is certain that he collaborated in it.

Eventually, he influenced the court of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and especially during the reign of Zedekiah, who often consulted the prophet. But the nobles' hatred against him sent him to prison.

With the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, the prophet, freed from prison, retreated to Mizpah under governor Gedaliah; but only for a short time because the latter became the victim of a conspiracy and Jeremiah had to flee to Egypt where he continued to prophesy against the idolatrous Jews who, it seems, stoned him for his endless reproaches.

### THE III AND THE IV BOOK OF KINGS<sup>2</sup>

The third and the fourth books of Kings make up as well another work, an independent work which, tying itself up, with the death of David, to the preceding book, narrates the events of

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<sup>1</sup> In *LS* it is written "secolo XII" ("XII century"). Obviously, it is a misprint.

<sup>2</sup> III/IV Kgs: 1/2 Kgs.



Solomon's reign, the schism, the separate history of the two kingdoms of Judah and of Israel until the destruction of the latter, and the story of the kingdom of Judah until the exile in Babylon.

The author shows that God is true to his word in punishing Solomon, the kings of Judah and of Israel, and finally accomplishes his threats in the exile of all the chosen people.

#### REFLECTION IV

### The Holy Bible and Dogmatic Theology<sup>3</sup>

*“Your justice is forever right,  
your teaching forever true.”*  
(Ps 118/119:142)

Today we shall see how the Church draws from Sacred Scripture the truths contained in *Dogmatic Theology* and those of the Catechism included under the title of “Faith.”

\* \* \*

*What Dogmatic Theology is.*

Dogmatic theology is the science of the dogmas, of the truths that Mother Church proposes to us | for belief. Contained in it are all the truths concerning *God, the Creator*, as the beginning and end of all things. Those concerning the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity: *Jesus Christ*. It speaks about the

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<sup>3</sup> One can find an update of what is proposed here in *The interpretation of the Bible in the Church*: “The Sacred Scripture... is the privileged base of theological studies. In order to interpret the Scriptures with scientific exactness and precision, theologians need the work of exegetes. On their part, exegetes ought to direct their studies so that “the study of the sacred Scripture” can effectively be “like the soul of sacred theology” (DV 24)... Exegetes can help dogmatic theologians avoid two extremes: on one hand, dualism, which completely separates a doctrinal truth from its linguistic expression, considered devoid of importance; on the other, fundamentalism, which, confusing the human with the divine, considers as revealed truth even the contingent aspects of human expressions. To avoid these two extremes, it is necessary to distinguish without separating, and hence to accept a persistent tension. Thought and words are of God and man at the same time, so that everything in the Bible comes at the same time from God and from the inspired author.” (n. 38)

Redeemer, his death and resurrection, his redemptive work, and then of his mystical body, the Church; of the Papacy, of Christ's last coming into the world, that is, the last judgment.

Furthermore, Theology teaches us all the truths concerning the *Holy Spirit*: it tells us of His work of sanctification and how He applies to souls the fruits of Redemption. Furthermore, it explains to us all the doctrine concerning the Sacraments, Sacramentals, Liturgy, etc.

The sources from where the Church draws all these truths are the Bible and Tradition.

All the theologians, as proof of their dogmatic theses, as principal proof after the doctrine of the Church, present the texts of Holy Scripture.

It is prescribed that in the middle of the hall where Bishops are gathered in Council to define some truth, the Sacred Scripture be placed.<sup>4\*</sup> And this to point out that the Bible is the first and principal source of truth. Furthermore, by such an act, the Church wants to tell us that if the defined truth is contained in it, nothing is left to us other than to bow our heads and to believe with all our strength.

50 Oh, how grateful we ought to be to the Lord, who was not satisfied with merely raising up men like Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., and even his only-begotten Son to speak to us in His name, but still decreed | with infinite love, that the principal and indispensable truths for our salvation be fixed and written in a book: the Bible, which is the principal, as well as the clearest and most precise, source of Dogmatic Theology and catechism.

From this follows that in the study of Sacred Theology, the greatest importance<sup>5</sup> must be given to biblical proofs. The other proofs of congruence or of reason have, of course, their importance, but they must be on the second line.

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<sup>4\*</sup> *"In medio sessus poni solitum erat in sancto throno venerandum Evangelium, in quod omnium vultus conversi errant"* (Conc. Calcedonense).

<sup>5</sup> "The interpretation of the Sacred Scripture is of primary importance for the Christian faith and for the life of the Church... The manner of interpreting the biblical texts for the men and women of today has some direct consequences on their personal and communitarian rapport with God, and it also is closely bound to the mission of the Church" (John Paul II, introducing the document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 1993).

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Three consequences:

1<sup>st</sup>. In the study and explanation of Theology and the Catechism, the first proofs with the first *examples* should be taken from the Sacred Scriptures.

How beautiful and effective, for example, are those of Jesus child, adolescent, adult: marvelous mirror of all the virtues! Those also of Abraham, Judith, Ruth, Noemi, Tobit, Job, etc., etc. How do they edify and comfort! They are very effective in illustrating and inculcating the theological, cardinal, and moral virtues.

2<sup>nd</sup>. Let the *sayings*<sup>6</sup> be also taken from the Bible because, as we know, the words of the scriptures have a special power of their own, a sweet anointment that no author can have. In fact, they came out of the mouth itself of God.

Regarding this, the Apostle says: “For whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” (Rom 15:4)

The sayings of the Saints and great men are also worthwhile, but let us remember always that the first author is always God.

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<sup>6</sup> In *LS* the “sayings” of the Proverbs are recorded (p. 105) and in general the “holy sayings” that inflame the reader of the Bible (p. 107), but above all those biblical passages printed and exposed everywhere in the Small House of Turin through the order of Cottolengo (p. 204). It is a part of our spiritual work to avoid the dangerous sayings of the world, substituting them with those of the Gospel (p. 237). The studies, too, aimed at that: “This must be life’s exercise: to remove one by one the worldly sayings and then to place, write, engrave verse by verse in our brain the Sacred Scriptures... Let us try in every [Eucharistic] visit to take away from our head a worldly saying and put in its place the opposing saying of the Gospel... *Factus est Deus homo ut homo fieret Deus*; let us then become gods in our mind” (*RM* 1934, 71-72). “The sayings of the ‘beatitudes’ do not occupy more than half a page in the Gospel of St. Matthew, but the entire Bible can be said to be a commentary, a continuous recommendation of the beatitudes” (*UCAS* 1933, *SPa* 1962, p. 281). “Saint Paul was converted in his mind: he completely changed his ideas. We, too, to convert ourselves in our mind must change our ideas. We must embrace the sayings of the Gospel of today” (*La conversione di San Paolo*, to the Daughters of St. Paul, USA, Jan. 1946: *EMC* 1952, p. 75).

- 51 A model in this is Fr. | Segneri,<sup>7</sup> who, we can say, in his sermons and writings cites nothing but the Sacred Scriptures.

See, for example: *Manna dell'anima [Manna for the soul]*.<sup>8</sup>

3<sup>rd</sup>. The Teacher of Theology, or the Catechist, ought also to take from the Bible the *paragons*. For example, do we want to explain how one falls into sin? Very well, the example of Eve who put herself in the occasion of sin and imprudently conversed with the cursed serpent offers itself. In the Bible we find suitable examples to explain all the virtues, and all of them are of great efficacy.

What are the conclusions of all of these? Here they are: most praiseworthy is the habit of those who, in their study of Theology and the Catechism, take note, in the margins, of sayings, scriptural phrases, citations of examples that concern the truth contained in those pages of their text; their study and their explanation shall acquire a special aspect, and will have a divine efficacy, as to know, at the end of their study, how to explain all the principal dogmatic truths in this very simple way: reading the Bible and adding few things.

So that the reading of the Bible may be effective and useful for our soul, it is not necessary that there be long critical and historical notes. Few words that serve to connect the scriptural text with that given truth of Sacred Theology or the Catechism would be enough.

Let us pray so that the Lord may soon stir up someone to make such a commentary that would have a very great effect on souls.

- 52 EXAMPLE. – *The angelic Thomas Aquinas*. – He is, in the Catholic Church, a luminary of surpassing greatness, | one of

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<sup>7</sup> Paolo Segneri, Jesuit (Nettuno 1624 - Roma 1694) owes his renown to the *Quaresimale*, Florence 1679. For this work, Segneri was compared to Bernardine of Siena, a well-known missionary of the people.

<sup>8</sup> Famous collection of prayers and reflections drawn from the life of the Saints for every day of the year. This book was published for the first time in Milan in 1683. The complete title was: *La manna dell'anima, ovvero esercizio facile e fruttuoso per chi desidera di attendere all'orazione [Manna for the soul, or an easy and fruitful exercise for one who wants to attend to prayer]*. In the edition of Todero (Venice 1766-1768) the *Il Divoto di Maria Vergine [The Virgin Mary's devotee]* by the same author follows.

the greatest Doctors. He was called, for his blamelessness of life, the Angelic Doctor and Pius XI proclaimed him as the “Guide of studies, the Angel of the schools.”

As a child, he was educated in Monte Cassino, where he learned from the Benedictine Fathers, together with the letters, the practice of Christian virtues and love for Holy Scripture that later will become the object of his studies and teaching in the professorship at the famous University of Paris.

Sent to Naples to finish there his studies, he came to know the Dominican Fathers, and the desire to join their Order was born in him. He triumphally overcame the opposition of his family and not long after he was in Paris hearing the lectures of St. Albert the Great.

Becoming professor of Theology, he attracted crowds of students who admired the learned talks of the new Master, his method, and the clarity of his exposition.

But what extraordinary thing did St. Thomas do then? Let us read his biography: “Discussions were but a small part of his works at this time; the foundation of his theological teaching was Holy Scripture; he explained alternately the Old and the New Testament.”

The books commented by him during the first three years of his teaching were: the prophecy of Isaiah and the Gospel of St. Matthew.

It is said that one day, finding difficulty in explaining a passage in the Holy Bible, he went with great confidence and simplicity to bow before the holy Tabernacle to get Jesus’ explanation.

Among his many works, of which the two “*Summae*” would be enough for him to earn the title of Doctor, a noteworthy place occupy his works on Sacred Scripture; in fact, aside from the aforementioned books on Isaiah and St. Matthew, he commented on the Canticle of Canticles, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the Book of Job, the Psalms, St. John, and the Epistles of St. Paul.

He knew very well the Old and New Testament so much that for each of the theological truths that he had to prove, he had a suitable text ready to serve as proof.

If the excelling Angelic Doctor was able to reach the highest peaks of theological science, it is due in good part to his attachment to and profound knowledge of the Holy Bible.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Today I shall talk to someone about the beauty of the Bible, and I shall try to make him want to read it.

CANTICLE OF THE THREE YOUNG MEN [#]

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord,  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Angels of the Lord, bless the Lord,  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 You heavens, bless the Lord,  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 All you waters above the heavens,  
 bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 All you hosts of the Lord, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Sun and moon, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Stars of heaven, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Every shower and dew, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 All you winds, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Fire and heat, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Cold and chill, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Dew and rain, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Frost and chill, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Ice and snow, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Nights and days, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Light and darkness, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Lightnings and clouds, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Let the earth bless the Lord,  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Mountains and hills, bless the Lord;  
 praise and exalt him above all forever.

Everything growing from the earth, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 You springs, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Seas and rivers, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 You dolphins and all water creatures, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 All you birds of the air, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 You sons of men, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 O Israel, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Priests of the Lord, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Servants of the Lord, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Spirits and souls of the just, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Holy men of humble heart, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael, bless the Lord;  
     praise and exalt him above all forever.  
 For he has delivered us from the nether world,  
     and saved us from the power of death;  
 He has freed us from the raging flame  
     and delivered us from the fire.  
 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
     for his mercy endures forever.  
 Bless the God of gods, all you who fear the Lord;  
     praise him and give him thanks,  
     because his mercy endures forever. *(Dn 3:57-90)*

## READING

### The benefits of wisdom

For those who keep the holy precepts hallowed shall be found holy, and those learned in them will have ready a response. Desire therefore my words; long for them and you shall be instructed. Re-

splendent and unfading is Wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her.

**55** She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of men's desire; he who watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed, for he shall find her sitting by his gate. For taking thought of her is the perfection of prudence, and he who for her sake keeps vigil shall quickly be free from care; Because she makes her own rounds, seeking those worthy of her, and graciously appears to them in the ways, and meets them with all solicitude.

For the first step toward discipline is a very earnest desire for her; then, care for discipline is love of her; love means the keeping of her laws; To observe her laws is the basis for incorruptibility; and incorruptibility makes one close to God; thus the desire for Wisdom leads up to a kingdom.

If, then, you find pleasure in throne and scepter, you princes of the peoples, honor Wisdom, that you may reign as kings forever.

Now what wisdom is, and how she came to be I shall relate; and I shall hide no secrets from you, But from the very beginning I shall search out and bring to light knowledge of her, nor shall I diverge from the truth. Neither shall I admit consuming jealousy to my company, because that can have no fellowship with Wisdom. A great number of wise men is the safety of the world, and a prudent king, the stability of his people; so take instruction from my words, to your profit.

*(Wis 6:10-25)*

### JEREMIAH'S PRAYER

Remember me, LORD, visit me, and avenge me on my persecutors. Because of your long-suffering banish me not; know that for you I have borne insult. When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart, Because I bore your name, O LORD, God of hosts. I did not sit celebrating in the circle of merry-makers; Under the weight of your hand I sat alone because you filled me with indignation. Why is my pain continuous, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? You have indeed become for me a treacherous brook, whose waters do not abide!

*(Jer 15:15-18)*

**56** [Blank page]



## THE BIBLE AND MORAL THEOLOGY

### EZRA

He belonged to the tribe of Levi, descending from the family of the first priest, Aaron. He was with the Jews who remained in Persia after the edict of Cyrus in 536.

He went for the first time to his country in 445 with Nehemia and read the law of Moses before all the people gathered together. Then he returned to the land of exile to lead other Jews back to Palestine. In fact, in 398 he obtained from King Artaxerxes a decree that granted freedom to anyone to go to Jerusalem. Not only that, but the king allowed him to gather offerings and to ask the treasurers whatever he needed.

Many Jews, numbering 260, joined him. Upon reaching Jerusalem, he dedicated himself to the moral reformation of the people, completing what Nehemia had already done before him.

Desolate because of the harm caused by mixed marriages, he prohibited marrying foreign women and sought to lead back the people to the Law of the Lord.

The two books of the Paralipomenon<sup>1</sup> and the two books that bear his name are attributed to him.

### THE BOOKS OF THE PARALIPOMENA

The Books of the Paralipomena, Chronicles in Hebrew, start from the time of Adam to the edict of Cyrus and they can be divided into three distinct parts.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Paralipomena* are *1/2Chronicles*. These two books of the OT that follow the two books of Kings (III/IV Kgs, according to *LS*) correspond to the Hebrew title "Facts or words of the days." For the Jews, they formed a single book that occupies the last place in their canon. In the Greek translation of the LXX and the Latin translation by Jerome, the *Chronicles* were called *Paralipomena*, a term that means "what was omitted in the [preceding] tradition." The complete title given by Jerome was: "Chronicle of all sacred history" and it indicates with relative precision the content of the book.

The *first part*, after having presented the genealogies from Adam to Jacob, of Judah, David, and all the tribes, except Zabulon and Dan, speaks of the ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem and ends with the exposition of Saul's genealogy.

The *second part* speaks of David, aiming at his relationships with Jerusalem, the liturgy, and the temple, and follows him until his death.

The *third part* talks about Solomon and his glory, especially of the temple. It moves on to speak about the schism and the time of struggle between the two kingdoms, then of the period of alliance between Israel and Judah; finally, it speaks of the kings of Judah from Johas to Hezekiah and from Hezekiah to the exile.

The Paralipomena are not an appendix to the books of Kings, but a distinct work, which has as its purpose to expose, exclusively from the religious point of view, the story of David and of his descendants; to show that faithfulness to God is a source of happiness, while unfaithfulness and idolatry destroy kingdoms.

Most say that they have been written by Ezra, who also is the author of the two books that bear his name.

## THE BOOKS OF EZRA <sup>2</sup>

They speak of the civil and religious restoration of Israel in Palestine, after the exile in Babylon, and embrace the historical period from the edict of Cyrus to the last years of Ezra and has some addition that reaches the time of Alexander the Great.<sup>3</sup> In a fragmentary form, they speak of the return from exile, of the rebuilding of the temple and of the walls of Jerusalem, and of the civil and religious reforms accomplished by Nehemiah and Ezra.

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<sup>2</sup> On the attribution of the two books of Ezra, see note 9 on page. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.), son of Philip, King of Macedon and disciple of Aristotle, was the conqueror and organizer of an empire that extended from the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea (Greece and Egypt) up to India (cf. 1Mc 1:1-9; 6:2) establishing what was called the "Hellenic civilization." Some passages of Daniel's prophecies probably refer to him and to his kingdom (cf. Dn 2:40-41; 7:7; 11:3-4). The historiography that has seen in Hellenism the age of "conversion" to the Jewish-Christian religion has also included therein the Latin culture and philosophy of the first centuries of the Christian era.

The *first book* speaks about the repatriation of the Jews guided by Zerubbabel, of the rebuilding of the walls, of the temple, and of the reforms of Ezra who goes to Jerusalem with another big group.

The *second book* talks about the return of Nehemiah and of his work done in Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the walls.

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This is the order of the events as narrated in the two books, but the chronological order is different. Nehemiah would have returned first and Ezra would have completed his work.

## REFLECTION V

### The Bible and Moral Theology<sup>4</sup>

*“In your kindness give me life,  
to keep the decrees you have spoken.”*  
(Ps 118/119:88)

#### *What is Moral Theology?*

Moral Theology is the science that guides human actions according to the law of God, so that man may achieve his goal, which is eternal life.

In other words, we can say that Moral Theology is a vast explanation of the second part of the Catechism that goes under the name of *Commandments and precepts*.

As the Catechism shows in the first part the principal truths every Christian has to believe and, in the second part, the law to observe in view of achieving life eternal, so does Theology: Dogmatics deals with truths to be believed, Moral Theology instead with laws to be observed.

Moral Theology tells us:

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<sup>4</sup> *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* sheds light on this theme: “The Bible closely unites to the narratives of the history of salvation numerous instructions on how to behave: commandments, prohibitions, juridical prescriptions, exhortations and prophetic invectives, advices of the wise. One of the tasks of exegesis is to clarify the scope of this abundant material and thus to prepare the work of moral theologians.” (no. 39)

- 60 1<sup>st</sup>. *Who the lawgiver is*, that is, who makes and promulgates the law;  
 2<sup>nd</sup>. *In what this law consists*;  
 3<sup>rd</sup>. *Shows the sanctions*, that is, the rewards for him who observes the laws or the penalties for him who violates them.

The purpose then of Moral Theology is to let men know the divine will so that in doing it, they may be saved.

It tells us that there are two roads that lead to Heaven: the *narrow* road of the Commandments, and the *very narrow* road of the evangelical counsels.<sup>5</sup>

Moral Theology, like Dogmatic Theology, draws its sublime teachings from the Bible. It is there that greater part of moral laws have their foundation and principle.

We can very well construct the entire Moral Theology on the Bible. In fact the Bible tells us that the lawgiver is God; and that He, being the Creator and absolute master of everything, has the full right to command. Furthermore, it shows us God's Commandments and gives us the motive and reason why they are to be observed. Finally, it promises blessings to him who observes them and threatens with maledictions and punishments him who violates them.

First of all: the Bible gives us a lofty and sublime idea of God; it describes Him for us as Creator and Father of all things, as lawgiver and ruler of the Universe; to be convinced about this, it suffices to read the first chapters of Genesis. "*Audi, Israel, Dominus Deus tuus...*": Hear, O Israel,<sup>6</sup> because your God speaks to you."

At the beginning of the Commandments, we say: "I am the Lord, your God": a magnificent preamble, with which the Lord

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<sup>5</sup> These "counsels" are the three religious vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, as will be said on p. 153.

<sup>6</sup> Here reference is made to the *Shema Israel* ("Hear, Israel"), the prayer that makes up the profession of the Hebrew faith. It is made up of three Biblical passages (Dt 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Nm 15:37-41) that proclaim the unity of God, the commandment to love him above all things, the meditation of his laws and the observance of the prescriptions of the phylacteries (*tefillim*), of *mezuzah* (biblical passage placed in a pouch and fixed at the door beams) and of the seams of clothes, as "memorials" of the will of God. The *Shema* is recited everyday, morning and evening, and its first verse is said even by the dying.

wants to tell us: It is your | God, your Creator who speaks to you; it is I, your Lord, who orders to you what is contained in the Ten Commandments: listen to them and observe them.

61

Furthermore, the Bible shows us the law, and it is for this that very often the sacred Book is simply called “the Law.”

In Exodus, Chapter 20, we find manifested that Decalogue that God gave to Moses amidst thunder and lightning: “I, the LORD, am your God... You shall not have other gods besides me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God... You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain. For the LORD will not leave unpunished him who takes his name in vain. Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave... Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you... You shall not kill... You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him.” (Ex 20:2-17)

This is the exposition of the Ten Commandments, that is, the Law properly called, but then Holy Scripture has countless comments, recommendations of this law, and we can say that the rest of the Bible is a development | and application of them. It is enough to open it randomly to be quickly convinced of it.

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About a third of the verses of the Psalms speak about or recommends the Holy Law of God; and Psalm 118,<sup>7</sup> which is the longest, is entirely a praise, a recommendation of the divine Law. Only one verse does not speak of the Law, all the other 175 expressly mention it.

It is unfortunate that many do not give to God’s Law all the importance it deserves! They perhaps observe, scrupulously, all

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<sup>7</sup> It is now Ps 119.

the human laws for fear of a very small fine. Little importance, however, is given to God's law! Why so? Because of ignorance, or lack of reverence, or lack of love.

On the contrary, he who reads the Bible acquires such a lofty and sublime idea of the divine law, and sees such beauty therein that he desires ever more strongly to know it better, and goes seeking and listening to all that may be of use to him to illustrate and comment on it.

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In the Bible are shown not only God's Commandments, but also the reason and foundation of all the precepts of the Church.

63 One day, the Divine Master, calling to himself St. Peter, asked him: "Peter, do you love me?" For three times Jesus asks him this question, and after the three-fold expression of love by the Apostle, he tells him: "*Pasce agnos meos, pasce oves meas*" (Jn 21:17);<sup>8</sup> and, according to the Council of Trent, the office of shepherding belongs to the Bishops and the Church and constitutes the so-called *power to govern spiritually*. And he conferred on Peter and in him to all his legitimate | successors *legislative, executive and judiciary power*.

Hence, the power the Church has to issue precepts and that of making them be observed, has further its explanation and foundation in Holy Scripture.

The holy precepts of the Church are like an emanation or conclusion of God's Commandments. One or the other, however, arises from Sacred Scripture:

There are five precepts of the Church:

1. To hear Mass on Sundays and holidays of obligation.
2. Not to eat meat on Fridays and on prohibited days, and to fast during the prescribed days.
3. To go to Confession at least once a year and to receive Communion at least on Easter.
4. To support the needs of the Church, contributing according to laws and customs.
5. Not to solemnly celebrate weddings during prohibited days.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Jn 21:15-17: "Feed my lambs... feed my sheep..."

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Thirdly, the Bible, as Moral Theology does, tells us the sanctions of the divine law.

Most recent is a book of about 200 pages wherein are gathered, in the first part, all the promises of blessings contained in the Bible given to him who observes the law of God and the Church. In the second part, on the other hand, are shown all the punishments and threats that the Lord makes to transgressors of his law.

To convince ourselves of this, let us open the Bible and let us read chapter 28 of Deuteronomy: “Thus, then, shall it be: if you continue to heed the voice of the LORD, your God, and are careful to observe all his commandments which I enjoin on you today, the LORD, | your God, will raise you high above all the nations of the earth. When you hearken to the voice of the LORD, your God, all these blessings will come upon you and overwhelm you. May you be blessed in the city, and blessed in the country! Blessed be the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soil and the offspring of your livestock, the issue of your herds and the young of your flocks! ... But if you do not hearken to the voice of the LORD, your God, and are not careful to observe all his commandments which I enjoin on you today, all these curses shall come upon you and overwhelm you: May you be cursed in the city, and cursed in the country! Cursed be your grain bin and your kneading bowl! Cursed be the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soil and the offspring of your livestock, the issue of your herds and the young of your flocks! May you be cursed in your coming in, and cursed in your going out!”<sup>9</sup>

64

Certain sins, it is true, are hidden from the eyes of men, but they are not before God. Meanwhile, many families are displaced due to the fact that they do not observe the holy law of God. The reason given is this or that but the true cause is that God’s law has not been observed.

Instead, among families where the Commandments of God and of the Church are respected and observed, peace and prosperity envied by the impious reign.

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<sup>9</sup> Dt 28:1-4,15-19.

Oh, let us heartily ask the Lord's forgiveness for having so many times forgotten and transgressed his Holy Law! And let us detest our foolishness.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Cyprian*. – He lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, during the time of persecutions; he was a courageous Bishop of Carthage and a Martyr.

65 His biography says that he had undertaken the study of the writings of Tertullian, especially "The Apologetics"; however | Tertullian was not his only teacher, nor the principal one. It is from the Scriptures above all that he drew his lessons. To make his studies of the Scriptures more fruitful, he used to write the most characteristic passages, especially those regarding the defense of the Church and the practice of Christian duties. And when his friend Quirinius, a rich recently converted Christian of Carthage, asks the Bishop something written to complete his instruction, for him Cyprian groups together and coordinates those Biblical quotes into chapters and books, according to a logical and well-conceived plan.

That little work, a simple collection of texts, is very precious for the history of the Latin Bible. It became the Christian's manual, popular for a long time in Christian Africa.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – I shall recite the *Miserere* in reparation for transgressions and neglect of the Law of God.

#### CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH [#]

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
 for he has visited and brought redemption to his people.  
 He has raised up a horn for our salvation  
 within the house of David his servant,  
 even as he promised  
 through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old:  
 salvation from our enemies  
 and from the hand of all who hate us,  
 to show mercy to our fathers  
 and to be mindful of his holy covenant  
 and of the oath he swore to Abraham our father,  
 and to grant us that, rescued from the hand of enemies,



without fear we might worship him  
 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
 And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High,  
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
 to give his people knowledge of salvation  
 through the forgiveness of their sins,  
 because of the tender mercy of our God  
 by which the daybreak from on high will visit us  
 to shine on those who sit in darkness  
 and death's shadow,  
 to guide our feet into the path of peace. (Lk 1:68-79)<sup>10</sup>

## READING

66

### Charity, the center of morals

Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. Bless those who persecute (you), bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.

Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Rather, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."

Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.  
(Rom 12:9-21)

## PRAYER

### Blessed may you be, O Lord

Blessed may you be, O LORD, God of Israel our father, from eternity to eternity. Yours, O LORD, are grandeur and power, majesty,

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<sup>10</sup> LS shows "Luca 1, 68-80," (Lk 1:68-80) but the passage quoted ends with verse 79.

splendor, and glory. For all in heaven and on earth is yours; yours, O LORD, is the sovereignty; you are exalted as head over all. Riches and honor are from you, and you have dominion over all. In your hand are power and might; it is yours to give grandeur and strength to all.

Therefore, our God, we give you thanks and we praise the majesty of your name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should have the means to contribute so freely?

**67**

For everything is from you, and we only give you what we have received from you. For we stand before you as aliens: we are only your guests, like all our fathers. Our life on earth is like a shadow that does not abide. O LORD our God, all this wealth that we have brought together to build you a house in honor of your holy name comes from you and is entirely yours. I know, O my God, that you put hearts to the test and that you take pleasure in uprightness. With a sincere heart I have willingly given all these things, and now with joy I have seen your people here present also giving to you generously. O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep such thoughts in the hearts and minds of your people forever, and direct their hearts toward you.

*(1Chr 29:10-18)*

## THE BIBLE AND THE ECCLESIASTICAL STATE

### THE BOOK OF TOBIT

It is a jewel of art and of refinement.

The thesis advanced is that divine Providence, if it tries the just, never abandons them, but makes them happy even in this life.

After describing the misadventure of Tobit (poor and blind) and of Sarah (insulted because she had seven husbands killed by the devil), the book shows divine Providence that sends the Archangel Raphael to guide Tobit's son<sup>1</sup> as he goes to Media to collect ten talents from a certain Gabael. The Archangel frees Tobit's son from the fish, Sarah from the devil, and makes her the bride of Tobit's son; finally, after returning from Media, he restores Tobit's sight

According to most, the book was written by Tobit himself, in the VII century before Christ.

### REFLECTION VI

#### The Bible and the ecclesiastical state

*“With all my heart I seek you;  
do not let me stray from your commands.”*  
(Ps 118/119:10)

Many read the Holy Bible, but few are those who know how to read it well. It is necessary, especially for those called to priesthood, to know how to draw and learn from such reading the teachings of the five Theologies: dogmatic, moral, pastoral, ascetic and mystical, with each of them being founded on the divine book.

The young man who reads the Bible with such an intention shall see ahead of him boundless horizons. His mind shall un-

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<sup>1</sup> Tobiah, son of Tobit, has the same name as his father.

derstand the motive and divine beauty of so many truths that later he shall have to study and hear explained. A mysterious light shall continually brighten his intelligence and shall guide him through the mysterious ways of divine science.

His will, encouraged by the example of holy men told by the Bible, shall acquire tenacity and courage in the practice of Christian morals. And his heart shall see opened before it infinite ways and thus he will be able to give vent to his love for God and neighbor.

\* \* \*

70 In the preceding days we have reflected on the Bible in relation to Dogmatic and Moral Theology. Today would remain meditation on the Bible and Pastoral Theology.

*What is Pastoral Theology?*

St. Gregory the Great defines Pastoral Theology as: “*Ars artium, regimen animarum*”: that is, the art of saving souls. It is the art of pasturing souls well and of leading them to heaven.

In order to understand well this definition, we would need to hear from Jesus’ lips themselves the divine saying: “I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” (Jn 10:11)

Even in this art, Jesus is the model, the Teacher. We need to imitate him. But we cannot imitate the examples of a teacher if we do not know him. Hence, it is necessary that the shepherd of souls and those called to such a work should open the holy Gospel and read it.

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Today<sup>2</sup> the practice of pastoral life is on the way of a very particular development. Proof of this are the numerous translations of the wonderful book of St. Gregory the Great: *Regole*

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<sup>2</sup> Reread the invitation on page 18 to consider the books that *today* are printed in the world (pp. 32, 45, 48, 53...). The *today* is usually referred to the reading of the Scriptures. In the *Pastoral Note* of the CEI (1995) we read: “*Today* is the time of the “great hunger” for the Word of the Lord... Also *today*, while we are invited to intensely get committed to the “new evangelization, it is God himself who, through the sacred book, evangelizes his people, speaks to their heart as a father to his children” (no. 25). In *LS*, on p. 78, it is lamented that “men of *today*” esteem natural sciences more, useful for the present life and not for the future.

*pastorali*,<sup>3</sup> (*Pastoral Rules*) written by the Supreme Pontiff for the formation of a holy clergy.

What a consoling development the work of catechization and instruction, especially of the young, is having today! The works of charity, beneficence, good and pastoral press, etc.

As we know, the soul of all these activities that have as goal the sanctification of souls, ought to be the Priest. He is the true established shepherd.

The Priest, for his souls, must be: *pulpit, altar, and confessional*.

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1<sup>st</sup>. *He must be a pulpit*: that is, he must enlighten, instruct his sheep with the word, written if necessary. Not only that, but after the example of Jesus Christ, he has to be a living pulpit, that is, through his holy life, continually preach, admonish, push to good the souls that follow him.

2<sup>nd</sup>. *He must be a confessional*. The priest must know how to go and look for the lost sheep, free it from the thorns in which it is entangled and bring it to safety. He must know how to attract sinners, let himself be loved by children to be able to handle them in their innocence and keep them always pure as lilies.

It is the art of the priest to know how to be small among the small, poor among the poor, to deal with adults, with the dying, with sinners of all sorts. He, in a word, has to be all to everyone, as was Jesus Master, in order to save them all.

3<sup>rd</sup>. *He must be an altar*: the good shepherd of souls, furthermore, must not only teach virtue and show it to souls, but must also communicate the grace and the strength to truly practice it. It is on the altar that he puts himself as mysterious channel between God and souls and obtains for them every grace and heavenly blessing.

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<sup>3</sup> The title is *Regula pastoralis*. In this *Regula*, divided into 4 parts, Gregory sheds light on the loftiness of the Episcopal dignity; he underlines the virtues of the pastor; traces the manner with which to educate the different categories of the faithful and finally exhorts the bishop to continuous personal renewal, in order to make his word more incisive and effective. The *Regula pastoralis* enjoyed very great diffusion during the Middle Ages and even today is read with fruit by pastors of souls, becoming for them what the *Regula Benedicti* was for monks and religious in general.

It is true: the priest seems to be alone on the altar, and yet he is in intimate communication with God. He presents to God all his needs and those of souls; he offers for all the divine sacrifice.

72 In the Holy Mass, the priest offers in sacrifice | not only the divine victim, but also himself: his comforts, his interests, his ego.

This is the identity of the pastor of souls.

But from where do we know that such ought to be the priest's life? How can we say that this is the life of a very good shepherd of souls?

We know it from the Bible.

The Sacred Scriptures, in the succession of the various books, put before our eyes the marvelous examples of the first Patriarchs, placed as pastors and heads of the chosen people.

In the Book of Leviticus, we know of the important office of the tribe of Levi, chosen from among the twelve tribes of Israel, to exercise the office of divine worship; that is, one-twelfth of the Jewish people was dedicated exclusively to this important work. Then the Bible narrates to us examples of holy priests who are for all pastors of souls a stimulus to accomplish well their task.

The Priest, however, learns the *ars artium* especially from the New Testament. It is in those sacrosanct pages that he can contemplate the divine model, Jesus Christ; it is there that he sees him as all love and tenderness for the children. It is through the Gospel that we know the immense love of Jesus for sinners.

Anyone who wanted to write the best treatise of Pastoral Theology has but to take the Holy Gospel and comment on it. Thus, in fact, did St. Gregory the Great in his *Pastoral Rules*, which is nothing but a commentary, an explanation of some chapters of the books of the New Testament.

A book<sup>4</sup> was recently published where it is fully demonstrated that the New Testament, especially the Acts of the Apostles, is the best treatise of Pastoral Theology; stated in

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<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to establish to what book Don Alberione refers. One could examine the *Lecture Biblique (Bible Readings)* directed by Ferruccio Valente and published by SEI in 1928; *Il Divino Maestro [The Divine Master]*, Concordant text of the four Gospels, with notes, Pia Società San Paolo, Alba 1929 (pp. 330). There also was "*Via, Veritas et Vita,*" *Manuale di Catechismo*, Rome 1928, published by B. M. Maroni.

it | is that the life of apostolate of St. Paul is the most perfect model, after that of Jesus, for a pastor of souls. 73

Priests and clerics, open that sacred book. There you have your code, your rule of life. There you shall learn how to save souls. The Gospel is a magnificent compendium of Pastoral Theology.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Gregory the Great.* – He was named the Great for the number and importance of his works. St. Gregory was one of the greatest Popes the Church has ever had.

Knowing that he could not have served God completely living in the world, he put into practice the evangelical counsel of selling one's property and give its sales to the poor, in order to withdraw to the monastic life in the monastery of St. Andrew founded by him.

He embraced as his occupation prayer, penance, and the assiduous study of the Sacred Scriptures, from where he drew to write his marvelous works: proof of this are "*I Morali*" [*The Morals*] on the book of Job.<sup>5</sup> He is the doctor of Pastoral Theology.

From the chair of St. Peter to which he had been unanimously elevated, he recommended to Superiors of monasteries that they promote above all the study of the Holy Books. And to a courtesan of Constantinople whom he knew while he was the Emperor's Nuncio, he wrote: "I have a complaint against you, and it is that you, finding yourself busy with many occupations, neglect reading everyday the words of Him who has redeemed you; because what is Sacred Scripture if not a letter the omnipotent God has written to his creature? Certainly, if you received a letter from an emperor of this earth, you would not know how to find rest, and you would deprive yourself even of sleep, until you have read what he had written to you. Now, the emperor of Heaven, the Lord of men and Angels, has sent you his letters, where your life is concerned, and yet you neglect reading them. Seek to change your conduct and for the future, do not let any day | pass, wherein you do not read the words of your Creator and meditate on them." 74

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<sup>5</sup> The *Expositio in Iob*, which is also titled *Moralia in Iob*, was begun in Constantinople in the form of conversations addressed to confreres and continued in part *through dictation*. Eventually Gregory reworked everything.

Let us understand these words of the Saint as addressed to each of us and let us put into practice the advice of daily reading of Holy Scripture.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – I will recite three *Pater, Ave, Gloria* to Jesus Master in order that pastors of souls may be formed through the study of the Sacred Scriptures.

#### CANTICLE OF THE REDEEMED [#]

On that day, you will say:  
 “I give you thanks, O LORD;  
 though you have been angry with me,  
 your anger has abated, and you have consoled me.  
 God indeed is my savior;  
 I am confident and unafraid.  
 My strength and my courage is the LORD,  
 and he has been my savior.  
 With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation,  
 and say on that day: “Give thanks to the LORD, acclaim his name;  
 among the nations make known his deeds,  
 proclaim how exalted is his name.  
 Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement;  
 let this be known throughout all the earth.  
 Shout with exultation, O city of Zion,  
 for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!”

(*Is 12:1-6*)

#### READING

##### **Christians must obey their Priests and pray for them**

Obey your leaders and defer to them, for they keep watch over you and will have to give an account, that they may fulfill their task with joy and not with sorrow, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Pray for us, for we are confident that we have a clear conscience, wishing to act rightly in every respect. I especially ask for your prayers that I may be restored to you very soon.

May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, Jesus our



Lord, furnish you | with all that is good, that you may do his will. May he carry out in you what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever (and ever). Amen.

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(*Heb 13:17-21*)<sup>6</sup>

### SOLOMON'S PRAYER

LORD, God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven or on earth; you keep your covenant and show kindness to your servants who are wholeheartedly faithful to you. You have kept the promise you made to my father David, your servant. With your own mouth you spoke it, and by your own hand you have brought it to fulfillment this day. Now, therefore, LORD, God of Israel, keep the further promise you made to my father David, your servant, when you said, 'You shall always have someone from your line to sit before me on the throne of Israel, provided only that your descendants look to their conduct so as always to live according to my law, even as you have lived in my presence.' ... Can it indeed be that God dwells with mankind on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple which I have built! Look kindly on the prayer and petition of your servant, O LORD, my God, and listen to the cry of supplication your servant makes before you.

(*2Chr 6:14-17:19*)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *LS* reads "Ebr. III, 17-21," (*Heb 3:17-21*) but the quote refers to Ch. 13.

<sup>7</sup> In *LS* the quote is "III Re, III, 23 e seg." (*III Kgs 3:23* and ff), but even referring to the *Vulgate*, it seems mistaken.

## THE BIBLE AND ASCETIC THEOLOGY

### THE BOOK OF JUDITH

It tells of a historical event that took place when Mannaseh, King of Judah, was a prisoner in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar, after defeating the king of the Medes, subjugates Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and Arabia. All of them, terrified, surrender. Israel, however, incited by the High Priest Eliakim, attempts to resist. Holofernes, the general leading the Assyrians, besieges Bethulia and reduces it to the extreme, and the Bethulians decide to surrender.

A pious widow, Judith, goes with a maidservant to the Assyrian camp; brought to Holofernes and detained by him, she cuts his head and brings it to Bethulia. The besieged, after attacking the enemy that flees, loot the camp. Eliakim and the people celebrate Judith and establish a feast to memorialize the great victory.

This little book, overflowing with trust in God, shows that a repentant people is never abandoned by God: its heroine is Judith, who is to be admired as a beautiful example of virtue and fortitude, a type of the true strong woman, Mary Most Holy.

The author of the book is unknown.

### THE BOOK OF ESTHER

It is a historical book. The events concern the Jews left in Persia after the edict of Cyrus. We are in the years 485-465, during the reign of Xerxes I (Ahasuerus).

77 Here is the story: Xerxes during the third year of his reign repudiates Vashti, the queen, because she refuses to join a public banquet. In Vashti's place, he chooses Esther, foster daughter of Mordecai, who often visits to know how she fares and chances to discover and unmask a plot against the king. His act is recorded in the annals. Meanwhile, Haman becomes the prime minister and, hating the Jews, especially Mordecai who refuses to pros-

trate before him, resolves to exterminate the Jews. After getting the royal decree of extermination, he draws lots to set the date. The orders are given and the Jews begin to despair: Esther, urged by Mordecai, attempts to be received by the king. He receives her and invites her to dinner along with Haman, and repeats the invitation for the next day. Haman sets up a gibbet for Mordecai but Xerxes, who has read this man's deeds, commands him to honor him. At the banquet, Esther accuses Haman and Xerxes commands that Haman be hanged in the gibbet he prepared for Mordecai. Mordecai is then made prime minister and with a new decree obtained from the King nullifies that of Haman, wreaks tremendous vengeance on his enemies, and establishes the feast of Purim.

How noble is Esther's example who, after being raised in dignity, does not forget her persecuted brethren but intercedes for them and saves their lives!

The book is attributed by most to Mordecai himself. Of him we do not know more than what is written in the book itself.

## REFLECTION VII

### The Bible and Ascetic Theology

*"Had your teaching not been my delight,  
I would have perished in my affliction."  
(Ps 118/119:92)*

To finish the beautiful picture of Theology in relation to Holy Scripture, let us consider today the Bible and Ascetic Theology.

Ascetic Theology can be defined as: *the art of Christian perfection to be attained through ordinary and common ways.*

It is a science that unfortunately people esteem little. Today's persons give much value to and esteem much the natural sciences as, for example, mechanics, physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc., etc.; in a word, all the arts useful for the present life; and they think little that there is a much more important and noble art, that is the art of saving one's soul.

Ascetic Theology is a *sublime and divine science*; it has God as its author and its purpose is to guide souls to heaven.

Is there in the world a more beautiful and useful science than this, which teaches us how to save our souls? Oh, certainly not. This in fact is the principal task of man on this earth.

All of man's perfection lies in the love of God, and all sciences, if they do not lead to this, are vain. Now, Ascetic Theology has precisely this very noble aim, to lead the soul to love God above all things, through the *ordinary ways* of the Commandments and the Evangelical Counsels.

It is the task of Ascetic Theology to teach man how to uproot from his heart every vice and let all virtues bloom in it: to guide the soul to love God with tenderness, through the practice of its daily duties.

[Meaningful is the following testimony]

"I was allowed to have a Bible... This divine book that I had always loved much, even when I seemed to be an unbeliever, was now studied by me with more respect as never before. Little by little I became capable of meditating it more profoundly and to savor it ever better.

"Such a reading never gave me the least disposition to bigotry, that is, that badly understood devotion that makes one narrow-minded and fanatic. Instead, it taught me to love God and people, to long ever more for the kingdom of justice, and to abhor iniquity, while forgiving the wicked." (*Silvio Pellico*)<sup>1</sup>

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Souls who are most desirous of perfection, wanting to progress ever more in holiness, seek ascetical books that may teach them how to love the Lord more, how to obtain more merits for Heaven and how to save more souls. And many are the spiritual books aimed at this: all the works of St. Alphonsus, for example, are inspired for this; those of Fr. Alfonso Rodriguez,<sup>2</sup> of

<sup>1</sup> Italian patriot and writer, Silvio Pellico (Saluzzo 1789 - Turin 1854) is known above all for the story of his political imprisonment under the Austrian Empire, described in the book *Le mie prigioni*, which is considered a noble testimony of faith and of Christian forgiveness.

<sup>2</sup> Reference is to Alonso (not Alfonso) Rodriguez, a Spanish Jesuit, a writer of Ascetics (Valladolid 1538 - Seville 1616). For many years, he taught Moral Theology at the Monterrey College, then for thirty years he was the master of novices and rector of Montilla. The work that made him famous was the *Ejercicio de perfección y virtudes cristianas*, in three volumes, published in Seville in 1609. He was highly esteemed by many founders of religious institutes, among whom Don Alberione.

Alvarez,<sup>3</sup> of St. Ignatius, of St. Francis de Sales, etc. These are all names that will never be forgotten and their writings shall not pass away with the passing of time, but will last for as long as the Bible, inasmuch as they are nothing but a commentary of it, and they form with it like one thing.

Hence the relationship between Theology and the Bible is very close. Ascetics in fact draws all its very lofty truths from Holy Scripture; so much so that during the first centuries of the Church, the principal, if not the only book of Ascetics, was the Holy Gospel, and it is said that St. Serapius was converted after reading the Gospel and, leaving the world, withdrew to the desert with nothing but a linen cloth on his shoulders and in his hand the book of the Holy Gospels.

The monks of St. Pacomius, of St. Basil and of St. Benedict did not have any other book of ascetics except the Sacred Scriptures, and it was prescribed by their Rules that they read every day a passage of the Holy Gospel and of the Letters of the Apostles.

It is true that Ascetic Theology is commented, illustrated and bolstered by the entire Catholic Tradition, but its real source is, and shall always be, the Sacred Scriptures.

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Nonetheless, if I told you to take the Holy Bible as a textbook of Ascetics, I would err because we have to draw from the Bible the truths not in our own way, but according to the spirit and teaching of our infallible mother, the Church. Hence in order to understand and draw ascetical science from the Bible, we need to read first a treatise of ascetics, for example *La pratica di amar Gesù Cristo*,<sup>4</sup> *l'Imitazione di Cristo*,<sup>5</sup> *il Diario Spiri-*

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<sup>3</sup> Diego Álvarez de Paz (Toledo 1560 - Potosí 1620) was one of the principal authors of spirituality of the Society of Jesus. A missionary in Peru and a professor of Philosophy, Theology, and Sacred Scriptures, he owes his renown for his three volumes of Spiritual Theology: *De exterminatione mali et promotione boni* (1613), *De inquisitione pacis seu studio orationis* (1617), *De vita spirituali eiusque perfectione* (1618).

<sup>4</sup> *The practice of loving Jesus Christ*. It is a work by St. Alphonsus de' Liguori, written in 1768, "for the use of souls who desire to assure their eternal salvation and to walk in the paths to perfection," and considered by the saint as "the most devout and useful of all my works." It had at least 516 editions, cf. *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* I, p. 853.

<sup>5</sup> *De imitatione Christi*, [*The Imitation of Christ*] is a book attributed to Thomas a' Kempis (cf. note 5 on p. 226).

*tuale*,<sup>6</sup> *il Teotimo*<sup>7</sup> of St. Francis de Sales, and others like them, after the reading of which, if we move on to open the Bible, we shall find in it, in all their beauty, the truths read and learned from the book of spirituality.

God, the first teacher of Ascetics, in the letter he sent us, tells us very beautiful examples of ascetic persons and in many ways inculcates and excites us towards the acquisition of perfection.

How much good the beautiful examples of Abel, Joseph, Jacob, Esdra, Ruth, Judith, etc., do to our souls. All the Patriarchs and the Prophets of the O.T. are an example and an incitement for us to holiness.

The most salient and most beautiful passages of Ascetic Theology we, however, find in the N.T.: it is here that the life of our Divine Master Jesus, who is the most perfect model of ascetic life, is narrated for us in breadth and in depth. By reading especially the four Gospels, we come to know that his entire life was a continuous act of love for the Heavenly Father, so much so that he could rightly say: “...learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.” (Mt 11:29)

**81** We know how the Apostle Paul, after hearing the voice of Jesus, tried to imitate in everything his Divine Master, so much so that St. John Chrysostom did not hesitate to say that “the

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Diario spirituale. Scelta di detti e fatti di santi e di altre persone di singolare virtù* [*Spiritual Diary, A selection of sayings and facts by saints and other persons of singular virtue*]. Pia Società San Paolo, Roma-Alba 1927 (reprint Bari 1956-1957). The book was anonymously published in Naples in 1775; two centuries later the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (item *Journal spirituel*, Paris 1974), attributes its authorship to the Barnabite B. Canale, Milan 1749. – The saying of 1 January is by St. Francis de Sales: “Consider that your entire past is nothing and say with David: now I begin to love my God.”

<sup>7</sup> *Teotimo* or *Trattato dell'amor di Dio* [*Treatise on the love of God*], published in Lyon in 1616, can be considered as the masterpiece of the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales. Its principal sources are: the Bible, above all the Psalms, Job, Jeremiah, the Canticle of Canticles and the letters of St. Paul; St. Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Siena, Catherine of Genoa, Teresa of Avila. The aim is made clear in the preface: “I have not thought of any other than to simply and naturally represent the story of the birth, progress, decadence, operations, traits, advantages, and excellence of divine love... The purpose of the treatise is to help the devout soul, so that it can advance in its aim.” The treatise was written in a special manner for the Sisters of the Visitation and for souls of the contemplative life.

heart of Paul was the heart of Christ,” that is, the life of the Apostle was the same life of Jesus Christ. St. Paul himself, writing to the Corinthians, says, “Be imitators of me as I am of Jesus Christ.” (1Cor 4:16)

Oh, divine model of holiness and perfection! Yes, O Jesus, he who follows you and imitates you shall be a saint!

And now, we ought to say more in detail how the Sacred Scriptures are the source of the whole of Ascetic Theology,<sup>8\*</sup> how it is its spirit and soul, how it indicates to us the means and the rewards and how it makes us beware of so many enemies who block us in the path of goodness, etc. But how can all this be possible for me in so short a time? I invite you to do only one thing, that is, take the Holy Gospel and open it in Chapter 5 of St. Matthew and read the Sermon on the Mount given by Jesus. There, in those eight Beatitudes, you have the compendium of the entire Ascetic Theology; there you will find the foundation of all the spiritual books. The soul, thirsting for perfection, finds here the freshest and most limpid waters to quench its thirst.

In order to have a true and living Asceticism, not dead or limited only to reason and sentiment, one must, after reading the treatise, read the Sacred Scriptures. It is then that the most beautiful marble statue | acquires life and warmth that, in turn, are communicated to the soul.

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And now let us pray to the Lord so that he may guide those souls desirous of holiness to the true source of life, the Bible.

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<sup>8\*</sup> Pio VI writes to Msgr. Martini, a famous translator of the Holy Bible: “You think very excellently if you judge as something necessary that Christians be greatly stirred to read the Holy Gospel; because these are the most bountiful sources from where access for every believer must be open and easy, in order to draw from them holiness of morals and of doctrine.”

[Msgr. Antonio Martini (Prato 1720 - Florence 1809), graduated in Letters in Pisa, was archbishop of Florence. Upon invitation of Card. Vittorio Amedeo delle Lanze he dedicated himself to the Italian version and the commentary of the *Vulgata*, in conformity with the norm of Pope Benedict XIV (brief of 13 June 1757), according to which the translation of the Bible into modern language is allowed as long as it is equipped with notes drawn from the holy Fathers and from learned Catholic Authors. The Bible of Msgr. Martini (Naples 1771-1781) was approved through a papal brief of Pius VI dated 17 March 1778.]

EXAMPLE. – *St. Hilary of Poitiers*. – He is one of the champions of the Church who, with St. Athanasius and others, defended the Catholic Church from the serious danger of Arianism.<sup>9</sup>

Coming from a pagan family and educated as a pagan, not satisfied with the foolish ideals of paganism, he sincerely searched for the truth. “The more I reflected,” he writes, “the more I was persuaded that there cannot be but one God, eternal, omnipotent and unchanging. Now when such thoughts were in my mind, I happened to lay hold of the books of Moses and the Prophets.”

His mind was completely cleared; hence, with the reading of the New Testament, the Truth of the Christian Faith won over his heart and led him to join the Church. “The writings of the Evangelists,” he says, “and of the Apostles, and especially the beginning of St. John’s Gospel unveiled to me what I was looking for and much more than I would have dared to hope.”

Among his writings, there are many books on the Scriptures, like the commentary on St. Matthew, the Psalms, and the explanation of the personalities of the Old Testament in relation to the New.

The Church has honored him with the title of Doctor.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – “Among the praises of the merits and of the virtues of the glorious virgin Cecilia, we read that she carried with her, at all times, hidden in her bosom, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I advice you to do the same because, among the exercises of the spiritual life, I believe that this is what is most necessary for you, the most useful, and that can lead you to a higher degree of perfection.”

(*St. Bonaventure*)

#### CANTICLE OF HABAKKUK [#]

O LORD, I have heard your renown,  
and feared, O LORD, your work.  
In the course of the years revive it,

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<sup>9</sup> A heresy that denied the divinity of Jesus Christ as Son of God. It was condemned by the Council of Nicea in 325. Arius, a priest of Alexandria, died in the year 336; the Arian controversy, however, occupied a large part of the IV century and was crucial for the explicitation and development of the Christian doctrine.



in the course of the years make it known;  
in your wrath remember compassion!  
God comes from Teman,  
the Holy One from Mount Paran.  
Covered are the heavens with his glory,  
and with his praise the earth is filled.  
His splendor spreads like the light;  
rays shine forth from beside him,  
where his power is concealed.  
Before him goes pestilence,  
and the plague follows in his steps.  
He pauses to survey the earth;  
his look makes the nations tremble.  
The eternal mountains are shattered,  
the age-old hills bow low along his ancient ways.  
I see the tents of Cushan collapse;  
trembling are the pavilions of the land of Midian.  
Is your anger against the streams, O LORD?  
Is your wrath against the streams,  
your rage against the sea,  
That you drive the steeds of your victorious chariot?  
Bared and ready is your bow,  
filled with arrows is your quiver.  
Into streams you split the earth;  
at sight of you the mountains tremble.  
A torrent of rain descends;  
the ocean gives forth its roar.  
The sun forgets to rise,  
the moon remains in its shelter,  
At the light of your flying arrows,  
at the gleam of your flashing spear.  
In wrath you bestride the earth,  
in fury you trample the nations.  
You come forth to save your people,  
to save your anointed one.  
You crush the heads of the wicked,  
you lay bare their bases at the neck.  
You pierce with your shafts the heads of their princes  
whose boast would be of devouring the wretched in their lair.  
You tread the sea with your steeds  
amid the churning of the deep waters.  
I hear, and my body trembles;  
at the sound, my lips quiver.

Decay invades my bones,  
 my legs tremble beneath me.  
 I await the day of distress  
 that will come upon the people who attack us.  
 For though the fig tree blossom not  
 nor fruit be on the vines,  
 Though the yield of the olive fail  
 and the terraces produce no nourishment,  
 Though the flocks disappear from the fold  
 and there be no herd in the stalls,  
 Yet will I rejoice in the LORD  
 and exult in my saving God.  
 GOD, my Lord, is my strength;  
 he makes my feet swift as those of hinds  
 and enables me to go upon the heights.

*(Hb 3:2-19)*

## 84

## READING

### The greatest of the Commandments

One of the scribes, when he came forward and heard them disputing and saw how well he had answered them, asked him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"

Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than this."

The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, 'He is One and there is no other than he.' And 'to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself' is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

*(Mk 12:28-34)*

### EZRA'S PRAYER

My God, I am too ashamed and confounded to raise my face to you, O my God, for our wicked deeds are heaped up above our heads and our guilt reaches up to heaven.

From the time of our fathers even to this day, great has been our guilt, and for our wicked deeds we have been delivered over, we and our kings and our priests, to the will of the kings of foreign lands, to the sword, to captivity, to pillage, and to disgrace, as is the case today. And now, but a short time ago, mercy came to us from the LORD, our God, who left us a remnant and gave us a stake in his holy place; thus our God has brightened our eyes and given us relief in our servitude. For slaves we are, but in our servitude our God has not abandoned us; rather, he has turned | the good will of the kings of Persia toward us. Thus he has given us new life to raise again the house of our God and restore its ruins, and has granted us a fence in Judah and Jerusalem.

*(Ezr 9:6-9)*

## THE BIBLE AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

### THE BOOK OF JOB

It is a marvelous poem, written during the golden age of Jewish literature, probably during the time of Solomon.

The book introduces to us the very pious Job, stricken by the most tremendous misfortunes and visited by three friends, who upon seeing him, turn mute out of dismay. The painful silence is broken by the anguished cry of Job, a cry that his friends understood as blasphemy, and which gives occasion to the most difficult question of pain. His friends tell Job that his misfortunes are well deserved because of his sins. Job declares himself innocent and, not believed and insulted by his friends, he appeals to God.

His friends speak three times, always with the same order, but for the last time, the second stammers and the third remains mute.

With his friends reduced to silence, Job declares himself innocent and says that his punishment is not proportionate to his sins. At this point, a third person intervenes: Eliu, who reveals the purpose of pain and exalts divine wisdom. Finally, God intervenes to reveal the audacity of men in wanting to investigate the designs of God.

As one can see, this book attempts to resolve, with a concrete event, one of the most difficult questions: how come the just man is at times oppressed by evil. The teaching that comes from the book is that pain does not only make one expiate for the sins he committed, but purifies and renders one virtuous and that man, instead of being curious about the ways of Divine Providence, must submit himself, thinking that God does everything with wisdom, justice and goodness.

### The Bible and Mystical Theology

*“How I love your teaching, Lord! I study it all day long.”*  
(Sal 118/119:97)

Just like Dogmatic, Moral, Ascetic, and Pastoral Theology, also Mystical Theology draws from the Bible.

WHAT IS MYSTICAL THEOLOGY? *It is that part of Sacred Theology that concerns the union of the soul with God, achieved through extraordinary paths; hence its purpose shall be to teach and guide the souls to the highest perfection.*<sup>1</sup>

It is a sublime and difficult science that few souls know and practice. In spite of this, it has its own foundation and its clear and secure principles, inasmuch as it makes as its base the Bible and Tradition, both secure and infallible sources.

Material for mystical theology are those extraordinary things that we read in the life of certain Saints, like ecstasies, apparitions, revelations, stigmata, bilocations and other mystical phenomena.

The life of Blessed Gemma Galgani<sup>2</sup> is entirely a mystical life. This young virgin from Lucca reached the point of spiritual espousals which is the highest level of Mysticism. She knew things | hidden and those to happen. She bore in her hands and feet the sacred Stigmata and it is said that her angel often appeared and conversed with her.

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Souls that enjoy such supernatural gifts have nothing to boast about since these are entirely gratuitous graces that the Lord generally concedes for the edification of all, according to the teachings of St. Paul: "To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for *some benefit*." (1Cor 12:7)

The Lord gives these gifts to whom he wants and how he wants: "*Spiritus... dividens singulis prout vult.*" (1Cor 12:11) Hence one, to whom such gifts are given, has nothing to boast about as he has freely received them from the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> For Don Alberione, asceticism and mysticism are the intrinsic sources of the apostolate inasmuch as they are expressions of authentic Christian and Pauline spirituality: "Our devotion and incorporation to Christ is the beginning and the end and the substance itself of our supernatural life: here lies asceticism and mysticism" (*Carissimi in San Paolo*, p. 1379; cf. *Donec formetur Christus in vobis*, no. 95).

<sup>2</sup> She is the first mystic and stigmatized woman of the XX century, who, from the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, drew her unmistakable physiognomy as "victim" and "spouse of a crucified king." Born near Lucca on 12 March 1878 and died there on 11 April 1903, she was canonized by Pius XII on 2 May 1940. At the publication of *LS* (1933), she was "blessed."

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The relationships that pass between Mystical Theology and Sacred Scriptures are very close. In fact, the action of the hagiographers who write under the inspiration and assistance of the Holy Spirit, belongs to Mysticism.

Who is he who with but natural enlightenment could have predicted, hundreds and hundreds of years earlier, the smallest details of the Redeemer's life as Isaiah did? Who can say with conviction, upon reading the Gospel and the Apocalypse of St. John, that such books were written by a simple man, without divine intervention? Certainly, no one, because all men put together could not have been able to understand and much less describe the most sublime things contained therein.

89 The entire Sacred Scriptures came about through a mystical gift.<sup>3</sup> Very many truths contained in them were miraculously known | by the hagiographers, or seeing them in visions as St. John saw them or hearing them directly from God as Moses.

Hence, mystical science is not something uncertain or abstract, but is a true and certain science and the most beautiful proof of it is the Holy Bible, written entirely through divine inspiration.

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Another reason for which it was said that there is a very close relationship between Mystical Theology and Sacred Scriptures is that the entire mystical science is drawn from the Sacred Scriptures. In fact, there are certain books like David's Psalter and the Prophets that contain sublime prayers that raise the soul up to God and lead her into the most intimate communion with the Holy Trinity.

The very beautiful short poem, the Song of Songs is even called the *Canticle of Mystics*. It is an intimate dialog between the soul in love and the Heavenly Spouse. It has the purpose of bringing the soul up to the Most High, until the highest level of Mysticism which is the espousal of the soul in love with Jesus Christ.

It was the favorite book of all mystical souls, first among them the Most Blessed Virgin, who read it who knows with

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<sup>3</sup> The Bible is from God; one receives it as a mystical gift.

what delight and understanding! It was also the favorite book of St. Paul, who so assimilated the very lofty message of the Song of Songs that his fourteen letters in turn constitute other tracts of Mystical Theology and inexhaustible sources to which all souls thirsting for the love of God have recourse.

St. Paul is the great teacher of Mystical Theology, not only because he left us the precious treasure of his letters, but because he himself gave us | examples of a very high level of union with God.

90

Mysticism therefore is not a human science that man may understand with only the light of reason, but it is a divine and supernatural science; it stands between heaven and earth; hence it is superior to all human sciences not only as to its origin but also as to its substance.

From where did the Holy Fathers and the Doctors of Mysticism draw their teachings if not from the Bible?

I ought to tell you, O souls thirsty for divine love, to read the books of St. Francis de Sales, of St. Alphonsus, of St. Bernard, and of St. John of the Cross, called the doctor of Mysticism; but what are these books with respect to the Bible? They are nothing but rivulets that flow from the Bible.

Take and read the Bible: there you shall find the living water that shall quench your burning thirst; you will find there the way to love above all things your Heavenly Spouse; you shall find there even the conversations to carry on with Him. In a word, your souls shall find there the way to appease itself completely.<sup>4\*</sup>

It is now about three years that Fr. Vitti, S.J., has started publishing in *Civiltà Cattolica* a series of articles about the Mystical Theology of St. Paul, with the purpose of leading

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<sup>4\*</sup> “Imagine any sentiment of perfection: it is found in the Gospel; let the desires of the purest soul go over personal passions, until the highest ideal of moral good; they will not go beyond the region of the Gospel.” (*Alessandro Manzoni*)

[Poor of exterior incidents, the life of Alessandro Manzoni (Milan 1785-1873) is all collected in an interior story of research, study and profound religiosity. Having grown in an environment of illuministic culture, he went back to the faith in 1810. A brotherly friend of Antonio Rosmini, he shared his spirituality and the same political-social vision. Author of the *Promessi sposi* (1821-1873) and of *Osservazioni sulla Morale Cattolica*, he thought of a cycle of “Sacred Hymns,” inspired after the principal festivities of the liturgical year.]

91 souls to the true fountain of Mysticism, that is, the Sacred Scriptures, and in Paul to show | to souls one of the most beautiful examples of mystical union.

This learned Jesuit writes in the 17 October 1931 issue: “He who wants to enjoy St. Paul must look at him in his intimate union with the Heart of Jesus Christ, in a divine ardor of charity; he must try to perceive the harmony that his humanity, almost not felt anymore, pours out upon contact, the most intimate possible, with the ineffable beauty of divinity. It is only then that the sublimity of the concepts of the doctrine of the Apostle will be reached and their abyss fathomed.”

Indeed, whoever desires to raise himself in mystical science, let him contemplate such examples, let him go to the inexhaustible fountain, the Bible, as all the mystical souls did.

The angelic St. Thomas Aquinas knew so well the Song of Songs that during one of the last nights of his life, feeling more than ever ardent in his love for God, he dictated the entire commentary of said book. The death of this excelling teacher was but a passage from this miserable earth to Heaven.

Thus it shall be for him who habitually reads the Bible. The assiduous reader of Sacred Scripture shall burn with love for God and neighbor so much that death for him shall be a decisive passage to Heaven, which consists essentially in love. The soul in love shall certainly be admitted into intimate union with the Spouse Jesus.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Bonaventure.* – In the numerous array of Doctors of the Church, St. Bonaventure, the intimate friend of St. Thomas Aquinas and one of the first disciples of St. Francis, shines with a special light.

92 Desirous of perfection, he joined very young the Franciscan Order and there learned from his Father, Francis, besides love for the Eucharist and the Blessed Virgin, love for Holy | Scripture, which he made the foundation not only of all his studies, but also of his spiritual self-perfecting.

From there he learned not to be lazy in the path of goodness, but courageous and magnanimous, and to undertake, in the name of God, the most grandiose works, like the struggle against one’s own ego.



The example of the young David who, in the name of God, goes against the giant Goliath and wins over him, that of Judith and of many others, were for Bonaventure very strong motives to hurl himself against all enemies. He not only succeeded in dominating perfectly his passions, but went up so high in sanctity that he is called the Seraphic Doctor, as if he were a new Seraphim.

The heart of this most worthy son of St. Francis was by now overflowing with every virtue, and he felt the need to give vent to his feelings. Thus the saint used to go up the pulpit with his face flaming with love and he spoke for hours, without ever tiring his listeners.

The number of listeners, however, was too small for Bonaventure and he was never satisfied although they were such a crowd. He wanted to speak to all men, he wanted to save all because he had read in the Holy Gospel: "Go preach the Gospel to all creatures." So what does Bonaventure do? He takes hold of the pen and writes. His writings are truly Seraphic.

Aside from numerous exegetical works, like the commentary on Ecclesiastes, on Wisdom, on the Gospel of St. Luke and St. John, he left us as well 79 conferences held on the Gospel. His principal work, however, was "*Itinerarium mentis ad Deum*": it is here that the Saint reveals himself very high in Mystical Theology, of which he is one of the principal Doctors.

From where did he draw such wisdom, we know directly from him: from the Crucified and from the Holy Scriptures, the only objects that he constantly had on his table.

The teaching that we must extract is suggested to us by St. Bonaventure himself: "He who does not love the Holy Scriptures, will never be able to understand its true meaning."

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – I shall recite a mystery of the Rosary so that the Holy Bible may read, meditated upon and lived.

#### HEZEKIAH'S CANTICLE [#]

93

Like a swallow I utter shrill cries; I moan like a dove.  
My eyes grow weak, gazing heavenward:

O Lord, I am in straits; be my surety!  
 What am I to say or tell him?  
 He has done it!  
 I shall go on through all my years despite the bitterness of my soul.  
 Those live whom the LORD protects;  
 yours... the life of my spirit.  
 You have given me health and life;  
 thus is my bitterness transformed into peace.  
 You have preserved my life from the pit of destruction,  
 When you cast behind your back all my sins.  
 For it is not the nether world that gives you thanks,  
 nor death that praises you;  
 Neither do those who go down into the pit await your kindness.  
 The living, the living give you thanks, as I do today.  
 Fathers declare to their sons, O God, your faithfulness.  
 The LORD is our savior;  
 we shall sing to stringed instruments  
 In the house of the LORD all the days of our life.

*(Is 38:14-20)*

## READING

### **Greatness of the gifts that God granted to St. Paul**

I must boast; not that it is profitable, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know someone in Christ who, fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows), was caught up to the third heaven. And I know that this person (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows) was caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter.

About this person I will boast, but about myself I will not boast, except about my weaknesses. Although if I should wish to boast, I would not be foolish, for I would be telling the truth. But I refrain, so that no one may think more of me than what he sees in me or hears from me because of the abundance of the revelations. Therefore, that I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan, to beat me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content

with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

(2Cor 12:1-10)

### JUDITH'S PRAYER

“A new hymn I will sing to my God. O Lord, great are you and glorious, wonderful in power and unsurpassable. Let your every creature serve you; for you spoke, and they were made, You sent forth your spirit, and they were created; no one can resist your word. The mountains to their bases, and the seas, are shaken; the rocks, like wax, melt before your glance. But to those who fear you, you are very merciful. Though the sweet odor of every sacrifice is a trifle, and the fat of all holocausts but little in your sight, one who fears the Lord is forever great.

Woe to the nations that rise against my people! the Lord Almighty will requite them; in the day of judgment he will punish them: He will requite them; in the day of judgment he will punish them: He will send fire and worms into their flesh, and they shall burn and suffer forever.”

(Jdt 16:13-17)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *LS* refers to the *Vulgate* and shows “Giud. XVI, 16-21,” (Jdt 16:16-21) which in the current translations correspond to 16:13-17.

## THE BIBLE FOR THE APOSTLE OF THE PRESS IS THE TRUTH

### DAVID

The greater part of the Psalms is attributed to the royal prophet David.

The eventful life of this holy king, described at length in books I, II, and III of Kings, is the life of a just man, of a wise king, and of a penitent.

For the first time he is recorded in the Scripture when the censure of Saul is narrated: David<sup>1</sup> was designated by the Lord to be consecrated as successor of Saul. His Father was Jesse, of Bethlehem.

When the king, as a result of divine punishment, was possessed by a bad spirit, the young David was called to the court so that by the harmoniousness of his harp, he could calm the furor of Saul. A little later we see him battling the Philistines: it was there that in the name of God, the defenseless Israelite went against the proud Goliath and killed him. The whole populace rejoiced because of it. Saul, however, suspicious even of the popular favor with which David was surrounded, became more and more jealous. At first, he denied him marriage with his daughter Merob; and if he allowed him to marry Michal, it was only after a victory of David over the Philistines who he hoped would kill him.

The young man established close friendship with his brother-in-law Jonathan, who, for a number of times, saved him from the spear of the infuriated king. But seeing that his stay in the court was not safe for him, he had to flee. He wandered in the deserts and then from city to city, always pursued by Saul, whose life he generously spared twice; but at the same time his followers became numerous.

96 When Saul was killed in battle against the Philistines, David was consecrated king of Judah.

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<sup>1</sup>  *Davide*: the spelling of this word is not uniform, perhaps because of different sources.

His glorious and happy reign was disturbed by the rebellion of his son, Absalom. Thus the Lord wanted to punish him for a grievous sin; as later he punished him for an act of pride, inflicting his people with a plague lasting three days wherein seventy thousand died. The holy king unceasingly wept for his sins, but God wanted to show him through punishment how grave was the offense he caused him. He thought of building for the Lord a temple worthy for him to stay in, but it was the glory of his successor to realize the plan.

Feeling the end of his life, he chose his son, Solomon, as his successor; then he peacefully died at the age of 70, after having reigned for forty years.

## THE PSALMS

They are a collection of the religious hymns of the people of Israel; and from the name of the poet to whom we owe the greater part of them, it is called the Davidic Psalter.

They made up the book of prayer of the Synagogue, from which the Church has inherited them. The collection of 150 Psalms was made on several occasions from the time of David to that of Ezra.

Not all the Psalms are by David, even from the titles they are said to be of various personalities, from Moses to Nehemia.<sup>2</sup> It seems that Ezra, gathering also the Psalms of the exile and of the restoration, made the last touches on the Psalter.

The Psalms give nobility to almost all kinds of lyrics. They are hymns, thanksgivings, prayers, pious meditations, historical, didactic and penitential poems. Famous among them are the messianic psalms that speak of Christ and are grandiose prophecies.

The text used by the Church is the Gallican Psalterium, corrected by St. Jerome on the Hexapla of Origen and then became a part of the Vulgate.

The Psalter, which is the soul of the breviary and the breviary of the Old Testament and the garden of true devotion, must return as the prayer book of the Christian people, just as it was during the time of the Martyrs, the time of the Fathers, wherein the

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<sup>2</sup> Neemia or Nehemia: a variable spelling (cf. preceding note).

- 97 plowers, the harvesters, the vinedressers, the shepherds, | all of them, sanctified their work with the singing of the Psalms. In the Psalter there are praises and prayers for every soul; it is enough that each one makes them his own and recites them with heart.

## REFLECTION IX

### **The Bible for the Apostle of the Press is the Truth**

*“Your servant loves your promise;  
it has been proved by fire.”*  
(Ps 118/119:140)

The Bible, or the book par excellence, is the complex of 72 books which the Council of Trent has defined as sacred and inspired by God. They constitute a single letter that God addressed to human beings, in order to invite them to heaven and to teach them the way.

In the Press Apostolate, it is so essential so that with the Bible *alone* it already exists in its essential elements. Without it the Press Apostolate cannot live in any way,<sup>3</sup> although at times something may be done that resembles it.

In fact, God writes to human beings. The Apostles thereafter and the Popes continue the work as God’s representatives. The priest acts as the pen, the mouth, and the hand of the Pope. The Press Apostolate is the continuation of God’s work. Would you ever

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<sup>3</sup> The close relation between the apostolate of editions and the study of the Bible is one of the fundamental themes of *LS* (cf. pp. 72ff; 98ff, 191-193, 289-294, 306, 317ff) as it was of the preceding *Apostolato Stampa*, and it is along the line of Vatican Council II’s teaching: “The bride of the incarnate Word, the Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, is concerned with attaining an ever deeper understanding of the Sacred Scriptures, so as to be able to feed her children continually with the divine words.” Therefore, “she encourages the study of the holy Fathers of both East and West and of sacred liturgies. Catholic exegetes then and other students of sacred theology, working diligently together and using appropriate means, should devote their energies, under the watchful care of the sacred teaching office of the Church, to an exploration and exposition of the divine writings. This should be done in such a way that as many ministers of the divine word as possible will be able to offer with fruit to the people of God the nourishment of the Scriptures which enlightens the mind, strengthens the will, and sets men’s hearts on fire with the love of God.” (*Dei Verbum*, no. 23)

have a plant without roots? A rivulet without a source? Sacraments without the Cross? Continuation of a work without a beginning? We would have a branch that is not attached to the vine; and it would suffer the consequences of him who in the Church detaches himself | from Jesus. He loses authority, strength, merit, and readers themselves. We would have a Priesthood without a mission.

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*Biblical truths are contained in the Press Apostolate* – God ordered Moses to write; all the subsequent sacred writers took from Moses and expanded, making applications; the writers of the New Testament showed us the fulfilled<sup>4</sup> shadows and prophecies and revealed to us the mysteries of truth and grace brought by the Son of God; the Church is the continuation of the Incarnation and the mystical life of Jesus Christ who, staying with men until the consummation of the world, continues his work as sanctifier and as unique, universal, and indefectible teacher. The priests reflect his teachings, communicate them, and give them power through the press.

Hence it is the biblical truths that they give; even as they give them through historical events; inasmuch as religion has historical bases and on them dogmas, morals, the practice of worship that ought to honor God are written. History is an immense canvas that is drawn; on it God has written and writes; and the writers read and invite men to reflect on them, read them, discern them, learn, live them and be saved.

\* \* \*

1) In fact, *the primary object* of the Press Apostolate is also that of the Bible: the truths concerning God and the soul; in a word, that which is spiritual. Hence, the work of God the Father, the work of God the Son, the work of God the Holy Spirit are revealed and preached. Furthermore, the duties that concern the soul: from the Holy Commandments to the Evangelical Counsels, | to the loftiest virtues. And all the means of sanctification of which revelation is very rich for us and of which the holy Church, the mother of Saints, is authoritative teacher.

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<sup>4</sup> This is about *sensus plenior*, or full meaning. Cf. p. 40, note 7, n. 3.

2) *The same end*: that God may be glorified, that souls may achieve eternal salvation. Not human gain, no; but the Apostolate of the Press has but one treasure: the eternal, that it wants to assure for itself and wants to obtain for others. These souls are dear to it, as they are dear to the Heart of Jesus who gave his life for them.

3) *The same means*: The Sacred Scriptures and the Press Apostolate make use of the same voice: the written one. The best ornament of an editorial room is the picture of the Evangelists; the best sign and object of devotion, an open Gospel where this is said: “*Semen est verbum Dei...*” (Lk 8:11)<sup>5</sup> and some fall on good ground and even very good ground and produced: some thirtyfold, some *sixty*, some a hundredfold. He who has ears, let him hear.

\* \* \*

From this follows the need for devout and daily reading of the Bible. The Popes Leo XIII, Pius X, and Benedict XV have so much recommended this pious practice.

Let’s hear what the very unassuming Pius X wrote to Card. Cassetta:

*“The reading and meditation of the Holy Gospel is a very wholesome action, as that which leads us to the narration of an entirely divine power, that is, to the narration of the life of Jesus Christ, of which nothing could be thought of as more eminently efficacious to form us in sanctity.”*

**100** Everyone must read the Sacred Scriptures, but the Apostle of the Press more than everyone else, before everyone else, and more constantly than everyone else so as not to be, as St. Augustine says, one blind guiding another blind.

He who reads the divine book, assumes the divine language, speaks the divine language, and acquires divine effectiveness.

Numerous sermons, many books, many exhortations would be much more effective if, instead of man, God spoke: “*Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is na-*

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<sup>5</sup> “The seed is the word of God.” – LS erroneously indicates “Luca XVII, 11.” (“Lk 17:11)



*ked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account.”* (Heb 4:12-13)

He who daily reads the Gospel becomes capable of truly saying the word of God.

However, by reading it *with piety*: that is, with the spirit with which it was written: with the heart of children who want to listen and wholeheartedly follow their Heavenly Father. We must take it as spiritual reading, as a means for recollection and elevation during the visit to the Most Blessed Sacrament, as the principal book of meditation, and as a divine sanctuary to be consulted in all needs, whether spiritual, apostolic, or social.

EXAMPLE. – *Louis Veuillot*. – Louis Veuillot is the glory of Catholic journalism in France, the indomitable asserter of the rights of the Church, a martyr of the Papacy.

For several years, he directed “*L’Univers*,” a combative Catholic newspaper, which was suppressed by the government because of his devout attachment to the Pope.

After having read and meditated the Holy Gospels several times, he wrote a *Life of Jesus*, fruit of his pious readings and meditations, | a biography that is one the warmest in love for the Divine Master.

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He always carried with him the book of the Holy Gospels. He put down in his testament that the life of Jesus he wrote be placed in his coffin.

Here is his testament that served as the epitaph for the tomb of the distinguished Catholic journalist.

Place my pen beside me,  
 Christ, my only boast, over in my heart,  
 This book at my feet,  
 Then, my friends, close my coffin in peace.

When the last prayer ends,  
 O plant the cross on my grave:  
 And if a stone be generously given me  
 Let it be inscribed: “I believed, now in Heaven I see.”

Say amongst you: “He sleeps, at last his honest  
but difficult work he finished.”  
Or rather say: “He wakes up  
And sees what one day he dreamed of so much.”

I hope in my Jesus: here, amidst many  
Of my faith never did I blush.  
And on the last day before the Father,  
He, too, will not be ashamed of me.

Gounod<sup>6</sup> found this testament so beautiful that he wanted to put it in music and composed the famous “*Last prayer.*”

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Recite the Litany of the Sacred Writers that is found at the end of the book so that the Press may ever be inspired by the divine teachings of the Bible.

#### CANTICLE OF HANNAH [#]

My heart exults in the LORD,  
my horn is exalted in my God.  
I have swallowed up my enemies;  
I rejoice in my victory.  
There is no Holy One like the LORD;  
there is no Rock like our God.  
Speak boastfully no longer,  
nor let arrogance issue from your mouths.  
For an all-knowing God | is the LORD,  
a God who judges deeds.  
The bows of the mighty are broken,  
while the tottering gird on strength.  
The well-fed hire themselves out for bread,  
while the hungry batten on spoil.

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Gounod (Paris 1818 - St. Cloud 1893), former seminarian, besides music had also studied literature and philosophy. He won the *Grand prix de Rome*, where he stayed in 1840 and 1841. He became enthusiastic of Palestrina’s polyphonic execution, in such a way that he himself composed a mass that made him deserve the designation of chapel master in the Roman Church of St. Louis of the French. In his brilliant opera career, he was successful in Vienna and in Leipzig, aside from Paris. He is most popular for his *Ave Maria* adapted from a prelude of J. S. Bach.

The barren wife bears seven sons,  
 while the mother of many languishes.  
 The LORD puts to death and gives life;  
 he casts down to the nether world; he raises up again.  
 The LORD makes poor and makes rich,  
 he humbles, he also exalts.  
 He raises the needy from the dust;  
 from the ash heap he lifts up the poor,  
 To seat them with nobles  
 and make a glorious throne their heritage.  
 He gives to the vower his vow,  
 and blesses the sleep of the just.  
 “For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S,  
 and he has set the world upon them.  
 He will guard the footsteps of his faithful ones,  
 but the wicked shall perish in the darkness.  
 For not by strength does man prevail;  
 the LORD’S foes shall be shattered.  
 The Most High in heaven thunders;  
 The LORD judges the ends of the earth,  
 Now may he give strength to his king,  
 and exalt the horn of his anointed!

(1Sm 2:1-10)<sup>7</sup>

## READING

### **Sincerity and frankness in the apostolic ministry**

Therefore, since we have this ministry through the mercy shown us, we are not discouraged. Rather, we have renounced shameful, hidden things; not acting deceitfully or falsifying the word of God, but by the open declaration of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. And even though our gospel is veiled, it is veiled for those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus. For God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone | in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of (Jesus) Christ. But

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<sup>7</sup> LS indicates 1Kings for 1Sm.

we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.

We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

*(2Cor 4:1-12)*

### PRAYER

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, but the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

*(Jn 1:1-14)*

## WHY AND HOW MUST WE READ THE BIBLE

### SOLOMON

He succeeded his father, David, in the government of the people of Israel; hence he was the third king of the chosen people.

He ascended the throne at age twenty but he manifested just how wise he was. Because as soon as he was elected king, the Lord appeared to him and said to him: "Ask what you want and it shall be granted to you." The young king asked for wisdom and a righteous heart, in order to know the ways of good and evil and to govern with justice. It pleased the Lord that Solomon did not ask for wealth or earthly goods, and hence aside from the requested gifts, he gave him in addition also wealth and glory. And Solomon was in fact the wisest and richest king of the people of God.

On the fourth year of his reign, he started the construction of the Temple, already thought of by his father David. Sixty thousand workers worked on it to bring it to completion. Gold, silver, and the most precious marbles were lavished on it with great abundance; never was a magnificent building ever seen before. The Lord, to show his pleasure, manifested himself during the Feast of the Dedication by means of a cloud that covered the Lord's house; and a mysterious fire descended from heaven and burned the victims of the sacrifices.

The glory of Solomon reached the farthest nations; but so much greatness unfortunately made him forget the Lord and his law. Foreign women made him fall into idolatry and he stained himself with horrible impiety, making his salvation uncertain.

Attributed to Solomon are four books of the Bible, full of divine wisdom: the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs and Wisdom.

### THE PROVERBS

We ought to remember that among the Jews, aside from the popular sayings, also circulated elaborate dictums of the wise, with the purpose of teaching the people wisdom, that is, the art

of knowing and practicing the will of God, the art of living well according to God.

The book of Proverbs is a collection of sayings pronounced largely by Solomon, and then gathered on several occasions; it is a mirror of real life in contrast to the ideal one, according to the dictates of wisdom.

## ECCLESIASTES <sup>1</sup>

It is a collection of philosophical thoughts, manifested to the people, now in prose and at another time in poetry.

The Ecclesiastes, having taken as theme the vanity of all earthly things, examines them with a restlessness that makes it brusquely pass from one subject to another in writing, as it passed in the examination of things. Having knocked down the idols of knowledge, pleasure, and wealth, it shows that everything depends on God. Then it examines the miseries of life, and shows man powerless to free himself from pain and to reach happiness.

Having examined the miseries, it offers some practical rules for happiness and locates the philosophy of life in eating, drinking, being joyful in the holy fear of God and in the fulfillment of one's religious duties.

Having as aim to teach how to achieve possible happiness on earth and to set life in order, it concludes that everything is vanity except the fear of God and the observance of his law.

## THE SONG OF SONGS

This book, by its title, means the most beautiful song; and it is truly the most lofty and difficult song in the Scriptures. In it human love is celebrated as a figure of the divine love, that is, of the love of God for the chosen people, the Church, and the soul.

Some take it as a short drama, with its protagonists, with its contrast in the seductions of the royal palace, to the pomp which the bride renounces for the life in the fields with her beloved spouse. Such dissimilar love represents the love of God for his people, threatened by the luxurious pagan civilization.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiastes* or *Qohelet*. Don Alberione rarely cites this book, as he does *Ecclesiasticus* or *Sirach*.

According to the majority of the Fathers, it is a very beautiful allegory<sup>2</sup> of the mutual love between God and his Church and with the soul, and of the Word with humanity. God is the groom and as such he is called king; the soul, the Church, humanity is the bride.

### THE BOOK OF WISDOM

It takes this name because it is a sublime hymn to divine wisdom shared with men in religion and in virtue.

By wisdom of God is meant the exact knowledge of divine things, which sees God in all things in order to follow his divine will and the fear of him in all of life. This wisdom, either speculative or practical, is a gift of God, hence it comes from God himself, and is a participation of the uncreated wisdom through which God created all things and governs them.

The sacred author makes two large portraits: in the first, he presents wisdom from the intellectual and moral side; in the second, he presents her from the historical side. Hence, we can divide the book into two parts.

In the first it exhorts the practice of justice and religion, the sources of happiness and immortality and shows the contrasting fate of the just and the impious in this life and in the next.

In the second part, mention is made of the origin and foolish immorality of idolatry in its different aspects. Finally, it makes the contrast between the just and the impious by contrasting the Jews and the Egyptians, especially in the plagues of Egypt.

### REFLECTION X

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### Why and how must we read the Bible

*“Accipe librum et devora illum.”*  
(Rv 10:8)<sup>3</sup>

In this last Hour of Adoration, we intend to make reparation for the sorrow caused to the Divine Master by many men and

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<sup>2</sup> It is only here that *LS* mentions “allegory” as a manner of interpreting the Bible (cf. PCB, *L’interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, 31c).

<sup>3</sup> Rv 10:8-9: “Go, take the scroll... take and swallow it.”

Christians who prefer the reading of human books rather than the Bible.

How many in the world read everything except the divine book! They go in search of the speck of gold lost in the bosom of the earth but they do not see the mountain of gold that is the Bible!

Any other charlatan is heard and believed; from him one obtains a definite object, infallible against any sickness; the object, perhaps made up of water and powdered brick, is paid dearly and jealously guarded. One goes to buy health from one who cannot give it and from one who does not seek anything but his own interests.

Any vulgar novel is sought after and dearly paid. The Bible instead is sought by very few!

108 You will find in a thousand bookstores any book, any novel, but hardly will you find the king of books, or at least, if there is, it is at the end | of all the others: it is covered, too! Oh, how much human respect!

There is a place for all, only for God is there no place.

Oh! Here, the work of the devil comes in, otherwise we could not explain such a phenomenon.

Let us make reparation! And on our part let us resolve to read the Holy Bible often and to advise others to do the same, and if we know that someone of our acquaintance has taken a bad or less serious book, let us advise him to burn it, and to acquire instead the Bible.

\* \* \*

Now let us move on to reflect on the reasons why we ought to read the Bible and how to read it.

We must read the Bible:

1<sup>st</sup> *Because God wills it:* for as many as two hundred times we read from the Bible itself that the Lord orders the reading and investigation of the Scriptures.

The fact that He himself deigned to move the sacred writers to write tells us that it is his desire that human beings read and meditate on the Bible.

How could we imagine that that Jesus, who instituted the Sacrament of love, may not now burn with the desire that it be received? The same thing we can say of the Bible: if God has written it for us, it is an evident sign that he wants it to be read.



2<sup>nd</sup> *Jesus wants it*: he himself gave us the example. Every Sabbath he went to the Synagogue and there read it and heard it read. And he meditated on them. Then, he expressly commanded it | saying: “Search the Scriptures... even they testify on my behalf.”<sup>4</sup>

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The first Christians, to whom the invitations of Jesus and of the Apostles to read the Sacred Scriptures still resounded in their ears, were reading them every day, even several times a day; and to have more ease to read them in moments of danger and persecution, they always brought them with them, at least the Holy Gospel. And from this they drew strength to persevere in their faith and for it, if it were necessary, even to give their life.

3<sup>rd</sup> *The Church wills it*. She divided the books in such a way that they could be easily and fruitfully read.

How greatly have the Supreme Pontiffs recommended the reading of the Bible!<sup>5</sup> The Encyclical “*Providentissimus Deus*” by Leo XIII, “*Pascendi Dominici gregis*” by Pius X and that of Benedict XV, “*Spiritus Paraclitus*,” all of them on the Sacred Scriptures, these are the brightest proof of the desire of the Church that the Sacred Scriptures be read.

\* \* \*

How must we read the Bible and what are the necessary dispositions?

We know that the Bible was given by God to us out of love, and we too ought to read it out of love.

Furthermore, we must read the Bible as the Church gives it to us; we have to receive it from her hands. Unlike the Protestants who do not want to know anything about the Church; they go directly to the Bible and hence they are outside the path established by God, that is, the path that leads to heaven.

The Protestants made a Bible of their own: that is, they took the true Bible, stripped it of all the notes and took away those books and pages that somehow scourged their passions. Thus mutilated they passed it on to men telling them: read and you shall be directly enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and to the extent that you understand it, it is well understood.

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<sup>4</sup> Jn 5:39. The verse is quoted as an invitation to read the Scriptures. It does not seem to be its original meaning.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. pages 17 and 30.

Instead, for Catholics it is not so: they have to take the Bible from the hands of the Church and interpret it according to her orientation. And this is because God entrusted his book only to the Church, and only she can infallibly interpret it.

Catholics must not interpret the Bible with private interpretation as Protestants<sup>6</sup> do, and retain what everyone understands because the Holy Spirit is not given to each one individually, but only to the Church; hence, only she can infallibly interpret the Holy Bible.

This is why the Council of Trent prohibits the reading of the Bible without notes: and he who did it would run the risk of losing his way.

Also, the Protestants read the Bible only to be instructed, not to learn the path to heaven and to have life. Catholics, instead, read the Bible in order not only to be enlightened but also to know better the law of God, the Commandments, the Precepts, etc., that is, the way to heaven; and the means to have from it the strength and the courage to walk with its help. Catholics seek in the Bible the truth, the way and the life; Protestants, only the truth;<sup>7</sup> and thus, the explanation of their motto: “*pecca*

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<sup>6</sup> In *LS* Don Alberione does not only exhort the reading of the Bible but to interpret it well, “infallibly” or in a Christian manner, as the Church knows how to do (pp. 9, 17, 111, 285, 310). The Scriptures would be interpreted badly by some Jews (pp. 40, 111) and by Christian heretics (p. 260). It is not enough to read them with passion for the Scriptures to transform their readers into authentic disciples of Jesus. According to Don Alberione, one must learn to interpret them as Jesus Master did in the synagogue (p. 319) and as the Church does. The rules of interpretation are those established by the Roman Catholic Church as in the case of the Council’s Constitution *Dei Verbum* (cf. n. 12). The “humble” ones are those who penetrate the true meaning of the bible and interpret it correctly (*LS* p. 200).

<sup>7</sup> This generalization is not correct. A controversial Mormon author, the Englishman Brigham Henry Roberts (born in 1857), expounded his thought according to the three fundamental words of Jn 14:6, while inverting however the order of the first two: *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*. With this treatise, published towards the end of his life (1933), Roberts intended to consolidate his own reflection in a composite that would unite science with the Scriptures, by dividing his material into three parts: (a) the truth concerning the earth and the truth of revelation; (b) the way of salvation and (c) Jesus’ earthly life – this last was considered capable of molding the entire existence of the Christian.

*fortiter et crede fortius,*”<sup>8</sup> sin much but believe even much more, and then you will be saved just the same. Hence, for the Protestants | works of charity, the virtues, morals do not exist; rather, they even reached the point of seeing, in some verses of the Bible itself,<sup>9</sup> the negation of good works and they say that in order to be saved faith is enough: that good works are not necessary. This demonstrates that man abandoned to himself and without the infallible aid of the Church in interpreting the Bible, reaches the point of denying the most obvious and essential truths of our holy Religion.

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Hence, in the first place, we have to *read in a Catholic manner* the Sacred Scriptures, that is, after having learned from the Church the essential truths and received the Bible from her.

St. Augustine explains well how the damnation of the Jews was caused by a false interpretation of the Bible, and says that wanting to interpret it in their own manner, they did not know Jesus Christ. That event happened anew among the Protestants who, having fallen into rationalism and then materialism, ended up shouting to Jesus Christ the “*Crucify him*” of the Jews and with Jesus Christ, they reject his vicar, the Pope, the divine motherhood of Mary Most Holy, the greater part of the Sacraments. In other words, they placed themselves out of the way to heaven.

Let us read the Holy Bible with true Catholic spirit, that is, to understand Catholic morals and learn the practical path to heaven. Thus did the Most Holy Virgin read it and thus did she learn from St. Anne; and in turn she taught the Divine Master Jesus.

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<sup>8</sup> “Faith without works” could be an excessive simplification of the Protestant creed. Luther’s exact statement was: “*Esto peccator, pecca fortiter, sed fortius fide*” (Be a sinner, sin much, but let your faith be stronger). The Reformed Diet of Worms, in 1517, confirmed it by condemning those who believed that works are indispensable for salvation. For a more correct evaluation of these positions and of *LS*, the necessary biblical reference is St. Paul’s teaching (Gal 2:16; 3:2; 5:6; Ti 3:8) and James’ (Jas 2:14,17,18,20,22,24,26).

<sup>9</sup> Probably Don Alberione refers to the interpretation of the verses from the Pauline letters (Rom 3:27-28; 9:32; Gal 2:16; 3:2). An erroneous interpretation of Paul is possible when attention is not paid to the fact that he is speaking of the inadequacy of the “works of the law,” while he does not deny the necessity of charity (cf. Gal 5:6: “For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love”; cf. 1Cor 8:1; 12:31–13:13).

Let us learn from these divine models.

Let us receive the Bible not from others but from the Church and her ministers and let us read it with infinite love and reverence the way the Church presents it to us.

112 The Bible is not an ordinary book, it is not a | book for the curious and for those thirsting for novelty, but it is the book of holiness, it is the book of God.<sup>10\*</sup>

Let us pray so that all may read God's word under the enlightened and infallible guidance of the Church only with which Jesus Christ promised to be until the end of time: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt 28:20)

EXAMPLE. – *Jesus says that we investigate the Scriptures.* "If I testify on my own behalf, my testimony cannot be verified. But there is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that the testimony he gives on my behalf is true. You sent emissaries to John, and he testified to the truth. I do not accept testimony from a human being, but I say this so that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp, and for a while you were content to rejoice in his light. But I have testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me. Moreover, the Father who sent me has testified on my behalf. But you have never heard his voice nor seen his form, and you do not have his word remaining in you, because you do not believe in the one whom he has sent. You *search the scriptures*, because you think you have eternal life through them; *even they testify on my behalf*. But you do not want to come to me to have life. I do not accept human praise; moreover, I know that you do not have the love of God in you. I came in the name of my Father, but you do not accept me; yet if another comes in his own name, | you will accept him. How can you believe, when you accept praise from one another and do not seek the praise that comes from the only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father: the one who will accuse you is Moses, in whom you have

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<sup>10\*</sup> "The Sacred Scriptures fall under the eyes of our mind like a mirror, for us to see in it our spiritual image. In fact, in it we can see the ugliness of our sins and the beauty of our good works: from it we see how much we advance in good and how far are we from perfection." (*St. Gregory the Great*)

placed your hope. For if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me.

But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

(*Jn 5:31-47*)

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Let us listen to Jesus' voice, and to do him homage, today let us read the prophecy of Isaiah narrated in Chapter 53.

#### CANTICLE OF JUDITH [#]

A new hymn I will sing to my God.  
 O Lord, great are you and glorious,  
 wonderful in power and unsurpassable.  
 Let your every creature serve you;  
 for you spoke, and they were made,  
 You sent forth your spirit, and they were created;  
 no one can resist your word.  
 The mountains to their bases, and the seas, are shaken;  
 the rocks, like wax, melt before your glance.  
 But to those who fear you, you are very merciful.  
 Though the sweet odor of every sacrifice is a trifle,  
 and the fat of all holocausts but little in your sight,  
 one who fears the Lord is forever great.  
 Woe to the nations that rise against my people!  
 the Lord Almighty will requite them;  
 in the day of judgment he will punish them:  
 He will send fire and worms into their flesh,  
 and they shall burn and suffer forever.

(*Jdt 16:13-17*)<sup>11</sup>

#### READING

##### **Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch**

Then the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, "Get up and head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route." So he got up and set out. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet

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<sup>11</sup> *LS* indicates, according to the *Vulgate*, "Giud. XVI, 15-21." (*Jdt 16:15-21*)

Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, “Go and join up with that chariot.” Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him.

This was the scripture passage he was reading: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth. In (his) humiliation justice was denied him. Who will tell of his posterity? For his life is taken from the earth.”

Then the eunuch said to Philip in reply, “I beg you, about whom is the prophet saying this? About himself, or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with this scripture passage, he proclaimed Jesus to him.

As they traveled along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, there is water. What is to prevent my being baptized?” Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him.

When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, but continued on his way rejoicing.

Philip came to Azotus, and went about proclaiming the good news to all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

*(Acts 8:26-40)*

#### PRAYER OF THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
 my spirit rejoices in God my savior.  
 For he has looked upon his handmaid’s lowliness;  
 behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.  
 The Mighty One has done great things for me,  
 and holy is his name.  
 His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.  
 He has shown might with his arm,  
 dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.  
 He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones  
 but lifted up the lowly.  
 The hungry he has filled with good things;  
 the rich he has sent away empty.  
 He has helped Israel his servant,  
 remembering his mercy,  
 according to his promise to our fathers,  
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

*(Lk 1:46-55)*

SECOND PART

THE HOLY BIBLE  
AND MORALS

(Way)





## FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE FLOWS THE VIRTUE OF FAITH

### JESUS, SON OF SIRACH

Undoubtedly, he is the inspired author of Ecclesiasticus<sup>2</sup> as his nephew, who translated the book, assures us in the Prologue: In chapter 50, verse 27, we read: “I, Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sirach, as they gushed forth from my heart’s understanding.”<sup>3</sup>

We know very little of him. Coming from Jerusalem, he dedicated his life to the study of wisdom and, in order to acquire it, he had undertaken long trips during which he ran many and serious risks, but he as well garnered a lot of fruits in his studies. He was known for his deep knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures, from where he drew true wisdom.

The manner with which the sacred author speaks of the High Priest Simon II, son of Oniah, says that he is his contemporary. We can therefore affirm that Ecclesiasticus was written on the 2<sup>nd</sup> century before Christ, and hence translated into Greek soon after by the author’s nephew.

### ECCLESIASTICUS

During the early years of the Church, Ecclesiasticus had this title because it was the most used in the Churches; the Greek text, however, bears the title “The Wisdom of Sirach.” The author, | in fact, exhorts his readers towards wisdom, that is, to the exercise of all the virtues. 116

The book can be divided into two parts, aside from the pre-  
amble and the epilogue.

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<sup>1</sup> Between pages 114 and 115 of the original text was inserted a page with a side note of “Parte seconda” and a following blank page, not numbered.

<sup>2</sup> *Ecclesiasticus*, or *Sirach*.

<sup>3</sup> Sir 50:27. In the *Vulgate* the text corresponds to verse 29.

In the preamble, after the exhortation to seek wisdom, it describes the origin and fruits of wisdom and shows the intimate relationship between wisdom and the fear of God.

The first part is doctrinal and establishes in what consists true wisdom and the exercise of virtue.

The second part, instead, is historical. After a hymn to God, the Creator, the author celebrates the work of God in nature as he describes individual creatures, then in great and holy men from Enoch up to the High Priest Simeon.

The epilogue repeats the exhortation to seek wisdom and to praise God; it closes with a beautiful prayer.

## REFLECTION XI

### **From Holy Scripture flows the virtue of faith**

*“I am prompt, I do not hesitate  
in keeping your commands.”*

(Ps 118/119:60)

In the first part of the month<sup>4</sup> we considered that the Bible is true light for our mind, and we briefly touched on the arcane beauty contained in it and how the Church draws from it the biggest part of sacred science; and how the Sacred Book sheds light on and confirms the natural sciences themselves.

**117** In this second decade, we shall instead see how our will can find in the Sacred Scriptures marvelous examples of all the virtues; examples | that, aside from being way, are for us incentives and strength to win immortal goods which rust and moth shall not corrode or consume in eternity.

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<sup>4</sup> Let us remember that the hours of adoration effectively preached to the community were ten, but in *LS* 30 meditations are proposed. The new structure is approved by Don Alberione, as it appears in a circular letter addressed to the Daughters of St. Paul: “G.D.P.H. | Alba, 22 November 1933 | Good Daughters of St. Paul, | I have submitted to the Daughters of St. Paul for printing: six visits | to the Most Blessed Sacrament on death; and six visits on heaven. And *the book of the visits on the readings | of the Bible* has already been printed.” (*Considerate la vostra vocazione*, no. 34)

Then we shall see how the virtues spring from the Sacred Scriptures and how they teach and recommend all of them, through numerous sayings and examples.

\* \* \*

Today, we shall see how the first of the theological virtues, Faith, springs from the Bible.

As we know from Catechism, Faith is *to believe all the truths<sup>5</sup> revealed by God and proposed to us for belief by the Church*. The Center<sup>6</sup> of all revelation, if we observe it well, is the adorable person of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament in fact speaks to us of the forthcoming Messiah; the New Testament, of the Messiah who came, in such a way that our mind, reading either Old or New Testament, is always focused on a single center: the Divine Master.

The example of the Transfiguration of Jesus, narrated to us by the Holy Gospels, is most beautiful:

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his

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<sup>5</sup> No. 6 of *Dei Verbum*, reads: “Through divine revelation, God chose to show forth and communicate Himself and the eternal decisions of His will regarding the salvation of men ‘to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind.’ The holy Council professes that “God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason.” (see Rom 1:20) But it teaches also that it is through His revelation that “those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can be known by all men with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in this present state of the human race.”

<sup>6</sup> This term, in *LS*, is always rich in meaning. Examples: center of the Bible is Christ (p. 118); he who loves and reads the Bible does not remain on the sides, but reaches the center (p. 318). Let these affirmations be compared with what the *Pastoral Note* of the CEI (Italian Bishops’ Conference) will later say: “Jesus is the center and the end of the Scriptures... Because of this, the Church, following the apostolic tradition, meets the Bible “through Christ, with Christ and in Christ” and in his light understands it as a single design of God for our salvation.” (*La Bibbia nella vita della Chiesa*, no. 2) The centrality of Christ is the hermeneutical principle of the Church in interpreting the Sacred Scriptures. It is necessary that we “read them in Christ” to understand them in their most profound meaning.

clothes became white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, ‘Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow  
**118** over them, then from the | cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’ When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and do not be afraid.’ And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.” (Mt 17:1-8)

Oh, divine spectacle! We contemplate the Divine Master transfigured in the middle;<sup>7</sup> above him are Moses and Elijah, as representatives of the old law and of the prophets; under him, the three Apostles representing the N.T.; Peter, the symbol of faith; John, of charity, and James of one who translates into practice the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity.

It is true that the Old Testament tells us of the Messiah through figures, symbols, types and prophecies, but when “the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4) and with him all the prophecies and figures of the Old Testament were realized. Thus, the New began, the 27 books of which speak to us of the Messiah come on earth: of his birth, of his life, of his work of redemption, and of his death and glorious resurrection. Furthermore, they tell us of the coming of the Holy Spirit, of his work of sanctification. Finally, the Apocalypse tells us in detail of the last coming of Jesus Christ on earth. Hence at the center of the two Testaments is always Jesus Christ.

\* \* \*

**119** It follows that he who often reads the Sacred Scriptures with right intention acquires a very lively faith in Jesus Christ, and seeing how much he has done | for the redemption of human-kind, will pray to him with secure and tranquil faith to have from him all the necessary means for salvation.

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<sup>7</sup> Christ the Master is always at the center, in every situation and representation, because he is such in the Scriptures.

But the Bible not only presents us Jesus Christ as the central object of faith, but narrates to us examples of men who had great and admirable faith, thus enlivening and increasing our faith.

Let us just refer to the magnificent example of faith given us by Abraham who, having been commanded by God to sacrifice his only son Isaac, immediately, that very night, without waiting for daytime, departs with his son and goes to the mountain to perform the sacrifice.

God promised him that he would become the father of a numberless people, but how could such a thing happen, if now he commands the sacrifice of his only son? The patriarch does not reason out that way: he promptly executes God's command, certain that his word would not be vain. And so it was: Abraham became the father of a very numerous people, like the sand on the seashore.

How enlivened is our faith while reading such an example and many others like it!

\* \* \*

The assiduous and devout reader of the Sacred Scriptures soon becomes divine in his thoughts, divine in his judgments and reasonings, and he acquires in a short time supernatural aspirations. In him, a new man, the just man, is created: "*Justus ex fide vivit.*" (Heb 10:38)<sup>8</sup>

How different are the men who read the Bible from those who do not read it!

Try it yourselves. Before reading, you feel that you are men, that is, human thoughts rule over your mind; desires and base feelings possess your heart, but after reading, you rise up no longer like men, but like gods: divine shall your thoughts be; divine, your aspirations; holy and supernatural, your desires.

St. Augustine's saying comes to mind: "*If you love the earth, you are earthly; if you love heavenly things, you are heavenly.*"

\* \* \*

In reading the Bible, let us also seek Jesus and only Jesus, as Mary and Joseph sought him in Jerusalem and if we shall

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<sup>8</sup> "But my just one shall live by faith."

have found him, he will certainly enliven our faith, and it can be said of us what Elisabeth said of Mary Most Holy: "*Blessed are you who believed*" (Lk 1:45); because if our faith is alive, also in us, as in Mary Most Holy, the marvels of the Lord would be done.

Let us accustom the eyes of our faith to contemplate in the books of the Sacred Scriptures Jesus Christ truth, just as we contemplate under the veil of the candid Host, Jesus present in his body, blood, soul and divinity, so that we can contemplate Him then in heaven, no longer with the eyes of faith and as in an enigmatic mirror, but face to face as St. Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Felix, martyr of the Sacred Scriptures.* – At the start of Diocletian's persecution, a good number of Christians, out of cowardice, surrendered the Scriptures to the infidels for burning, and many of them believed that they would be excused of their crime.

**121** Felix, bishop of Tibara, in the proconsular province of Africa, did not allow himself to be dragged in the number of those guilty; rather, the fall of his brothers did nothing but further stimulate his vigilance and rekindle his courage.

Magnilianus, magistrate of the city of Tibara, after seizing him, vainly ordered him to surrender the Scriptures that belonged to his Church. He answered that he would rather let his body be burned than be guilty of such a crime.

Magnilianus led him to the proconsul of Carthage and this sent him to the prefect of the praetorium, which was then in Africa. Annoyed by the forthright freedom with which Felix confessed his Faith, he ordered that he be detained in a narrow prison and weighed down with heavy chains.

Nine days later, he ordered him to be loaded in a ship and sent to Italy, to appear before the emperor. The Saint, placed at the bottom of the ship, stayed four days without eating or drinking. Finally, the ship landed in Agrigento. The Christians of Sicily received Felix honorably in all the places through which he passed. When he was in Venosa, his chains were removed in order to force him, through torments, to declare

whether he possessed the Scriptures. He said yes, but at the same time he declared that he would never surrender them.

Despairing of his inability to overcome his constancy, the prefect condemned him to be beheaded. Upon arriving in the place of execution, Felix gave thanks to God for the mercy granted him, and received joyfully the blow that ended his life in 303, at the age of fifty-six.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Let us invite someone to acquire the Holy Bible and to read it daily.

#### HYMN OF THANKSGIVING [#]

Shout joyfully to God, all you on earth;  
sing of his glorious name;  
give him glorious praise.  
Say to God: "How awesome your deeds!  
Before your great strength your enemies cringe.  
All on earth fall in worship before you;  
they sing of you, sing of your name!"  
Come and see the works of God,  
awesome in the deeds done for us.  
He changed the sea to dry land;  
through the river they passed on foot.  
Therefore let us rejoice in him,  
who rules by might forever,  
Whose eyes are fixed upon the nations.  
Let no rebel rise to challenge!  
Bless our God, you peoples;  
loudly sound his praise,  
Who has kept us alive and not allowed our feet to slip.  
You tested us, O God, tried us as silver tried by fire.  
You led us into a snare;  
you bound us at the waist as captives.  
You let captors set foot on our neck;  
we went through fire and water;  
then you led us out to freedom.  
I will bring holocausts to your house;  
to you I will fulfill my vows,  
The vows my lips pronounced  
and my mouth spoke in distress.

Holocausts of fatlings I will offer you  
 and burnt offerings of rams;  
 I will sacrifice oxen and goats.  
 Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
 while I recount what has been done for me.  
 I called to the Lord with my mouth;  
 praise was upon my tongue.  
 Had I cherished evil in my heart,  
 the Lord would not have heard.  
 But God did hear and listened to my voice in prayer.  
 Blessed be God,  
 who did not refuse me the kindness I sought in prayer.  
*(Ps 65/66:2-20)*

## READING

### **Justification comes from faith and not from the works of the law**

O stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

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I want to learn only this from you: did you receive the Spirit from works of the law, or from faith in what you heard? Are you so stupid? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? - if indeed it was in vain. Does, then, the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works mighty deeds among you do so from works of the law or from faith in what you heard?

Thus Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Realize then that it is those who have faith who are children of Abraham. Scripture, which saw in advance that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, foretold the good news to Abraham, saying, “Through you shall all the nations be blessed.” Consequently, those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham who had faith.

For all who depend on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not persevere in doing all the things written in the book of the law.” And that no one is justified before God by the law is clear, for “the one who is righteous by faith will live.” But the law does not depend on faith; rather, “the one who does these things will live by them.” Christ ransomed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree,” that the blessing of Abraham might



be extended to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

*(Gal 3:1-14)*

### DAVID'S PRAYER

O God, by your name, save me.  
By your strength defend my cause.  
O God, hear my prayer.  
Listen to the words of my mouth.  
The arrogant have risen against me;  
the ruthless seek my life;  
they do not keep God before them.  
God is present as my helper;  
the Lord sustains my life.  
Turn back the evil upon my foes;  
in your faithfulness, destroy them.  
Then I will offer you generous sacrifice  
and praise your gracious name, Lord,  
because it has rescued me from every trouble,  
and my eyes look down on my foes.

*(Ps 53/54:3-9)*

## FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE FLOWS THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

### ISAIAH

Isaiah is the greatest of the prophets. Although he is not chronologically the first, he is placed first in the canon of the Scriptures, because he is worthy of such a distinction for the loftiness of his revelations and his style.

Born and lived in Jerusalem, Isaiah started prophesying when still very young. His prophetic ministry lasted about fifty years. Begun at the death of Uzziah, it continued under Jotham, against the corruption of Israel. The influence of Isaiah appeared vigorously under the impious Ahaz, when the kingdom of Syria and Israel endanger the existence of the kingdom of Judah; meanwhile Ahaz calls to his help the powerful king of Assyria, Tegla-Phalasar. Isaiah's influence was decisive under the reign of the saintly king Hezekiah of whom he was a friend and counselor, and for whom he prophesied when he was ill, in the Babylonian embassy, and during the invasion of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. After the Assyrian invasion, Isaiah disappears from the political scene, but not from the world. It is believed that he lived under the reign of the impious Manasseh, who, perhaps in 696, so tradition says, sawed him with a wooden saw.

His prophetic activity is certainly more vast than his work as a writer: he did nothing but write the summary of his prophecies.

### ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

The book is composed of speeches and prophecies, dictated and written in the course of fifty years. All the parts, however, although they deal with different things, aim at a single purpose which is expressed by the prophet in the first chapter through the words: Zion shall be redeemed in judgment, and set free through justice.

Isaiah, sent by God to call the people back to the law, had, now inveigh against, now to console, now to comfort. Even so,

his entire book can be called “consolation” and rightly Isaiah can be called the prophet of divine mercy. He, in fact, threatens the children of Israel and the gentiles; but if judgment and punishments are for the death of the blinded, they shall be salvation for those who will go back to the Lord, and the very pagan people shall be one day made participants of the blessings of the messianic kingdom which shall last forever. The center of the new kingdom shall be Jerusalem and its king will come from Judah.

Isaiah is the prophet of lofty style, of grandiose images, the prophet of the Messiah, of whom, more than as a prophet, we can say that he talks as an evangelist.

The prophecy of Isaiah is the book that St. Ambrose among all the others recommended to St. Augustine.

## REFLECTION XII

### **From Holy Scripture flows the virtue of hope**

*“Your laws become my songs  
wherever I make my home.”*  
(Ps 118/119:54)

Hope is the second of the theological virtues. The catechism defines it: *Hope | is that supernatural virtue by which we trust in God and expect from him eternal life and the graces necessary for meriting it here on earth through good works.*

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It is the virtue that gives us strength amidst the various difficulties of life. It is the salutary ointment that calms our troubled heart from the passions and gives strength to our will in our struggle against all our spiritual enemies.

The thought of heaven, how great a consolation it is for us in times of discouragement and trials!

No sacrifice is ever too great for one who often thinks of Heaven!

Like faith, also this virtue flows from Holy Scripture and grows and increases when we read it.

\* \* \*

The object of Hope is *twofold*: Heaven and the graces necessary for meriting it.

We will see then how the Bible keeps alive in us the thought of heaven and increases the confidence that we will have from God all the necessary means for meriting it.

We read in the first book of the Maccabees that Jonathan, writing to the Romans to establish with them an alliance of brotherhood and friendship, tells them: “Now we, although not needing these things (alliances), because we have, for our consolation, the sacred books in our hands” says further that such an alliance they make only as a sign of friendship and harmony and not because they feel the need of the help of the Romans: the only hope in fact of receiving from God all the necessary aids was very strong because it was founded on the divine promises written in the Bible.

127 The hope<sup>1</sup> that began to shine in the souls of Adam and Eve when, after they sinned, God promised them the Redeemer, kept on growing until Jesus Christ. The Hope for the Messiah was very much alive not only among the Jews, but also among the pagans: all longed for him and ardently desired him because they saw in him the Prince of Peace prophesied by Isaiah; they hoped from him the peace so greatly desired.

With Christ, heaven was also hoped for. It was his role to open again the gates of heaven, closed due to the sin committed by Adam and Eve. Before Jesus Christ, no one could enter heaven, not even St. Joseph. It was only after Jesus’ glorious resurrection that the gates of the eternal city were opened wide.

Magnificent is the example of hope given us by Job who, tried by God in many ways, never got discouraged or lost heart. He knew well that his God was just and would be compassionate to him.

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<sup>1</sup> It is one of the essential messages and contents of the Scripture. He who studies the Bible becomes a person of hope even in the execution of his duties, according to the teachings of the Church. In the *Providentissimus Deus* of Leo XIII, quoted many times in *LS* (pp. 17, 30, 109), it is required that “provisions be made so that young persons undertake biblical studies conveniently prepared and endowed, so that they may not frustrate their just *hope* and so that, what would be a greater evil, captured by the deceptions of the rationalists and by the appearance of erudition, they may not carelessly run the danger of losing their way.” (no. 6) Don Alberione refers above all to the hope of eternal life and heaven.

At the height of his sufferings, he kept on saying: “But as for me, I know that my Vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust; whom I myself shall see: my own eyes, not another’s, shall behold him, and from my flesh I shall see God; my inmost being is consumed with longing.” (Jb 19:25-27)

How much strengthened becomes our hope even by the mere reading of this biblical incident!

If hope is vivified by reading the books of the O. T., what can we say of the New?

What a sublime example of Hope is that of the Blessed Virgin when, invited by the pious women to also come to the sepulcher to embalm the body of her Jesus, refuses to go, not because she did not love her Son, but because she strongly hoped that He would resurrect, as she had read many times in the Prophets.

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How many other examples, narrated in the Bible, can we mention for the comfort and increase of our hope in Jesus and in his Paradise, since the whole Bible is all for saying that man is not to stay on this earth, but he is created for heaven... that his dwelling is not here, but in Paradise.

“How long will you people mock my honor, love what is worthless, chase after lies?” (Ps 4:3) Seek and love the eternal beauties for which you have been created.

The reading of the Bible not only revives in us the hope of Heaven, but also increases our confidence to receive from God all the graces to merit it. For as many as 400 times,<sup>2</sup> God, in the Bible, says that we pray, ask, and demand that He will give us all that we need to reach heaven. Let us quote some of them: “...the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary” (Lk 18:1); “...be serious and sober for prayers” (1Pt 4:7); “Let nothing prevent the prompt payment of your vows...”

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<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to make calculations like these on the *concordances* of the *Vulgate*. In the *Nuovissima Versione* (ed. San Paolo) the result is as follows: 29 forms (of the verb “pregare” [to pray], of the noun “preghiera” [prayer], or [“orazione”]) are present in 360 verses of the Old and the New Testament, for a total of 542 occurrences. Prayer is certainly one of the most important themes of the Bible.

(Sir 18:22);<sup>3</sup> “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Mt 7:7)

129 Then, what can we say of the numerous examples recorded in the Bible for our edification? Let us mention | only that of the Holy Virgin who, at the wedding of Cana, having noticed that there was no more wine, went to Jesus and simply told him: They have no wine. Then, certain that she would be heard, she tells the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.” (Jn 2:1ff) It was then that Jesus performed his first miracle by changing the water into choice wine.

Most beautiful are the parables narrated to us by Jesus, of the lame, the lepers, the blind, the deaf, and the mute who, having prayed, were healed and cured.

Read Holy Scripture and it will console you; there you will find everything that you desire. Your heart will be filled with all the goods it longs for. You will learn how to pray and how to acquire heaven.

\* \* \*

From this follows a great conclusion, that the favorite spiritual reading must be the Bible. How many souls, thirsting for holiness, look for worthless books here and there in order to nourish their souls, and they are never satisfied. Let these souls take the Bible and there they shall find abundant and substantial food. It is, according to what the *“Imitation of Christ”* says, a heavenly banquet prepared by God for your souls.

“For two things do I feel to be exceedingly necessary to me in this life, without which this miserable life would be intolerable to me; being detained in the prison of this body, I confess that I need two things, food and light. Thou hast therefore given to me who am so weak, Thy sacred Body and Blood, for the re-

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<sup>3</sup> In another Italian translation, the words are different: “Non ritardare il voto quando sei in tempo, e non aspettare la morte per assolverlo.” The original Greek speaks about a “vow” or “to always work.” The following verse, however, (v. 23) refers to prayer: “*Ante orationem praepara animam tuam et noli esse quasi homo qui tentat Deum.*” The Italian translation mirrors the Latin and specifies it: “Prima di fare un voto preparati e non essere come chi tenta il Signore.” The English translation: “Before making a vow have the means to fulfill it; be not one who tempts the Lord.”

freshening | of my soul and body, and hast set Thy Word for a lantern to my feet. Without these two I could not properly live; for the Word of God is the light of my soul, and Thy Sacrament the bread of life. 130

“These may also be called the two tables, placed on this side and on that, in the treasury of Thy holy Church. One table is that of the Sacred Altar, bearing the holy bread, that is the precious Body and Blood of Christ, the other is the table of the Divine Law, containing holy doctrine, teaching the true faith, and leading steadfastly onwards even to that which is within the veil, where the *Holy of Holies* is.”<sup>4\*</sup>

EXAMPLE – *St. Euplius*<sup>5</sup> gives his life for the Sacred Scriptures. – Deacon Euplius was brought before Calvisian, the governor of Catania; as soon as he reached the room where the judge was, the deacon shouted that he was a Christian.

He stood before the governor with the book of the Holy Gospels in hand. “Where did you get these writings?” Calvisian asked him. “Do you bring them from your house?” “I do not have any house,” Euplius replied, “but I had this book with me when I was arrested.” Told by the judge to read some passage, he opened it and read these two sentences: *Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*<sup>6</sup> *Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4\*</sup> *Imit.* 1. IV, c. 11, n. 4.

[The ‘Holy of Holies’ in the temple of Solomon was called *debir*, literally, “the holiest place.” In reality, the word *debir* means “set apart” and, extensively, mysterious, “sacred,” reserved. The *debir*, a cubic hall of about 10 meters on each side, accommodated the Ark of the Covenant, and could be visited only by the high priest, and only once a year on the Day of Expiation (*Yom Kippur*) celebrated by the Jews on the 10<sup>th</sup> *tishri* (September-October). The Chronicler calls *debir* “the cell of the Holy of Holies” (2Chr 3:8,10). Referring to the verb *dabhar*, “to speak,” Jerome translates it as *oraculum*, that is “(place of the) word” or “oracle.”]

<sup>5</sup> This refers to Euplius, martyr of Catania, tortured to death because he violated the first edict of Emperor Diocletian (February 303), that ordered the surrender of the sacred books. Cf. *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, V, p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> Mt 5:10.

<sup>7</sup> Mt 16:24 (Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23).

Calvisian ordered that this confessor be stretched over the rack; then, he asked him a second time if he insisted in his sentiments. Then, Euplius, making the sign of the cross on his forehead, answered: *I already declared and I declare to you anew that I am a Christian and I read the divine Scriptures.* And he added that “he would have offended God if he surrendered those writings which he loved; better to die | rather than commit such a crime, his death would be followed by a life eternally blessed.”

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The governor doubled the tortures, but in vain; he exhorted the martyr to worship the gods in order to be freed and to offer sacrifice. Euplius, however, replied: “I adore the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; I adore the Most Holy Trinity. I offer myself as sacrifice to Jesus Christ, my God. In vain you tire yourself to make me change my resolution: I am a Christian.”

Fed up, Calvisian, finally read the death sentence; and Euplius was conducted to the place of execution with the book of the Holy Gospels hanging on his neck. His blood reddened the Scriptures that he defended and confessed until death.

It was 12 August of 304.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – I, too, shall have always with me at least a page of the Holy Gospel.

#### CANTICLE [#]

Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace,  
according to your word,  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and glory for your people Israel.”

(Lk 2:29-32)

#### READING

#### **Hope in the resurrection**

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a human



being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has | put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for “he subjected everything under his feet.” But when it says that everything has been subjected, it is clear that it excludes the one who subjected everything to him.

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When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will (also) be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all. Otherwise, what will people accomplish by having themselves baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, then why are they having themselves baptized for them? Moreover, why are we endangering ourselves all the time?

*(1Cor 15:20-30)*

#### PRAYER

Grant me justice, LORD!  
 I have walked without blame.  
 In the LORD I have trusted;  
 I have not faltered.  
 Test me, LORD, and try me;  
 search my heart and mind.  
 Your love is before my eyes;  
 I walk guided by your faithfulness.  
 I do not sit with deceivers,  
 nor with hypocrites do I mingle.  
 I hate the company of evildoers;  
 with the wicked I do not sit.  
 I will wash my hands in innocence  
 and walk round your altar, LORD,  
 Lifting my voice in thanks,  
 recounting all your wondrous deeds.  
 LORD, I love the house where you dwell,  
 the tenting-place of your glory.  
 Do not take me away with sinners,  
 nor my life with the violent.  
 Their hands carry out their schemes;

their right hands are full of bribes.  
But I walk without blame;  
redeem me, be gracious to me!

*(Ps 25/26:1-12)*

## FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE FLOWS THE VIRTUE OF CHARITY

### **JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY**

The book is composed of numerous discourses and prophecies made in a span of forty years, with numerous news that illustrate and confirm the prophecies. A chronological order is not followed, but a certain logical order that develops the threats and the execution of divine justice against the Chosen People and against the Gentiles. Everything, however, can be reduced to a certain unity by the idea of divine justice. If, however, the description of God's vindictive justice prevails, the prophet did not fail to build and plant by preaching mercy and restoration.

What order the prophet had in forming his book, we do not know. He certainly put order to many of his prophecies which he let Baruch write in a book burned by King Jehoiakim, and it's possible that the book dictated anew to Baruch may have served as the basis of the collection of prophecies we now have.

Jeremiah did not have the sublimity or the eagle's eyes of Isaiah, but he is so simple, spontaneous, and natural that he can be the model narrator in all of literature; he is the prophet of the heart, and just as he was one of the most vibrant figures of Christ, so he represents in himself all the sorrows and the hopes of the chosen people.

### **JEREMIAH'S LAMENTATIONS**

This small book of five elegies took the name of lamentations from its Latin title. They are five different, short poems. The first four are alphabetical in Hebrew, that is, every verse begins with a letter in alphabetical order. The third short poem repeats for three times the same letter.

The first lamentation describes the event: desolate Jerusalem, compared to an abandoned woman, laments. The second lamentation describes the cause of the massacre of Jerusalem: God

justly angered at her sins. The third lamentation expresses the deep mourning of Jerusalem that trusts in the mercy of God. The fourth lamentation makes a dramatic contrast between the present and the past of Jerusalem, enumerates the sins that have been the cause of so many misfortunes and ends angrily addressing Idumea. The fifth lamentation is the prayer of the chosen people that lays bare her misfortunes and asks that God's anger be not eternal.

### BARUCH'S PROPHECY

After a historical introduction, the prophet confesses the sins of Israel and asks for mercy. Then, he warns on the causes of the national ruin and promises the greatest consolations. In appendix he includes Jeremiah's letter to the exiles.

### BARUCH

135 Baruch, Son of Neriah, disciple and secretary of Jeremiah, belonged to a noble family of the tribe of Judah. During the fourth year of King Jehoiakim he read Jeremiah's oracles and rewrote them after the king burned them. Under Zedekiah, he suffered imprisonment like Jeremiah until the conquest of Jerusalem. He followed Jeremiah to Massah and then to Egypt. On the fifth year after the fall of Jerusalem, we find him in Babylon reading to the exiles, gathered around King Jeconiah, the confession of sins. It seems that he died in Babylon about twelve years after the fall of Jerusalem.

### REFLECTION XIII

#### **From Holy Scripture flows the virtue of charity**

*"In my heart I treasure your promise,  
that I may not sin against you."  
(Sal 118/119:11)*

As we have seen, through the reading of the Holy Scriptures, we nourish our faith and enliven our hope. Today we shall see how the virtue of charity grows.

Charity is that virtue by which we love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves. A virtue not coming from earth but from heaven, it was brought to us by Jesus Christ himself. Before the coming of Christ, human beings did not know what charity was. On the contrary, for the ancients it was cowardice to forgive an enemy; one had to avenge himself at all cost. After the appearance of the Divine Master, however, things changed! The infinite number of charitable works that today arise in every country and city are a brilliant proof of it.

It is not exaggerated to say that charity is the *daughter of God*.<sup>1</sup> It was seated in the divine Heart of Jesus and flowed from it. Jesus in fact loved the Heavenly Father and human beings with an infinite love: “Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God.” (Eph 5:2)

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Men, with but their natural strength, would not know how to love each other according to the spirit of the Gospel; it was necessary that the Divine Master should come from heaven to teach it to them. This he did first by giving example, then by teaching it verbally; but this teaching of his had not to end with his mortal life; God disposed that the same teaching should be passed on to descendants through the Sacred Scriptures.

How fervent in love does one become who reads in the Holy Gospel the institution of the Most Holy Eucharist! How is love for God ignited when reading the very beautiful parable of the good shepherd, where God is symbolized as one who goes in search of the lost sheep and, having found it, embraces it, takes it in his arms and brings it to a secure place!

Also love towards neighbor is energized and made to grow while reading, for example, the miracles performed by Jesus, whether he cleanses the lepers or heals the paralytics and the afflicted with every kind of sickness, or frees those possessed by the demon, or gives back life to the dead, etc.

What tender sentiments of love and of confidence in God arouses in us the episode of the Magdalene, to whom was for-

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<sup>1</sup> This insistence on charity in *LS*, by Don Alberione, is justified by the words of Jesus himself in Mt 7:12; 22:40: the meaning of the whole Scriptures, or at least of the Law and the Prophets, can be synthesised in doing or not doing to others what one does or does not want to be done to oneself. It seems that this is the best definition of fraternal charity among the sons and daughters of God.

137 given so many sins so that she loved much. However, it is not only the New Testament that energizes and increases our | charity; also the books of the Old Testament contain very beautiful examples and precious teachings on charity. In the Exodus, for example, we read that God exercises mercy until the thousandth generation to those who love him and observe his teachings: “*Ego... faciens misericordiam in milia his qui diligunt me, et custodiunt praecepta mea.*” (Ex 20:5-6)<sup>2</sup>

The same things that we read in the Gospel of St. Matthew had already been written centuries and centuries ago by Moses: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Dt 6:5) with the only difference that in St. Matthew we have: “With all your mind,” instead of “with all your strength.”

In the book of Genesis, chapter 45, we read the very beautiful example of Joseph who generously forgives his brothers who had sold him as a slave and embraces them and kisses them.

This virtue of charity is recommended at least 200 times in the Scriptures.

In his letters, St. Paul speaks of this virtue, its qualities, its necessity, its fruits and rewards on every occasion. The Gospel and the letters of St. John who drew his love directly from the heart of the Divine Master, are a continuous recommendation of this heavenly virtue.

He who reads the Bible assiduously will learn how one must love God and neighbor, how one must forgive and not hate his enemies.

138 St. Alphonsus, from his reading of Holy Scripture, was so convinced of the need and beauty of | this theological virtue that he even wrote a book: “*The practice of the love of Jesus Christ*” as commentary to the verse from the Gospel of St. John: “*Qui habet mandata mea et servat ea, ille est qui diligit me. Qui autem diligit me, diligitur a Patre meo*” – Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father... (Jn 14:21)

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<sup>2</sup> “I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God... bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

We also read in the Holy Gospel how Jesus, before giving to St. Peter the threefold power to administer, govern and judge and before entrusting to him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, wanted from him a threefold profession of love.

Hence, let us read the Bible with the intention and desire to let the three theological virtues – *Faith, Hope and Charity* – grow: and in it, let us look for deeds and sayings that can make them grow and become strong and we shall soon see the effectiveness of such reading.

EXAMPLE. – *The Bible and the Christians of the first centuries.* The history of the Church narrates that the love of the first Christians for Holy Scripture was very great. The Bible and the Eucharist were the two principal springs from where they drew the strength to fight against enemies in the inside and from the outside.

Majority of the Christians carried in their breast the Holy Gospel. The Breviary expressly tells us that St. Cecilia always carried the book of the Gospels in her heart: “*Virgo semper in corde suo Evangelium Christi ferebat,*” and this to have the ease to read it often during the day and during greater and sudden dangers.

At the start of the IV century, Emperor Diocletian issued a decree where he ordered the surrender of the books of Holy Scripture under pain of death. The impious decree did nothing but increase the love and attachment of the Christians for the sacred books. And many preferred to give their life rather than surrender their treasure. Eusebius makes the number of Martyrs of Holy Scripture to reach several hundreds. So much so that the Church, unable to celebrate the feast of each of these martyrs, established January 2 as the so-called feast of the *Martyrs of the Holy Scripture*.

In another place, Church history narrates how those fervent Christians were writing, on special tablets, the most beautiful verses of Holy Scripture, and then they attached them to the walls of their Churches and homes so as to be reminded always of the divine words.

So here we explain the heroic courage of those first Christians

who preferred a hundred thousand deaths rather than deny their faith. Here we explain their great love for each other that stupefied and evoked the admiration of the pagans who, seeing it, said among themselves: Look how they love one another!... they all seem to be brothers and sisters!

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – In imitation of the first Christians, I shall write on my books and notebooks some verses of Holy Scripture.

#### HYMN TO THE CREATOR [#]

Listen, my faithful children: open up your petals,  
 like roses planted near running waters;  
 Send up the sweet odor of incense,  
 break forth in blossoms like the lily.  
 Send up the sweet odor of your hymn of praise;  
 bless the LORD for all he has done!  
 Proclaim the greatness of his name,  
 loudly sing his praises,  
 With music on the harp and all stringed instruments;  
 sing out with joy as you proclaim:  
 The works of God are all of them good;  
 in its own time every need is supplied.  
 At his word the waters become still as in a flask;  
 he had but to speak and the reservoirs were made.  
 He has but to command and his will is done;  
 nothing can limit his achievement.  
 The works of all mankind are present to him;  
 not a thing escapes his eye.  
 His gaze spans all the ages;  
 to him there is nothing unexpected.  
 No cause then to say: "What is the purpose of this?"  
 Everything is chosen to satisfy a need.  
 His blessing overflows like the Nile;  
 like the Euphrates it enriches the surface of the earth.  
 Again, his wrath expels the nations  
 and turns fertile land into a salt marsh.  
 For the virtuous his paths are level,  
 to the haughty they are steep.

*(Sir 39:13-24)*



## READING

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**Characteristics of charity**

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known.

So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

*(1Cor 13:4-13)*

## DAVID'S PRAYER

Hear, LORD, my plea for justice;  
 pay heed to my cry;  
 Listen to my prayer spoken without guile.  
 From you let my vindication come;  
 your eyes see what is right.  
 You have tested my heart, searched it in the night.  
 You have tried me by fire, but find no malice in me.  
 My mouth has not transgressed  
 as humans often do.  
 As your lips have instructed me,  
 I have kept the way of the law.  
 My steps have kept to your paths;  
 my feet have not faltered.  
 I call upon you; answer me, O God.  
 Turn your ear to me; hear my prayer.  
 Show your wonderful love,  
 you who deliver with your right arm  
 those who seek refuge from their foes.  
 Keep me as the apple of your eye;  
 hide me in the shadow of your wings.

*(Ps 16/17:1-8)*

## THE BIBLE AND THE PRACTICE OF THE GOSPEL BEATITUDES

### EZEKIEL

Ezekiel, of priestly lineage, was brought to Babylon with Jeremiah during the second deportation (601-599 B. C.), and with his wife who died in Tel-Abib, on the Chebar (perhaps the great canal that united the Tigris with the Euphrates) where he stayed with a colony of exiles. After five years of exile, perhaps at the age of thirty, he began his prophetic ministry, and for at least twenty-years, he was the moral guide of his people, whose elders used to meet in his house because Ezekiel, as a priest, as a prophet, and more than anything else for his great spirit, had great authority among them. He died in exile and seems to have been killed by a prince of Judah he scolded for idolatry.

Ezekiel lived during the sad days of the chosen people. In a foreign land, a prophet of divine fidelity amidst threats and promises, with marvelous greatness of spirit and firm character, and with efficacious eloquence, he proclaims the fulfillment of the divine threats and prophesies the fulfillment of the divine promises when the exile ends, Israel returns to the motherland and is restored in the messianic kingdom.

### EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY

The prophecies of Ezekiel seem to have been put together by himself in the order in which we have them; because of this, the book has a logical as well as a chronological order.

The central focus of his book is the fall of Jerusalem: before the fall of the holy city, his prophecies aimed at exciting the Jews to sorrow, and to trust in God and not in Egypt and in other peoples, and they insist on the triumph of the Babylonians and the fall of the kingdom of Judah. After the fall of Jerusa-

lem,<sup>1</sup> his prophecies aimed at consoling the exiles by the promises of liberation, the return to the motherland and the messianic kingdom, which is described with marvelous symbols.

The book of Ezekiel is obscure, especially due to the crowding of symbols and visions, of usages and customs unknown to us; the language shows the effects of the exile; the style, for some, is not elegant but for everyone it is strong and effective and full of audacity. The vagueness, however, becomes clarity before the reality of the messianic kingdom symbolized by him.

#### REFLECTION XIV

### **The Bible and the practice of the Gospel beatitudes**

*“Your decrees are my delight,  
they are my counselors.”*  
(Ps 118/119:24)

The Divine Master, having gone up the mountain and having sat down, started to teach the crowd saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

“Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem surrenders to Nebukadnezzar II, king of Babylon, in March of 597 B.C., the year during which the forced exile of many influential citizens began. Other deportations follow after the final destruction of the city in the years 587-586. It is not known how many in all were deported to Babylon even if Jer 52:30 talks about “four thousand six hundred.” The date of Ezekiel’s deportation is not known. For Don Alberione it would have happened between the years 601-599 (cf. p. 141), but it is a dubious conjecture, with him believing that the ministry of Ezekiel began “after five years of exile.” One cannot understand however how the prophet, from Babylon, could have excited the Jews to repentance before the fall of Jerusalem (cf. p. 142).

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Mt 5:3-12)

These are the gifts that we expect from Jesus on the day of judgment; they are divine gifts that have their root and dependence on the theological virtues. This is why we speak of them here, immediately after the virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.

The Gospel beatitudes contain in themselves a twofold promise: a promise of beatitude on earth and a promise of beatitude in Heaven. The soul, in view of such promises, courageously casts herself into the path of perfection, very sure to find in them both peace and tranquility.

It is true, the Beatitudes do not occupy more than a half page in the Gospel of St. Matthew, but then the whole Bible can be considered as their commentary, a continuous recommendation of the Beatitudes promulgated by Jesus in the famous discourse on the mountain.

**144** In how many places in Holy Scripture do we find, for example, that the poor are blessed even here on earth! Beautiful and edifying is the example of Ruth who, not having anything to live on, goes to glean in the field of a rich lord called Boaz who, seeing the young girl’s virtue, wanted her as his bride, and from that day on Ruth lived happily even here on earth.

Another example of awarded poverty is that of the prophet Elisha to whom God miraculously provided food by sending a raven that brought him the needed bread. And thus we could continue to put forth many other examples from the Bible to prove that the poor are blessed, while cursed are the rich, that is, those who have their heart attached to wealth. The same could be said of the other beatitudes.

How many facts, sayings, and examples do we find in the Bible that praise and comment: “Blessed are the pure of heart.” What does the beautiful figure of the innocent and pure Joseph, the Hebrew, tell us? That of the chaste Susanna? With facts, they repeat to us the words of Jesus: “Blessed are the pure of heart.”

The event of the deluge, of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah repeat to us instead that the adulterous will be tremendously punished and cursed by God.

Of each of the other beatitudes, both the Old or the New Testament have praises, recommendations and commenting events.

\* \* \*

He who assiduously reads the Bible is brought to live in the divine and heavenly atmosphere of the Blessed. He becomes so inflamed by the holy examples narrated in it, and by the | holy sayings that he conceives of heroic plans and, on the way of perfection, he not only runs, but flies. Thus, in fact, it happened to the Most Holy Virgin: she became inflamed in the reading of the holy Books and advanced in sanctity with giant steps.

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The beatitudes are like a compendium and practice of the life of Christian perfection; the virtues, in fact, of poverty, meekness, patience, and purity recommended by Jesus in the beatitudes constitute the highest and most sublime asceticism of perfection.

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From here it follows that Holy Scripture is not for one class of persons only, but for all, inasmuch as all are bound to tend to perfection. The Divine Master addresses to all the command to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect: "*Estote ergo perfecti sicut et Pater vester coelestis perfectus est.*" (Mt 5:48)<sup>2</sup>

Of the 72 books making up Holy Scripture some are more suitable for a class of persons and others for others. For example, how many practical teachings can parents and children have in the very inspiring books of Ruth, Tobit, and Job!

For one engaged in the service of God, how much good can he draw from the reading of Leviticus and Numbers!

For every class of persons the loving heavenly Father has written a letter. Everyone can find in the Bible what is suited for him. Everyone can find in it light, comfort, and strength.

During the first centuries of the Church and throughout Medieval times, the books of the Sacred Scriptures, especially

<sup>2</sup> "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

146 those of the New Testament, were in | all Christian families and every believer made of them his daily food. Eventually, with the coming of the danger of Protestantism and rationalism, such a practice gradually faded away. But at last came the man of Providence, Leo XIII who, in 1898, gave great development to the Groups of the Gospel, and so the very laudable practice of having and reading the Holy Gospel in families became more and more widespread and today we can say that each Christian family possesses the sacred book.

Msgr. Besson,<sup>3</sup> Archbishop of Geneva, in his book “The Catholic Church and the Bible” says that the reading of the Bible is not absolutely commanded, it is true, but it is however the preferred food of fervent souls and for anyone who desires to progress in the way of sanctity.

\* \* \*

Let us now pray to blessed Jesus so that he may incline our hearts to love the Beatitudes and give us the grace and strength to practice them as they did whose example he wanted to be recorded in the Bible, for our edification and comfort, and in order that like them we can become blessed already here on earth, be so thereafter in heaven.

EXAMPLE. – *The Saints in Holy Scripture.* – All the Saints are a living and perennial commentary to the Sacred Scriptures; all of them, by their blameless and industrious lives and by their varied activities have commented on one or more passages of God’s letter to mankind: even more, some have made of a single verse the purpose of all their lives: others, after reading very few words of the holy book, have had the thrust and the strength to free themselves from sin, give themselves to God, and reach the highest peaks of perfection.

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<sup>3</sup> Mons. Marius Besson (Turin 1876 - Freiburg 1945), bishop of Lausanne, Geneva, and Freiburg in Switzerland, was a zealous pastor, of vast and solid theological and historical culture. He exercised a notable influence in international circles, next to the Society of Nations that had its seat in Geneva. He was the animator of charitable and cultural organizations, of Catholic Action and of the Good Press. Among the Protestants, he was known for his conciliatory spirit. Among his writings, Don Alberione quotes, in the Italian version, *L’Église et la Bible*, published in Freiburg in 1927.

*St. Augustine* commented with his life that passage from the letter to the Romans: “*Let us conduct ourselves properly | as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.*” (Rom 13:13-14)

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These words fell before his eyes when he casually opened the Bible; they were the words that decided his conversion and holiness of life. He was already more than 30 years of a life spent as a pagan could spend it: but there were no more obstacles in front of him. He was converted, was baptized, and became a priest, then bishop of Hippo. For his numerous and very profound writings, he is rightly called the *eagle of Theologians*.

*St. Anthony Abbot* is another great pearl of Holy Scripture. The words of the Gospel, “*If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me*” (Mt 19:21) he heard in Church struck him. The young man decides to leave everything. He went, sold everything and gave to the poor: then after retiring in the desert, he undertook very severe penances and became famous for his miracles. He is the great *Patriarch of the Cenobites*.

*Blessed Don Bosco*,<sup>4</sup> like *St. Francis de Sales*, had for his motto the words that the Sacred Scriptures place on the lips of Abraham: “*Da mihi animas, cætera tolle*”: Give me the people; the goods you may keep (Gn 14:21). This was the aim of all his life; this was also the aim of all his work.

*St. Jerome Emiliani* put into practice the saying of the prophet Isaiah: “*Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked when you*

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<sup>4</sup> Don Giovanni Bosco (Castelnuovo d’Asti 1815 - Turin 1888), beatified by Pius XI on 2 June 1929, would be canonized by him on 1 April 1934. The “purpose” of his life, in *LS*, described by Abraham’s words (Gn 14:21), was in reality the education of young boys through the known “preventive system,” aiming at forestalling evil instead of correcting it. Such a system, illustrated by the author in an outline of nine pages, was known also by Don Alberione (cf. G. BARBERO, *Relazioni ed analogie tra Don Giacomo Alberione e San Giovanni Bosco, e tra la Famiglia Paolina e la Famiglia Salesiana*, Unpublished monograph, Rome 1988).

*see them, and not turning your back on your own.*" (Is 58:7) His life was entirely lived in charity towards the poor, especially the orphans, for whom he established everywhere orphanages, hospices, shelters, and founded the Somascan Congregation. Jerome is rightly called the *Father of Orphans*.

148 These are some examples. All the Saints, however, by their | lives commented on some passage of the Sacred Scriptures. And what do we say about all the millions of glorious Martyrs? They have commented, with their blood, what Jesus said: "*And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.*" (Mt 10:28)

The endless array of Virgins, are they not perhaps the most beautiful commentary of the Beatitudes: "*Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God?*" (Mt 5:8)

The words of Holy Scripture are all of God, and all are confirmed by the Saints who are the true children of God and his beloved friends.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Let us select a saying of Sacred Scripture and model upon it our thoughts and actions.

#### CANTICLE: THE BEATITUDES [#]

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
 Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.  
 Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.  
 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.  
 Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.  
 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
 Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
 Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you

(Mt 5:3-12)



## READING

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**The good and the bad on final judgment**

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

*(Mt 25:31-46)*

## PRAYER OF SORROW AND CONFIDENCE

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you. As when brushwood is set ablaze, or fire makes the water boil! Thus your name would be made known to your enemies and the nations would tremble before you. While you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, | such as they had not heard of from of old. No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him. Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our

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ways! Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean men, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; We have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; For you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt.

Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands. Be not so very angry, LORD, keep not our guilt forever in mind; look upon us, who are all your people. Your holy cities have become a desert, Zion is a desert, Jerusalem a waste. Our holy and glorious temple in which our fathers praised you, Has been burned with fire; all that was dear to us is laid waste. Can you hold back, O LORD, after all this? Can you remain silent, and afflict us so severely?

*(Is 63:19–64:11)*

## THE BIBLE AND THE RELIGIOUS STATE

### DANIEL

Daniel, made prisoner together with other noble young men during the first expedition of Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem, was brought to the Babylonian palace where he was raised and educated; and, in spite of the great dangers, he remained faithful to the Mosaic law along with his companions. God rewarded Daniel by conferring on him a wonderful wisdom and the spirit of prophecy.

He became great in court and Nebuchadnezzar gave him the job of governor of the province of Babylon. After Nebuchadnezzar's death, he probably withdrew from the court and did not go back there until he was called to interpret the three famous words that a hand traced on the wall during the royal banquet given by Belshazzar.

With the eventual fall of Babylon, Daniel was honored even by the conquerors: he was in fact esteemed by Darius the Mede and by Cyrus. He was not spared the snares of the courtesans and was thrown into the lions' den from where the Lord miraculously freed him. We do not have other information regarding his life.

### DANIEL'S PROPHECY

Daniel had the mission of defending his people in the court and of preparing the pagans for redemption.

He marvelously accomplishes this twofold mission by making the God of Israel known by the monarchs and by making his people respected. He accomplishes this by showing the foolishness of idolatry and the sovereign power of the true God, and especially by his precise and marvelous prophecies about the kingdoms of the earth and the messianic kingdom wherein he exhibits, like a painting, future history.

The book of Daniel has been attacked in every century by rationalism for the great miracles it narrates and for the marvelous

precision of his prophecies which, for the rationalists, cannot be made prior to the events, but were written during the time of the Maccabees. Already in his time, St. Jerome responded by saying that the accusation of the impious is the solemn testimony of the truth because he confesses that the prophecies did take place. That the prophecies were written under the Babylonian and Persian empires the book itself affirms by its Chaldean language; a book like that of Daniel could not but be written after the Persian Empire and Joseph the Hebrew narrates that the book of Daniel was shown to Alexander the Great when, in 332, he went to Jerusalem, and that because of the prophecies that concerned him he was disposed to respect the Jewish religion.

Daniel remains as the great light of history and he who announces with precision the time of the Messiah.

#### REFLECTION XV

### The Bible and the Religious State

*“May my ways be firm  
in the observance of your laws.”  
(Ps 118/119:5)*

What is the Religious State?

153 The Religious State is a *stable way of life* different from the lay and priestly state; in it the soul, aside from the observance of the Commandments, | embraces and promises, with vows, to observe also the evangelical counsels.

It is a more perfect state of life, chosen by those souls who aspire to a higher degree of perfection and, already observing the Commandments prescribed for all Christians, decide to observe also the evangelical counsels.

The Evangelical Counsels can be reduced into three: *Obedience, Poverty, Chastity*. These, if observed well, are enough and are adequate to lead the soul to the most sublime heights of holiness. The history of the Church proves it to us with countless examples of religious men and women who, through their observance, made themselves saints.

In what manner do we know the excellence of this state? From where do we know that the true founder was Jesus Christ himself?

From the Sacred Scriptures. It is there that we know that if a soul desires greater perfection, he must, aside from the observance of the Commandments, embrace also the Counsels.

The Religious State is completely a revelation and we would not know anything of its institution and of its advantages if we did not have the sacred books.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew we read of the very wonderful episode of the young man who comes to Jesus and asks him: "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" And Jesus replies: "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he asked. Jesus replied: "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him: "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" | Jesus said to him: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Mt 19:16-21)

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How many young men and women heard the voice of the Divine Master's voice and, leaving behind everything, followed him by embracing a more perfect life!

The eight beatitudes are a magnificent proclamation of the Religious State! We know from the Gospel that the true Founder of the religious state was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the first religious; he is the perfect model of a poor, obedient and pure life.

All the evangelists are in agreement in describing the humble poverty of the Messiah, and St. Matthew says of him: "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." (Mt 8:20)

As to his obedience to Mary and Joseph, we read: "He... was obedient to them." (Lk 2:51)<sup>1</sup>

As for the angelic virtue, the Evangelists tell us that Jesus did not even allow that he be accused about it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On Jesus' obedience to the Father, before obedience to men, see as well: Lk 2:48; Mt 12:48; Mt 19:29; Mk 11:27-33.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of other things: for example, of being "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." (Mt 11:19) Abusing of the Scripture, one can always find a passage to justify one's own

After the first and most perfect religious, Jesus, immediately follow the Blessed Mother, Mary Most Holy, St. Joseph, the Baptist; then follow the Apostles, the Disciples, and all the Pious Women who accompanied the Divine Master. And today, the religious houses, the Congregations who have as primary goal the sanctification of their members, are most numerous.

**155** The 27 books of the New Testament are a wonderful apology of the Religious State. The Gospels and especially the letters of the Apostles are a warm invitation to ascend the path of perfection and how many, upon reading them, fling themselves for the conquest of the incorruptible crown! Blessed is he who understands this call and follows it!

It is the youthful souls who are more disposed to listen to the voice of Jesus who speaks to their hearts through the Holy Gospel. It is for this that the Divine Master thanks the Father: “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.” (Mt 11:25)

The same thing was confirmed by the Most Holy Virgin when she exclaimed: “The rich he has sent away empty.” (Lk 1:53)

What powerful stimuli to perfection for the soul are certain verses of the Gospel! We recall only: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have... then come and follow me.” (Mt 19:21) “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mt 5:48), and many other similar exhortations that separate the soul from sin and place it at the following of Jesus.

**156** The great founders of monasticism: St. Anthony Abbot, St. Basil, St. Benedict were so convinced of it that to their monks they did not advise any other book except Holy Scripture. We know from Church History that those monks, not having the means to commune | every day with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, communed many times a day with Jesus-Truth and the encouragement and the strength they received from such read-

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convictions while ignoring other passages that would help to interpret a particular text. A rule of exegesis by now consolidated is to read the Bible with the Bible, and every passage in its context and in the frame of the whole Bible. In it, there is not only one “theology” or one “spirituality.”

ing were such that they became the terror of demons, the sworn enemies of the world and of souls.

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Anyone who on this earth often converses with the Divine Master and with the Heavenly Father by reading his letter, will deserve in heaven to be still near Him.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Anthony Abbot*.<sup>3</sup> – He was born in 259, in Herakleia of Egypt. He was schooled since he was young in seclusion, so that Anthony, growing through the years, did not bother about educating himself in secular sciences for fear that they would offer him occasions of evil; but he confined all his study to Holy Scripture, and all his pleasure was to read them and meditate on them while keeping diligently in his heart that fruit that he drew from such a praiseworthy and holy occupation.

At age twenty, he lost his parents and he had to take care of the administration of his goods. Temporal concerns were not made for him. One day, going to Church, he thought of the example of the Apostles, who left everything in order to follow Jesus, and of the first Christians who sold their properties to give the sale to the Apostles. By divine disposition, while he was entering the Church, the Deacon was singing those words addressed by Jesus to the rich young man: *If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.*<sup>4</sup> Anthony considered that invitation as addressed to him. He sold everything and kept only what was necessary for him and his sister.

A little later, hearing the exhortation of Jesus: *Do not worry about tomorrow,*<sup>5</sup> he no longer doubted the divine call. He brought his sister to the monastery, retired in a small cell, and later withdrew to the desert there to lead a penitent life. The fame of his holiness attracted to him many disciples.

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<sup>3</sup> This saint is referred to most often as an example of the person inspired by the Bible (see pp. 147, 155, 156f, 244, 290, 311). The Italian spelling of the title “abate” or “abbate” is not uniform.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mt 19:21.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mt 6:34.

He grouped them in monasteries and gave them their rule of life: the singing of the Psalms, the daily reading and meditation of the Sacred Scriptures, fasting, prayer, and manual work had to be their only occupations.

In his last recommendations to his monks, St. Anthony insisted on the reading of the Holy Bible and on living the teachings contained in it.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Today I shall read the Bible with greater recollection, while formulating a resolution for the day.

#### CANTICLE [#]

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,  
 proclaim it on distant coasts,  
 and say: He who scattered Israel,  
 now gathers them together,  
 he guards them as a shepherd his flock.  
 The LORD shall ransom Jacob,  
 he shall redeem him from the hand of his conqueror.  
 Shouting, they shall mount the heights of Zion,  
 they shall come streaming to the LORD'S blessings:  
 The grain, the wine, and the oil, the sheep and the oxen;  
 They themselves shall be like watered gardens,  
 never again shall they languish.  
 Then the virgins shall make merry and dance,  
 and young men and old as well.  
 I will turn their mourning into joy,  
 I will console and gladden them after their sorrows.

*(Jer 31:10-14)*

#### READING

##### **The religious have to strip off the old man and put on the new**

**158** Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming (upon the disobedient). | By these you too once conducted yourselves, when you lived in that way. But now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and ob-



scene language out of your mouths. Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

*(Col 3:5-17)*

## PRAYER

### **Longing of the religious soul**

Keep me safe, O God; in you I take refuge  
 I say to the Lord, you are my Lord,  
 you are my only good.  
 Worthless are all the false gods of the land.  
 Accursed are all who delight in them.  
 They multiply their sorrows who court other gods.  
 Blood libations to them I will not pour out,  
 nor will I take their names upon my lips.  
 LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,  
 you have made my destiny secure.  
 Pleasant places were measured out for me;  
 fair to me indeed is my inheritance.  
 I bless the LORD who counsels me;  
 even at night my heart exhorts me.  
 I keep the LORD always before me;  
 with the Lord at my right, I shall never be shaken.  
 Therefore my heart is glad, my soul rejoices;  
 my body also dwells secure,  
 For you will not abandon me to Sheol,

nor let your faithful servant see the pit.  
You will show me the path to life,  
abounding joy in your presence,  
the delights at your right hand forever.

*(Ps 15/16:1-11)*

## THE BIBLE AND THE PRIESTHOOD

### HOSEA'S PROPHECY

Hosea, son of Beeri, prophesied during the reign of the kings of Judah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, but he exercised his prophetic ministry in the northern kingdom a little after Amos. He saw the triumph of Israel under Jeroboam II, but he also saw its anarchy and ruin in his long life. He prophesied the destruction of Israel and saw his prophecies come true. Amidst the frightful corruption described by him, he raises his voice to tell the people that the punishment is just and it must be accepted, and that after their conversion there will be salvation; he shows God's justice in punishing obstinate sinners, his mercy in welcoming the repentant. His book is a composition done in a hurry at the end of his life as a prophet, in order to sum up the prophecies made during his prophetic ministry.

### JOEL'S PROPHECY

Joel, son of Pethuel, is with Obadiah, one of the most ancient prophets whose writings remain for us. He was of the kingdom of Judah and there he exercised his prophetic ministry. His writings place him in the golden age of Jewish literature, and perhaps in the first years of Uzziah. Joel is a | great prophet, clear, elegant, and sublime. He was imitated by the other prophets surpassed by him in sublimity, except Isaiah and Habakkuk.<sup>1</sup> The description of the locusts is a true masterpiece.

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### AMOS' PROPHECY

Amos was a shepherd and he cultivated sycamore trees in Tekoa when God called him to the prophetic ministry and sent him to the schismatic and idolatrous kingdom of the north

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<sup>1</sup> This is the spelling of the *Vulgata*. Very often in *LS* we find "Abacuc."

which, at that time, during the last years of Jeroboam II, was at the height of its power, prosperity, and also of corruption. The place of Amos' preaching was Bethel, one of the sanctuaries of idolatrous Israel. His preaching has as object Israel, but he does not forget Judah which, under Uzziah, had conquered many enemies, and after mentioning the present prosperity of the two kingdoms, threatens punishments and the destruction of Israel. At the end he encourages by proffering hopes.

### OBADIAH'S PROPHECY

Obadiah, who, in the Vulgate, occupies the fourth place among the minor prophets, according to some is the most ancient of the prophets who has left writings behind. The name Obadiah means servant of the Lord, and we can argue that he belonged to the kingdom of Judah due to his angry address against Idumea, most bitter enemy of Judah. Obadiah's prophecy, made of a single chapter of 21 verses, is the shortest writing in the Old Testament. With a single prophecy it announces God's judgment against Edom, considered the figure of God's enemies. He announces that Edom will be completely destroyed, since it is the enemy of Israel, who will be exalted.

### JONAH'S PROPHECY

**162** Jonah, the fifth of the minor prophets according to the order of the Vulgate, was from Gat of Zebulun, and hence of the kingdom of Israel. The book of Jonah does not have oracles, but narrates an event full of oracles. Jonah, an ardent patriot, hated the Gentiles whom he saw as dangerous to his people. Then, from God came to him the order to preach to Nineveh. That meant the conversion of Nineveh, the life of Assyria, who was headed to destroy Israel. The ardent patriot disobeys, flees to Joppa, and boards a Phoenician ship. A furious tempest obliges him to confess his crime. Thrown into the sea, swallowed by a big fish and cast to the shore after three days, he sings the power of God and goes to preach in Nineveh. Nineveh is converted, God withdraws the decree of destruction, and responds to the lamentations of Jonah by sending a worm to dry the resin tree that shaded him

## MICAH'S PROPHECY

Micah, of Moresheth, near Gat of Judah, prophesied under Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and hence he was a contemporary of Isaiah, whom he resembles for the nature and arguments he touches on. Micah at times threatens, but more than anything else he consoles, and he does it employing a lofty style, rich in images as well as in wordplays. He has great prophecies: the Assyrian invasion, the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem, the slavery of Babylon, the return, the messianic kingdom, and the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

### REFLECTION XVI

#### The Bible and the Priesthood

*"Your hands made me and fashioned me:  
give me insight to learn your commands."  
(Ps 118/119:73)*

As we have reflected yesterday, from the Bible flows the Religious State; today, instead, | we shall see how the Ecclesiastical State flows from it: that is, how the Bible tells every Priest what are his tasks and duties, what are his virtues and what will be his reward in the afterlife.

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Who is the Priest?

The Priest is an exceptional man, "*ex hominibus assumptus*," chosen by God in the midst of a people one thousand, two thousand, or five thousand, and constituted as minister of God, dispenser of his treasures: "*Ministros Christi, et dispensatores mysteriorum Dei.*"

The Divine Master casts his loving glance on that young man and with intimate and secret fascinations draws him to himself, that is, segregates him from his companions and with a thousand stratagems detaches him from his family and leads him to a sacred place, the Seminary, or the religious house, where the young man receives instruction and the necessary formation.

During this most delicate time of formation, Jesus continues to speak to his heart, causing the rose of charity, the lily of purity, and the marguerite of obedience to sprout in it and, in a word, all the virtues needed in a Priest. Through his superiors and Teachers, he forms and enlightens his mind and with interior and continuous graces strengthens him and gives him an iron will. When his training is considered adequate, the Bishop then intervenes. In the name of God he invites him to step forward and consecrates him minister of God, giving him the power to celebrate the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to preach and to administer the Most Holy Sacraments.

164 This is who the Priest is: a privileged person, one chosen among many a dispenser of heavenly goods, the gatekeeper of the Holy Tabernacle. In his hands are placed the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whoever wants to be saved must take from his hands a mystical pass, that of Baptism; otherwise, he could not enter Heaven.

The Priest is the Secretary of Jesus Christ, another Jesus Christ: "*Sacerdos alter Christus*," and hence he is called to exercise the same powers as the Divine Master, of whom he must be a faithful copy.

He is "*ex hominibus assumptus, et pro hominibus constituitur*": taken from among men and made their representative before God" (Heb 5:1); then he will hear confessions, thus freeing souls from their sins and raising them to perfection.

"*Pro hominibus constituitur*": observe him in the morning: he goes to the altar with slow and solemn steps, with his head bowed and totally absorbed since he knows he is going to Calvary where he will offer for the people the divine victim. There he satisfies, thanks, and supplicates the Omnipotent God for himself and for his people!

In virtue of that Mass the holy souls in Purgatory will be freed and relieved: the Blessed in Heaven will have glory and honor.

Oh, what a sublime man is the Priest!

Go to look for it in the Bible: there you will find him in his divine figure; there you will know what are his roles, what are his duties and what are his rewards.

To understand, however, what the Priest is in the New Law it is necessary to know what the Priest is in the Old Law, this last being the figure, the type of the true Priest.

Thus we have Leviticus and Numbers, which | almost exclu- **165**  
sively talk to us about the sublime office of the Levites.

Here we find what must be the life of a Priest, what his virtues are, his duties, the authority that envelops him and the respect that everyone must render him.

In Leviticus, for example, in chapter 10, we read that the Levites, that is, Aaron and all his sons, had to abstain from any inebriating drink, to be able to discern always the holy from the profane; they had to be healthy and not have any physical defect: “No man... who has some defect shall come forward to offer up food to his God: neither one with disfigurement or malformation, with a crippled foot or hand...” (Lv 21:17ff)

Even the victims that the Priests had to offer had to be without any physical defect. We also know (always from the Old Testament) that it was absolutely forbidden to offer victims and burn incense to the Lord for anyone who was not constituted minister, and whoever did so was immediately burned alive. Terrifying is the episode of Korah and his 250 followers who, wanting to usurp the office of the Priests, lit the thuribles and offered incense. It was then that immediately a mysterious fire came down from heaven and burned them alive. (cf. Nm 16)

The murmurers against the Priests were also immediately punished with death as the book of Numbers, 16, narrates. Fourteen thousand and seven hundred were burned for having murmured against Moses and Aaron. Very severe punishments as that of the Bible was inflicted<sup>2</sup> upon Mary, Moses’ sister, who murmured against her brother.

It is, however, in the Holy Gospel that we have the type, the **166**  
perfect model of the Priest: Jesus Christ; and it is from there that we know what must be the life, the zeal, and the rewards of God’s ministers. And we could say that one who has not read the Holy Gospel, has not understood who the Priest is.

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<sup>2</sup> The construction is syntactically inexact, but it corresponds to the original. It should read: “punishments of the Bible were inflicted upon Mary...”

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What relationship is there between the Bible and Priesthood?

It is a very close relationship inasmuch as it is in the Bible that the Priest knows that his ministry is divine; it is from there that he knows his duties and obligations; and it is from there that, knowing the rewards reserved for him, he draws strength and courage in the exercise of his ministry.

It is the Holy Gospel that makes us know the solicitous care of the Divine Master in forming the Apostles and how they received from Jesus himself the command to go to the whole world to preach the Good News to all creatures.

In St. Luke we read that Jesus, after having instituted the great Sacrament of Love, gives to the Apostles and, through them, to all their successors, the power to do the same until the end of the world: "*Hoc facite, in meam commemorationem.*" (Lk 22:19)<sup>3</sup>

167 It is still from the Holy Gospel that the Priest knows that the power that he has to free souls from their sins comes directly to him from Jesus. It is in the Holy Gospel that he reads about the great reward the Heavenly Father has prepared for faithful Priests. And Jesus told them: "Amen, I say to you that you who have followed me, | in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Mt 19:28)

From this it follows that the book of the Holy Gospel should be, not only for the Priest, but for every aspirant to such a sublime state, the principal ambition and the most beloved book. In it, in fact, is contained his code, his law, his rule of life; from it the cleric must know how to draw strength and courage in the difficult journey of his calling!

EXAMPLE. – *St. Ignatius of Loyola.* – Among the principal saints who in the XVI century opposed to the false Lutheran reformation a work of true Catholic reformation and were a bulwark against the spread of Protestantism, St. Ignatius of Loyola is certainly to be counted.

Let us recall just two events very much related to the Sacred Scriptures.

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<sup>3</sup> "Do this in memory of me."



When Ignatius, after being wounded during the siege of Pamplona (1521), was brought to the hospital, he asked for literature that would make his forced rest less lengthy and boring. He would have desired chivalrous novels, narrations of heroic deeds, but it was providence that placed in his hands the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the lives of Saints. He began to reflect on his own life and realized the vanity of that world he served. From then on his conversion began. He decided to give up earthly soldiership to serve, or, rather, lead another noble militia that would serve not an earthly king, but Jesus Christ himself. After hanging his sword at the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Monserrat, he retired at Manresa for a long course of exercises: from here his idea of founding the Society of Jesus.

In Paris, where he was staying to pursue his studies, he found his first companions; among them were illustrious names like Salmeron, Laynez, and Lefèvre. There was, at the University of Paris, an illustrious and still young professor to whom the honors and glories of the world and of science smiled: Francis Xavier. Ignatius won him over to himself: “What | does it profit a man – he often repeated the words of the Divine Master – to gain the whole world if he loses his own soul?” Those words penetrated little by little the good heart of Francis, until they caused him to completely renounce the world.

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On 15 August 1534, in the church of Montmartre in Paris, Ignatius, along with his first companions, pronounced his first religious vows: there was laid the first base of that Company which gave the Church so many saints and men eminent in doctrine, of that Company which is the right arm of the Church and has already accomplished much good in the world.

## CANTICLE [#]

Give ear, O heavens, while I speak;  
 let the earth hearken to the words of my mouth!  
 May my instruction soak in like the rain,  
 and my discourse permeate like the dew,  
 like a downpour upon the grass,  
 like a shower upon the crops.  
 For I will sing the LORD'S renown.

Oh, proclaim the greatness of our God!  
 The Rock - how faultless are his deeds,  
 how right all his ways!  
 A faithful God, without deceit,  
 how just and upright he is!  
 Yet basely has he been treated  
 by his degenerate children, a perverse and crooked race!  
 Is the LORD to be thus repaid by you,  
 O stupid and foolish people?  
 Is he not your father who created you?  
 Has he not made you and established you?  
 Think back on the days of old,  
 reflect on the years of age upon age.  
 Ask your father and he will inform you,  
 ask your elders and they will tell you:  
 When the Most High assigned the nations their heritage,  
 when he parceled out the descendants of Adam,  
 He set up the boundaries of the peoples  
 after the number of the sons of God;  
 While the LORD'S own portion was Jacob,  
 His hereditary share was Israel.

*(Dt 32:1-9)*

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## READING

### **Reward for him who follows Jesus**

Then Peter said to him in reply, "We have given up everything and followed you. What will there be for us?" Jesus said to them, "Amen, I say to you that you who have followed me, in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will yourselves sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

*(Mt 19:27-30)*

### SOLOMON'S PRAYER TO OBTAIN WISDOM

God of my fathers, LORD of mercy, you who have made all things by your word and in your wisdom have established man to rule the creatures produced by you, to govern the world in holiness and justice,

and to render judgment in integrity of heart: Give me Wisdom, the attendant at your throne, and reject me not from among your children; for I am your servant, the son of your handmaid, a man weak and short-lived and lacking in comprehension of judgment and of laws. Indeed, though one be perfect among the sons of men, if Wisdom, who comes from you, be not with him, he shall be held in no esteem. You have chosen me king over your people and magistrate for your sons and daughters. You have bid me build a temple on your holy mountain and an altar in the city that is your dwelling place, a copy of the holy tabernacle which you had established from of old. Now with you is Wisdom, who knows your works and was present when you made the world; who understands what is pleasing in your eyes and what is conformable with your commands. Send her forth from your holy heavens and from your glorious throne dispatch her that she may be with me and work with me, that I may know what is your pleasure. For she knows and understands all things, and will guide me discreetly in my affairs and safeguard me by her glory; thus my deeds will be acceptable, and I shall judge your people justly and be worthy of my father's throne.

*(Wis 9:1-12)*

## THE BIBLE AND FAMILY VIRTUES

### NAHUM'S <sup>1</sup> PROPHECY

Nahum, the seventh of the minor prophets according to the Vulgate, was from Elkosh, a small village of Galilee, hence of the territory of the destroyed kingdom of Israel. With a very beautiful style, he prophesies the destruction of Nineveh and of Assyria. The prophecy is posterior to the year 665, and is prior to the fall of Nineveh that took place, according to the last discoveries, in the summer of 612; and perhaps it was written during the imprisonment of King Manasseh, when Nineveh was at the height of its power.

### HABAKKUK'S PROPHECY

Habakkuk, the eighth of the minor prophets, is one of the major Hebrew prophets. He left no news of himself, aside from his prophecy. It seems that he belonged to the tribe of Levi and lived during the first years of Josiah; certainly he lived before the invasion of the Chaldeans in 609 that he announces as imminent. Habakkuk's prophecy is about the Chaldean invasion.

### ZEPHANIAH'S PROPHECY

Zephaniah, the ninth of the minor prophets, was, according to some, of royal blood and a descendant of Hezekiah. He exercised the prophetic ministry during the first years of King Josiah. It is believed that he lived and preached in Jerusalem. Zephaniah is clear, easy, and lively, though he lacks some originality. The tone of his prophecy, especially in the third chapter, is messianic.

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling "Naum" is also used (cf. p. 284).

### HAGGAI'S PROPHECY

Haggai, the tenth of the minor prophets, is the prophet of the exiles who have returned to their homeland and of the new temple. After seventy years of exile, the chosen people, authorized by the edict of Cyrus, returned to their homeland. The first group of survivors, after reaching Jerusalem, restored to its former place the altar of the holocaust. During the second year of King Darius, God inspired Haggai to stimulate the zeal of the Jews so that the temple would quickly be finished, and Haggai accomplished the task with his prophecies, all done during the second year of Darius, in different months. Haggai's style does not have splendor, and it is closer to prose than to poetry.

### ZECHARIAH'S PROPHECY

About two months after Haggai, Zechariah, son of Berechiah, began to prophesy. He seems to belong to the tribe of Levi. The last of his oracle is dated on the fourth year of King Darius. The book of Zechariah speaks of the restoration of theocracy and of the future messianic kingdom. It has marvelous unity, describing the messianic kingdom, first with visions, then with discourses, finally with oracles, and changing style according to the subject; it is almost prosaic in its visions, oratorical in its discourses, poetic in its oracles. Its obscurity is due to its many symbols, its many mysteries and to some prophecies that will take place at the end of the world.

### MALACHI'S PROPHECY

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Of Malachi, the last of the minor prophets, we know nothing; not even his name is reliable because it means "Angel of the Lord," a title anyone sent by God can have. From the vices this prophet scolds in the people, it is argued that he is a contemporary of Nehemia, that is, he prophesied under King Artaxerxes Longimanus, i.e., after 432 before Christ. The book of Malachi loves the force of dialogue and with pure language and clear and energetic style, he rebukes priests and people, and shows that God is a loving father and an inexorable judge.

## REFLECTION XVII

**The Bible and family virtues**

*“Lovers of your teaching have much peace,  
for them there is no stumbling block.”*  
(Ps 118/119:165)

We know how much the Supreme Pontiffs, especially from Pius IX to Pius XI, worked to bring to the greatest splendor the Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth, and to present that family as a perfect model of all the family virtues.

173 *Pius IX* approved in 1870 the statutes of the Association of the Holy Family. *Leo XIII*, after a splendid encyclical on Christian marriage, established the Feast of the Holy Family, for the purpose of offering to families, at that time | de-Christianized by liberal sects, a model to imitate. *Pius X* confirmed and enriched with new indulgences the consecration of families to the Holy Family. *Benedict XV* extended to the whole Church the Mass and Office of the Holy Family. *Pius XI*, gloriously reigning,<sup>2</sup> did not let the occasion pass to invite Christian families to contemplate their divine model which is the earthly Trinity: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Let us remember only his two encyclicals, one on Christian marriage and the other on the education of the Youth.

Why so many recommendations and so much concern by the Vicars of Jesus Christ for the perfecting of families? Oh, because they knew well that the family is the cell of Society, the hearth of the most precious and necessary virtues: the family virtues.

If the family is healthy and holy, so will be the vocations of which society is the base. Hence, for the welfare of the Church and Society, it is necessary that families be other hearths of virtues.

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<sup>2</sup> Pius XI (Ambrogio Achille Ratti, 1857-1939) was Pope since 1922: he was therefore “reigning” when *LS* was written. The two encyclicals referred to after are respectively *Casti connubii* (31-12-1930) and *Divini illius Magistri* (31-12-1929). This second encyclical offered Don Alberione the stimulus for his book on Pauline formation “*Donec formetur Christus in vobis.*” (1932)

Thus explains all the work, all the concern of the Supreme Pontiffs to bring to the highest splendor the Holy Family and to point it out as the perfect model to imitate.

To imitate the examples of a person, however, we must know them. Now how can families know the sublime examples of the Holy Family? They can know them by reading Holy Scripture: there are described examples of every virtue.

Leo XIII says: "Fathers of families have surely in Joseph an admirable model of vigilance and fatherly concern; mothers have in the Holy Virgin, Mother of God, an eminent example of love, of humble respect and submission, that of a soul of perfect faith; the children of families have in Jesus, submissive to his parents, a divine example of obedience to admire, honor, and imitate. Those who are born noble shall learn from this family, of royal blood, to maintain moderation in prosperity and dignity in afflictions; the rich shall recognize in this school how wealth is to be esteemed less than virtue. The workers then, and all those who suffer so much due to the difficulties of supporting a family and a poor condition, if they look at the holy members of this domestic society, will not want in the motive or occasion to rejoice in their lot rather than be saddened by it.

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"Nothing in fact can be found to be most salutary and most helpful for Christian families than the example of the Holy Family which embraces perfection and the whole of domestic virtues. Thus implored in the bosom of families, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph shall come to their help, shall conserve their charity, rule their customs, and stimulate their members to imitate their virtue and sweeten or make bearable the deadly trials that threaten us from every side."

All these sublime virtues of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, we can know by reading either the Old or the New Testament, with this difference that in the Old Testament they are narrated in a veiled manner, under the form of symbols and figures, and instead in the New Testament they are narrated to us in their entire beauty and reality.

In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul makes a list of the family virtues:

**175** “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, | holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

“Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them.

“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.

“Slaves, obey your human masters in everything, not only when being watched, as currying favor, but in simplicity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others, knowing that you will receive from the Lord the due payment of the inheritance; be slaves of the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will receive recompense for the wrong he committed, and there is no partiality.” (Col 3:12-25)

Is it not true that the soul, after such a reading, feels herself all fired up and is brought to make resolutions for a more perfect life?

**176** Oh, yes, let the Sacred Scriptures come to all our families; they shall sanctify them, model them after the example of the Holy Family!

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Furthermore, Holy Scripture tells us that aside from the natural family, there is another family, the religious and spiritual family, whose members are united not by bond of blood but by a spiritual bond that is grace. Here we ought to remember all



the doctrine of St. Paul regarding the mystical Body, his vigorous exhortations so that every member may be of edification to another: but how would this be possible for us? We cannot but invite the reader to take in his hands the letters of the Apostle and to read especially those to the Corinthians and the Romans.

Also for this religious family, if she wants to see in her bosom the blossomings of the most beautiful virtues, her members must make as their daily food the reading of the Bible.<sup>3\*</sup>

Let us pray to the Holy Family so that every Christian and religious family may learn, from the reading of the Holy Books, to know and practice the family virtues that must constitute our most beautiful crown in Heaven.

EXAMPLE. – *A young pagan woman becomes converted upon reading the Gospel of St. Luke.* – Calixta was still a pagan when the Bishop of Carthage gave her as gift the Gospel of St. Luke telling her, “My daughter, take this sacred parchment. It contains the life of our Lord on earth. And what his love for men has done. Read this book: you will see Who it is we love.” 177

These affectionate words penetrated Calixta’s heart. She remembered them and opened wide the precious book.

From the start the Gospel historian, dedicating his work to a certain Theophilus, presents it to him as a methodical and true narration of events that others have already described before him.

This tone of sincerity and the simplicity of the narration impressed Calixta. She read some chapters and quickly she became interested, such that she never stopped reading.

A completely new world appeared to the young woman. Elisabeth, John the Baptist, Joseph and Mary, Simeon and Anna showed her, with their lives, the virtues that she did not know at all. Above all, however, Calixta came to know the presence of a

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<sup>3\*</sup> “Divine Providence gave us two tablets of salvation: the Most Holy Eucharist and Holy Scripture. We must cling to both, wherefore the urgent need that, beginning from fervent Christians, everybody gradually return to the pious family reading of the Gospel; so that this divine book, like a radiant beacon light, may again cast heavenly light on the whole world, and again drive away its darkness.” (*St. Jerome to Eustochio*)

being perfectly distinct from all the others and superior to every brilliant imagination. This incomparable being, of a truly ideal perfection, was Christ, was Jesus. What she had always sought but was not able to discover, she now found in this book.

She said: "Oh, these are not imaginations of a poet... this is the portrait of a true being. This figure has so much truthfulness, naturalness, life and propriety as not to nail my faith." And the more Calixta studied the figure of Jesus Christ, the more she admired in Him a limitless perfection.

At the presence of this ideal of incarnate holiness before her eyes, how poor and miserable she found herself! For the first time a strong sentiment of humiliation subdued her, and she humbled herself to the point of despising herself.

178 The very good young woman, persevering in her reading, came to the episode of the feast in Simeon's house where the Divine Master shows all his immense love towards | the sinner who comes to anoint his feet and to wash them with her tears.

At this point also Calixta's eyes were filled with tears! She imagined herself to be that unfortunate sinner that the Divine Master did not reject but rather welcomed with so much love while forgiving her all her sins.

Coming to herself, the young woman decided to change her life: and from that day on, she became a very good Christian.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Today I shall make three mortifications in reparation for the abandonment by so many families of the Holy Bible.

#### CANTICLE [#]

*(Continuation of the Canticle of Moses)*

He found them in a wilderness,  
 a wasteland of howling desert.  
 He shielded them and cared for them,  
 guarding them as the apple of his eye.  
 As an eagle incites its nestlings forth  
 by hovering over its brood,  
 So he spread his wings to receive them  
 and bore them up on his pinions.

The LORD alone was their leader,  
 no strange god was with him.  
 He had them ride triumphant over the summits of the land  
 and live off the products of its fields,  
 giving them honey to suck from its rocks  
 and olive oil from its hard, stony ground;  
 Butter from its cows and milk from its sheep,  
 with the fat of its lambs and rams;  
 Its Bashan bulls and its goats,  
 with the cream of its finest wheat;  
 and the foaming blood of its grapes you drank.  
 (So Jacob ate his fill,) the darling grew fat and frisky;  
 you became fat and gross and gorged.  
 They spurned the God who made them  
 and scorned their saving Rock.  
 They provoked him with strange gods  
 and angered him with abominable idols.  
 They offered sacrifice to demons, to “no-gods,”  
 to gods whom they had not known before,  
 to newcomers just arrived,  
 of whom their fathers had never stood in awe.  
 You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you,  
 you forgot the God who gave you birth.  
 When the LORD saw this,  
 he was filled with loathing and anger  
 toward his sons and daughters.  
 “I will hide my face from them,” he said,  
 “and see what will then become of them.  
 What a fickle race they are, sons with no loyalty in them!  
 (*Dt 32:10-20*)

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## READING

### **Duties of children, of parents, of servants, and of masters**

Children, obey your parents (in the Lord), for this is right. “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise, “that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth.”

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord.

Slaves, be obedient to your human masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not only when being watched,

as currying favor, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, willingly serving the Lord and not human beings, knowing that each will be requited from the Lord for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

Masters, act in the same way toward them, and stop bullying, knowing that both they and you have a Maser in heaven and that with him there is no partiality.

*(Eph 6:1-9)*

### PRAYER

I give you thanks, O God of my father; I praise you, O God my savior! I will make known your name, refuge of my life; you have been my helper against my adversaries. You have saved me from death, and kept back my body from the pit, From the clutches of the nether world you have snatched my feet; you have delivered me, in your great mercy From the scourge of a slanderous tongue, and from lips that went over to falsehood; From the snare of those who watched for my downfall, and from the power of those who sought my life;

**180** From many a danger you have saved me, from flames | that hemmed me in on every side; From the midst of unremitting fire, from the deep belly of the nether world; From deceiving lips and painters of lies, from the arrows of dishonest tongues. I was at the point of death, my soul was nearing the depths of the nether world; I turned every way, but there was no one to help me, I looked for one to sustain me, but could find no one. But then I remembered the mercies of the LORD, his kindness through ages past; For he saves those who take refuge in him, and rescues them from every evil. So I raised my voice from the very earth, from the gates of the nether world, my cry.

*(Sir 51:1-9)*

## THE BIBLE AND SOCIAL VIRTUES

## THE MACCABEES

The Jews had their religious freedom under the Persians. After the death of Alexander, Palestine was contested between the kingdom of Syria and that of Egypt. The one who became cruel against the Jews and wanted to impose Hellenism on Israel was the brother and successor of Seleucid, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. On his return from an expedition in Egypt, he assaulted Jerusalem. Two years later he gave vent to his anger against Jerusalem and the Jews; he sent against them Apollonius with an army that took Jerusalem for the second time, desecrated the temple, where he placed the statue of Jupiter of Olympia. Thereafter the Jewish religion was forbidden under pain of death. A large part of Israel apostasized, but some preferred death to abandonment of their faith; among these was the old man Eleazar and a mother of seven sons. Many escaped to the desert. From these escapees started the resistance movement against Hellenism, the holy war that made of this era the most brilliant in Jewish history.

The old priest Mattathias led the struggle. He organized the resistance. After his death, the heroic Judas Maccabeus succeeded him in the command of the army engaged in the holy war. Succeeding him was Jonathan who obtained some peace for the Jews. After Jonathan's death, the Lord raised up Simeon to head the chosen people whose independence he proclaimed.

The events narrated are the object of the two books of the Maccabees.

*The first book*, after a rapid mention of Alexander | the Great and of his successors, narrates the persecutions of Antioch, the struggle of the Maccabees until the death of Simeon and it limits itself only to the narration of events, without adding to it any personal reflections. *The second book*, entirely independent of the first, even anterior to it, takes up again the attempt of Seleucid to loot the temple and stops at the victory of Judah over Nicanor. It is full of reflections on persons and events, and shows

the work of Providence in guiding its people with many miracles performed in its favor.

The two books of the Maccabees, although written by different authors for different purposes, can be considered as one inasmuch as they narrate the same things. One sheds light on and completes the other, but on their own they are independent, separate, written originally in different languages, and hence it is well to analyze them in detail, one after the other, as they are in the canon of the Vulgate, although if we look at the events being narrated, the second comes ahead of the first.

## REFLECTION XVIII

### **The Bible and social virtues**

*“Your decrees are forever just;  
give me discernment that I may live.”*  
(Ps 118/119:144)

The Bible does not only teach us how to live well individually or in family by teaching us individual and family virtues, it also teaches us to live well socially!<sup>1</sup>

The Bible is not only an excellent book of prayers and meditations and a source of Theology, it is also a code and norm of civil,<sup>2</sup> commercial and social life; it has laws for everything that borders on or depends on Catholic morals.

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<sup>1</sup> Until now Don Alberione has mentioned individual and social sanctification (p. 14), has spoken about apostolate and social needs (p. 100), and about the family as a cell of society (p. 173).

<sup>2</sup> Regarding this important affirmation of Don Alberione, read a pastoral note of the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI): “Today above all, while the Holy Spirit stimulates us to a “new Evangelization” in the context of the multiplicity of religions and cultures, we are invited to participate in the singular dialogue between biblical Revelation and the various signals that in them God has left of himself. This is part of the duty of inculturating the Word of God of which the Bible is simultaneously the primary testimony, the irreplaceable source of inspiration, and guarantee of fidelity. – Attention to the history of the effects of Scripture either in the Church or in society, on the level of religious, spiritual, ethical, and cultural expressions becomes, today, a provi-

To kings and governors of nations it teaches how to govern, and to subjects how to obey. **183**

To judges it teaches how to give sentence justly, while reminding them that every sentence they give will be judged.

To confirm this, we should quote literally the entire book of Judges, the four books of Kings, Josuah, Paralipomenon, all the letters of St. Paul, etc., the books preferred, read, re-read and meditated upon by the very Catholic Garcia Moreno, President of Ecuador, who was saying that he did not know how to govern the Republic if not by imitating God; and to know God's government in the world, every day he read the Holy Bible which he made the basis and code of his government. He brought the Republic to a level of civilization, enriching it with schools, streets and bridges, in order to aid agricultural and industrial development. He died a few days before the feast of Our Lady of the Assumption and his last words were: *God does not die! God does not die!*

Benedict XV said it well: "The deviations of today's society have their origin from the fact that the life, the teachings, and the work of Jesus Christ have fallen into deep oblivion, and men no longer draw from them inspiration for their actions." Oh, if the Bible were read and meditated upon, there would not be so much misery in the world, but there would be that international charity so recommended by the reigning Pius XI, and for which he continually recommends to pray and to make penance so that the Lord may grant it to us.

The Bible, saying that all men are brothers and sons of the same father, teaches them charity; it teaches how the various classes of persons ought to love and help each other, what duties servants have towards their masters and vice-versa. | It teaches honesty and justice in commerce and profits, industriousness and work. The Bible is also the source of all apostolates that tend to better society, and all the works of assistance to the young, the elderly, the poor, etc. **184**

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dential passage to recognizing that "great things the Lord has done for us." (Ps 125/126:3) He has performed marvelous deeds and still he does it amidst his people, starting from creation till the final fulfillment of salvation." (*La Bibbia nella vita della Chiesa*, no. 23)

All the fourteen works of mercy, seven corporal and seven spiritual, have their origin and foundation in the Bible and where such works are practiced, there is prosperity and true happiness.

Catholic Action, which today accomplishes in society an immense good, as Pius XI called to mind, has also its origin in the Bible. We know from the books of the New Testament how the Apostles and especially St. Paul called to work with them in the Lord's vineyard young people, men and women. The Bible is the foundation of all codes inspired to justice and truth; and every commercial code or one of Christian sociology cannot do without having recourse to the Bible.

It is said that the Hebrew people did not have any code of law other than Holy Scripture. For resolving whatever question and need, they consulted it. And with reason the Jewish people is said to be a theocratic people, that is, a people that has as head and King God. In fact, who truly governed the Hebrews was the Lord; it was He who, through Moses, Josuah, etc., dictated the laws to the people; and often sent his angels to fight for them.

We know that none of the peoples of Palestine could resist the Hebrews; it is true, they too suffered defeats, but these happened when they were not faithful to God's commandments.

185 The people that has God as their King and Lord, as Cantú shows in his universal history, | is truly blessed: "*Beata gens cujus est Dominus Deus ejus*: Happy the nation whose God is the Lord." (Ps 32/33:12)

And thus shall be happy modern-day peoples; they shall journey well if they shall conform to the principles of the Bible, if they shall accept, as their head and supreme Lord, their God.

All difficulties and hatreds among nations shall cease if all laws shall be inspired after the Bible; there is contained all that human nature needs. Since God is the creator of man, he knows well all the needs and requirements of human nature, and since he is also the primary author of the Bible, he saw to it that that book fully satisfied all needs of human nature.

Rightly therefore can we call the Bible the *Code of humanity*. And if governments will inspire themselves to it, nations will progress well and will see their enemy turn back and flee. If, instead, their laws will be unjust, they will meet exterminating peoples and they themselves will fall into the pits prepared



for others as it happened to Haman who hanged in the same gibbet he had prepared for Mordecai.

St. Louis, king of France, is said not to have made any law or decree without first attending two holy Masses and prayed much; and this so that the Lord would enlighten him and inspire him the law or decree that would truly be useful for the people.

Oh! Blessed be the Lord who raised model men and kings who at the start of their decrees and laws write: "In the name of God" or "by the will of God."

If all kings and governors of the earth made | all their laws in God's name, very soon the world would become an earthly paradise.

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EXAMPLE. – *St. Francis of Assisi and the Holy Gospel.* – Love for the Holy Gospel is the sign, the characteristic of fervent souls destined by God for great things. Now, since the Poverello of Assisi was destined for a mission of immense good, in his heart this love could not but burn. In fact, as his biographers say, he sought the Holy Gospel in every doubt and need.

It is narrated that one day he was greatly bothered for not knowing clearly what the Lord wanted from him. What does Francis do? He goes, takes the Gospel and reads. The words of Jesus to the Apostles fell under his eyes: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations... preach: the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>3</sup> Francis felt enlightened, he sees his path and cries out: "This I want and with all my heart I want to accomplish." He understands that he has to rebuild not only the material churches of St. Damiano, St. Peter, and the Porziuncola, but also the living Church of Christ.

When it was a matter of dictating the Rules to his Friars, although Francis knew that the work was delicate and very important since it was about laying down the rails on which millions and millions of souls would have to journey towards Heaven, the Saint is not dismayed at all. With Friar Bernard, he goes to the Altar and, after having signed himself three times, takes the book of the Gospels and reads. He closes it and reopens it for a second and third time. The foundation of the

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<sup>3</sup> Mt 28:19.

Franciscan Rules was established: the three passages read by St. Francis form the three great pillars on which is built the Franciscan Order which counts thousands of Saints and even today continues to be a true breeding ground of Saints.

The grain of mustard seed sown by Francis grew into a majestic tree and under it came to take refuge surpassing geniuses of humanity like Dante, Giotto, and Christopher Columbus.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – In doubts and temptations, with confidence let us also run to the Gospel.

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## CANTICLE [#]

*(Continuation of the Canticle of Moses)*

Since they have provoked me with their 'no-god'  
 and angered me with their vain idols,  
 I will provoke them with a 'no-people';  
 with a foolish nation I will anger them.  
 For by my wrath a fire is enkindled  
 that shall rage to the depths of the nether world,  
 consuming the earth with its yield,  
 and licking with flames the roots of the mountains.  
 I will spend on them woe upon woe  
 and exhaust all my arrows against them:  
 Emaciating hunger and consuming fever and bitter pestilence,  
 and the teeth of wild beasts I will send among them,  
 with the venom of reptiles gliding in the dust.  
 Snatched away by the sword in the street  
 and by sheer terror at home  
 shall be the youth and the maiden alike,  
 the nursing babe as well as the hoary old man.  
 "I would have said, 'I will make an end of them and blot out  
 their name from men's memories,'  
 Had I not feared the insolence of their enemies,  
 feared that these foes would mistakenly boast,  
 'Our own hand won the victory;  
 the LORD had nothing to do with it.'"

*(Dt 32:21-27)*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> LS shows "Deut. XXXII, 21-29," (Dt 32:21-29) but the Latin text quoted ends with verse 27.

## READING

**Fraternal correction.  
Effectiveness of prayer done together**

If your brother sins (against you), go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.

Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again, (amen,) I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three | are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

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(*Mt 18:15-20*)

## SARAH'S PRAYER

“Blessed are you, O Lord, merciful God! Forever blessed and honored is your holy name; may all your works forever bless you. And now, O Lord, to you I turn my face and raise my eyes. Bid me to depart from the earth, never again to hear such insults. You know, O Master, that I am innocent of any impure act with a man, and that I have never defiled my own name or my father’s name in the land of my exile. “I am my father’s only daughter, and he has no other child to make his heir, Nor does he have a close kinsman or other relative whom I might bide my time to marry. I have already lost seven husbands; why then should I live any longer? But if it please you, Lord, not to slay me, look favorably upon me and have pity on me; never again let me hear these insults!”

(*Tb 3:13ff*)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This passage corresponds only to the translation that the compiler has with him (*Vulgate*). There can be problems in finding the same text in other Italian translations. The Greek text of Tobit has come down to us in three different versions. One is in the Sinaitic Codex, and the *Vetus Latina* comes close to this. The second – used by the Greek Church and is in the Alexandrian and Vatican codexes – appears shorter and is at the same time well edited. The Bible of the CEI follows the (longer) textual type represented by the Sinaitic Codex with sporadic adjustments.

FOR THE PRESS APOSTOLATE  
THE BIBLE IS THE WAY <sup>1</sup>

ST. MATTHEW

The name of St. Matthew is read for the first time in the Gospel when Jesus invited him to a new life in the group of apostles: he was a tax-collector and he followed the Divine Master immediately leaving behind the tax-collector's booth. The publican named Levi of Alpheus of whom speaks another passage in the Gospels is identified with him.

It is not known from where he comes; but we know from the Gospel, that his conversion took place near Capharnaum. After his calling, nothing more is said of him, nor is he referred to in the Acts of the Apostles. According to tradition, however, it is said that he lived a very austere life, abstaining for always from meat. According to St. Clement of Alexandria, he preached the Gospel in Palestine for fifteen years. Then, although some insist that he preached the Gospel in India and others in Persia, according to the version accepted by the Roman Breviary, he preached the Gospel in Ethiopia and confirmed his preaching by many miracles. The miracle with which he raised from the dead the king's daughter for which the king, the queen and the whole region were converted remained famous. With the king's death, his successor Irtacus wanted to have as his bride Epigenia, the king's daughter. Not being able to have her because, upon advice of St. Matthew, she had made a vow of virginity and was persevering in her holy resolve, | Irtacus had the Saint killed while the latter was celebrating on the altar the mysteries. Thus on September 21 St. Matthew crowned his apostolic life with the palm of martyrdom. His body was brought to Salerno and then buried in the church dedicated to him, under the pontificate of Gregory VII, and until now he is venerated there with great piety by the faithful.

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<sup>1</sup> In *LS* there is life (*vita*), but the right word is way (*via*): all the second part, in fact, is dedicated to "Way," while the third to "Life" (Cf. Reflection XXIX that bears the title "For the Press Apostolate the Bible is Life").

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW

All the Fathers agree both in attributing to St. Matthew the first Gospel and in asserting that it was written for Palestinians, among the Jews and for the Jews. In fact, the abundance of prophecies taken from the Old Testament demonstrates to us that the Evangelist is speaking to Jewish readers. The descriptions, the narrations, and everything said regarding customs, are presented as to readers who already know them.

*Aim of the first Gospel:* St. Matthew wants to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament: in him the prophecies have become true, and the unbelief of the people and of its leaders, coming from their prejudices and the perversity of their heart had already been foreseen and foretold.

Hence, St. Matthew more broadly develops the prophetic argument in demonstrating the Messiahship and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Thus, in order to bring to light the unbelieving character of the people, especially that of the leaders, he describes the indifference of the priests and of the teachers starting from the coming of the magi. Jesus Christ foretells for the apostles the persecutions of the Synagogue and predicts the reproof of the people and of their leaders for their incredulity.

From the nature and end of the Gospel we can understand its order and composition. More than a historical work, St. Matthew wanted to make a theological work, caring little for chronological order. Hence he takes no trouble to describe particular events, but he tries instead to propose the doctrine in the events<sup>2</sup> and miracles. Jesus is the promised Messiah, hence his teachings must be accepted.

The time of the composition of the first Gospel can be placed between 42 and 48 A.D. The Greek translation was made perhaps by St. Matthew himself.

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<sup>2</sup> Here Don Alberione enunciates a principle to which he himself has been faithful: the primacy of deeds over words. Blessed Giaccardo wrote in his diary, citing the thought of Blessed Don Alberione: "During the exhortation to pray this morning: 'You are small and hidden, but if you have sorrow for sins, humility, remaining in your place; if you humble yourself as if you're nothing and sinful, trusting in God and praying, you will send a sound that the whole world will hear through the good press... Be doers, not undoers: deeds, through doing your duties and with diligence.'" (30 September 1918)

## For the Press Apostolate the Bible is the way<sup>3</sup>

“Your word is a lamp for my feet a light for my path.”  
(Ps 118/119:105)

We have considered on day IX<sup>4</sup> that the doctrine and the goal of the Press Apostolate is the same as that of the Bible. Today, we shall see that both the Bible and the Press Apostolate are 1. *Universal*, that is, for all men; 2. have *the same form*, that is, maximum simplicity and clarity; and 3. employ *the same process*: impression and press.

The true apostolate of the press must model itself after God the Writer, or on the Bible: a theme full of comfort, an object of love, a light that brightens, a motive of penitence.

The Apostolate of the Press should have: *a)* a character of universality, *b)* marked simplicity and clarity, *c)* convenience of impression.

\* \* \*

192 1. UNIVERSALITY. God wants all men to be saved. This is a matter of faith, “*Deus vult omnes homines salvos fieri.*” (1Tm 2:4)<sup>5</sup> And in this his efficacious will, the Lord has addressed to all his children his letter of invitation to heaven. | From the Sacred Heart of Jesus came out a very sweet tone of voice: “Come to me all of you...” (Mt 11:28)

The Bible is universal as *to places*, inasmuch as it has to reach everywhere, as *to people*, inasmuch as God wants that all men know their destination, as *to content*, inasmuch as its theme is spiritual and eternal.

Hence it is proper that the Press Apostolate, the continuation of the Bible, should be endowed with its universality.

<sup>3</sup> See note 1, p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> In the original this number is written as xIX, which is an error: day XIX and hence reflection XIX are precisely these. The exact number is IX, see p. 95. On p. 97ff reflection IX has the title, “The Bible for the Apostle of the Press is the Truth.”

<sup>5</sup> “God wants all men to be saved.” – In the original text, there is “1 Tim. XI, 4,” (1Tm 11:4) but the citation is evidently mistaken.

Every man must be enlightened by God “*true Light*.” Let the Apostle of the Press then light his lamp and place it in an elevated place: “*You are the light of the world*.” (Mt 5:14)

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2. SIMPLICITY. It is the quality that has to be found in the popular religious press. In fact, it is addressed to the mass of men: farmers, workers, the poor.

The Divine Master preached with all simplicity. No external apparatus of professorial chairs, schools, or attitude; no external form of lofty language. Everything was simplicity: the place, the audience, the tone of voice, the phrase, the example, the parable. And he proclaimed: “I have been sent to the poor.” Simplicity is truth, simplicity is the mark of divinity.

Hence the writings of the Apostle of the press shall be popular and polished in style, plain and clear in form and modest in offering.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Not “cover price” but a “modest offering.” In the language of Don Alberione, the terms used by an apostle should never be *commercial*. During the same years of the composition of *LX*, he used to rhetorically ask a group of Daughters of St. Paul: “How shall we give God’s Word?” And he used to answer: “Spread it in sheets of paper, in small catechisms, with the principal truths necessary for salvation, to pass on to all, *even without any offering*.” (August 1932, *HM II*,4, pp. 169-170) In January 1954, he will clarify to the Paulines: “Our apostolate has a part that seems to resemble industry (e.g., the printing press) and has a part that resembles commerce (bookstore); instead, it is entirely a means for preaching, like a pen in the hands of a Doctor of the Church. We should be careful, even externally, of stamping on it the common marks of businessmen and industrialists.” (*Carissimi in San Paolo*, p. 1089ff) Even more explicitly, and with a humorous note, in a sermon of 1957: “We do not have to say that *Mi protendo in avanti* (*I strain forward*) means to strain forward also in our prices. We strain towards the least possible, and that is the least price or the least offering that is possible, so that the apostolate can continue, the Congregation may live and can accomplish the works it has to accomplish for the sake of souls.” (*Pr D*, p. 522; italics ours) A final text on this theme is of 1960 and it concerns the role of Pauline bookstores: “Not business establishments, but service to the faithful. *Not sales, but apostolate with offerings*. They do not have clients, but cooperators. Not business, but centers of light and warmth in Jesus Christ. They don’t aim to get rich, but to serve the Church and souls. Not for exploitation, but to benefit souls. The faithful and the clergy should find therein collaboration, light, direction for their ministry; not prices, but offerings.” (*UPS IV*, p. 162)

The Eucharist is under the appearances of the most ordinary, but most necessary, food. It is presented under the form of a meal, and yet it contains Jesus Christ, the God-Man.

**193** Similarly the Press-Apostolate is under the form of what is being sought, *to read!* given in the manner of a modest book, and yet it contains the divine Truth "*Ego sum Veritas.*" (Jn 14:6)<sup>7</sup>

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3. CONVENIENCE OF PRINT have both the Bible and the Press Apostolate. Since Moses and the Apostles wrote after preaching; in the same manner acts whoever dedicates himself to this Apostolate. They have *the same means, print*, by which the word is fixed to be read, to be meditated upon, to become life of works, of merit, and of eternal glory.

\* \* \*

*It follows:* that, if this Apostolate is sacrifice, it is however, a sacrifice to which God invites us. That it is wise to take from the Scriptures the style, the form, and the manner of diffusion.

Furthermore: the Apostolate of the Press should be considered as bread; hence it should reach all and nourish all. A very special diffusion has to be made for the Bible that ought to be in the hands of all men, at least the part of the New Testament.

Hence, take God as model in all of the Apostolate.

Who shall win in the struggle for good? Those generous souls who shall know how to make themselves victims, who shall weave their Apostolate with hidden and powerful sacrifices close to the heart of Jesus, the Divine Master.

**194** EXAMPLE. – *St. Bernard.* – This Saint is very well known to us for his great devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and for his erudition in sacred and biblical science. He was born in Fontaines, France, in 1090. At the age of twenty, he joined the Cistercian Order of which, for the many reforms he made and the numerous monasteries he founded, he is said to be the Co-founder. From the many writings he left us, we notice how great was his

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<sup>7</sup> "I am the Truth."



eneration for the Bible, and how well he knew it. It was a knowledge and veneration acquired through constant and loving study, which he, in turn, sought to impart to his friars. His writings are all marvelously connected and interwoven with biblical phrases, and many of his biographers do not hesitate to assert that St. Bernard's style is biblical.

His principal works are Discourses on some passages of the Holy Gospel. Very beautiful is that one on the "*Missus est.*" Then renowned is his commentary on the Song of Songs, about which he has 84 sermons. His biographers narrate how more than once the Most Holy Virgin appeared to him and suggested to him the topic he had to write or preach, and taught him the most beautiful passages of Holy Scripture, well-suited to prove and illustrate the argument being discussed.

Many painters like to represent the holy doctor and Father of the Church in dialogue with the Most Holy Virgin, who holds the Divine Infant in her arms and in the act of offering him the Holy Book of the Bible.

He died in an ecstasy of love in the year 1153, amidst the grief of his very numerous religious. With St. Bernard ends the glorious rank of the Fathers of the Church. The Church celebrates his feast on August 20.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Recite three Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory be to Jesus Master for the Press Apostolate.

#### CANTICLE [#]

Rejoice, you just, in the LORD;  
 praise from the upright is fitting.  
 Give thanks to the LORD on the harp;  
 on the ten-stringed lyre offer praise.  
 Sing to God a new song;  
 skillfully play with joyful chant.  
 For the LORD'S word is true;  
 all his works are trustworthy.  
 The LORD loves justice and right  
 and fills the earth with goodness.  
 By the LORD'S word the heavens were made;  
 by the breath of his mouth all their host.

The waters of the sea were gathered as in a bowl;  
 in cellars the deep was confined.  
 Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
 let all who dwell in the world show reverence.  
 For he spoke, and it came to be,  
 commanded, and it stood in place.  
 The LORD foils the plan of nations,  
 frustrates the designs of peoples.  
 But the plan of the LORD stands forever,  
 wise designs through all generations.

*(Ps 32/33:1-11)*

### JESUS' PRAYER

Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you, just as you gave him authority over all people, so that he may give eternal life to all you gave him. Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began. I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me.

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are. When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the | world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth.

*(Jn 17:1-17)*

## READING

**How the apostles are to behave during persecutions**

Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves. But beware of people, for they will hand you over to courts and scourge you in their synagogues, and you will be led before governors and kings for my sake as a witness before them and the pagans. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say. You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but whoever endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. No disciple is above his teacher, no slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, for the slave that he become like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more those of his household! Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.

*(Mt 10:16-28)*

## DISPOSITION FOR READING THE BIBLE

### ST. MARK

The disciple John “who is called Mark” is mentioned in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. His mother was called Mary and in her house in Jerusalem the brethren gathered in times of persecution.

When Paul and Barnabas returned from Jerusalem after having brought to the brethren the collection of the Christians of Antioch, they took with them John Mark.

During the first apostolic journey, Mark was the companion of Paul and Barnabas but soon, for fear of difficulties, he went back to his homeland. So that when Barnabas after the Council of Jerusalem wanted to take with him the disciple again, Paul did not allow it and preferred to be separate himself.

He therefore went with Barnabas to Cyprus. But he always had harmonious relationships with St. Paul; in fact, Paul calls him in the letter to the Colossians his Cooperator. John Mark even returned with the Apostle and received from him a mission.

The evangelist was then in Rome where he stayed for some time with St. Peter. Sent to Egypt, he founded there the Church of Alexandria. His body was afterward brought to Venice, where the celebrated Basilica named after him rose.

### THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK

The Fathers are unanimous in maintaining that St. Mark is the author of the second Gospel, written in Rome for the Romans as per advice of St. Peter and with his approval.

St. Jerome attests: “Mark, disciple and interpreter of St. Peter, upon request by the brethren in Rome, wrote a short Gospel according to what he had heard from Peter. After hearing that Gospel, Peter approved it and gave it to the Church so that it might be read.” There are in fact many things in the second Gospel which prove that it is the summary of the preaching of St. Peter: St. Mark easily omits all that was to the praise of his

master. The manner of narration presents to us the words of an immediate interpreter as St. Peter had been.

St. Mark often refers things in their minute details, adding particular circumstances that confer nothing to better understanding of the doctrine, but rather show an eyewitness who in the things he narrates had his own part and narrates them as he saw them.

What could have been the purpose of St. Mark in writing the Gospel is not certain. Standing by Tradition, the second Gospel was written upon request by the Romans who wanted to remember the preaching of St. Peter. But we cannot determine exactly what was the principal aim of the preaching of St. Peter.

It has been rightly observed, however, that the second Evangelist principally points out the power Jesus Christ exercises over nature, the demons, and sicknesses: so that his Gospel can be called the Gospel of the miracles of Christ.

## REFLECTION XX

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### Disposition for reading the Bible

*“Open my eyes to see clearly,  
the wonders of your teachings.”*  
(Ps 118/119:18)

First of all, the Sacred Scriptures must be read with an ardent spirit; thirsting and desiring to the greatest intensity, so as to penetrate its meaning and scrutinize its significance.

Furthermore, to read it with great love, the love of affectionate children.<sup>1\*</sup> The Bible is God’s letter,<sup>2</sup> our heavenly Father’s

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<sup>1\*</sup> *“Nemo potest sensum Scripturae sacrae cognoscere, nisi legendi familiaritate, sicut scriptum est: Ama illam et exaltabit te: glorificaberis ab ea, cum ea fueris amplexatus.”* [“No one can know the meaning of the Scriptures, if not through assiduousness in reading it, according to what is written: Love her and she shall exalt you: she shall glorify you if you remain embraced by her.”] (*St. John Chrisostom*)

<sup>2</sup> On this theme also the pastoral note of the CEI, which quotes St. Augustine, insists: “From that [heavenly] city our Father has sent us letters, he has let the Sacred Scriptures come to us, to ignite in us the desire to return home.” To those letters “must correspond an assiduous, intelligent, prayerful, and obedient reading.” (cf. *La Bibbia nella vita della Chiesa*, no. 14).

letter. He has given it to us with the infinite love of a Father, we must read it with all the love of children.

Since all men are children of God, they are loved by him infinitely. Yearning to stay with them and talk with them about marvelous things, what does he do? He wrote them a long letter and entrusted it to the Church so that, like a faithful postman, she gave it to men, that every man may be enlightened in his path and reach Him one day in Heaven.

**200** Many souls complain because they do not know what mortification to do and which acts of love to perform for God. Let them take the Sacred Scriptures and read them. This is one of the most beautiful acts of homage to God's heart.

The most sincere act of love that we can make for Jesus Master, is to attend his school and listen to his divine teachings.

Don't you know what homage to give? Read the Holy Bible. A long segment is not necessary: most often a few verses are enough to nourish the soul and to make her fervent in love.

The Bible has to be read not for purposes of criticism or secular studies, but first of all to find the Lord in it, the way to love him more.

When the proud man reads the Bible, his heart remains empty and he does not draw any fruit from it. On the contrary, he could even be harmed by it as it happened to the Pharisees who, due to eyes veiled by pride, did not discover in reading the Bible the marks of the Messiah, and when he came, they did not recognize him: "*Et sui eum non receperunt;*"<sup>3</sup> not only did they not recognize him, they even put him to death.

The humble, instead, penetrate the meaning of the Scriptures and interpret them rightly. They see and know how to find the Lord behind those letters, the ways to love him and to make him loved.<sup>4\*</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "...but his own people did not accept him." (Jn 1:11)

<sup>4\*</sup> "The Gospel is sublime in its power... The manner itself with which the Scriptures speak is accessible to all, but it is not penetrated to its depth except by very few people. They propose the limpid truths that they contain without artifice like a close friend, both to the heart of the ignorant as to that of the learned... The evangelical teaching is sublime for its character of freedom." (St. Thomas Aquinas)

How many examples history tells us of people | who read the Scriptures not to find God, but themselves; not with a humble heart but with a proud one, and at the end found the devil instead of God! 201

How many ended up in damnation precisely because of Holy Scripture, for having read it with wrong intentions!

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As St. Paul writes, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2Tm 3:16) It follows that it must be read in order to learn, to be able to teach it after; to read it to be able correct ourselves and our neighbor, and to be able to educate whoever depends on us.

Furthermore, the Bible is useful for comforting, and therefore let us read it when we are dejected. It is the most delicious food for our soul, the bread given to us by the Heavenly Father. Let us take and eat it daily because, just as the body needs material bread daily, so the soul must be nourished every day by the heavenly bread.

In reading the Bible, we must seek first of all holiness, the manner of struggling against and winning over all our enemies. The manner of praying and meditating. The Bible is of the best use for all the practices of piety: Communion, meditation, Mass, examination of conscience, etc.

What progress in the way to perfection do they attain who in all their practices of piety use the Holy Bible! It gives strength and courage for overcoming all the difficulties of life; it gives light during moments of doubt and uncertainty. It |— as St. Augustine says — “leads to God, invites to love him, gives light to the heart, purifies the tongue, tests conscience, sanctifies the soul, strengthens the faith, drives away the demon, detests sin, warms cold souls, shows the light of knowledge, drives away the darkness of ignorance, suffocates the perversity of the world, ignites the joy of the Holy Spirit, gives drink to the thirsty.”<sup>5\*</sup> We can 202

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<sup>5\*</sup> St. Augustine, *Serm. XXVIII*.

say of the Bible what St. Paul says of piety, and that is, it is useful for everything: "*Pietas ad omnia utilis est.*" (1Tm 4:8)<sup>6</sup>

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We have here by the way a very beautiful passage from the *Imitation of Christ* about reading the Holy Gospel.

"O Christian, let your greatest study be the meditation on the life of Jesus Christ. It is Truth which we must look for in Holy Writ, not cunning of words. All Scripture ought to be read in the spirit in which it was written. We must rather seek for what is profitable in Scripture, than for what ministereth to subtlety in discourse. Therefore we ought to read books which are devotional and simple, as well as those which are deep and difficult. And let not the weight of the writer be a stumbling-block to thee, whether he be of little or much learning, but let the love of the pure Truth draw thee to read. Ask not, who hath said this or that but look to what he says.

203 "In order, however, that the reading of the Bible may truly be good to the soul, it is necessary to pray before and after the reading.<sup>7\*</sup> Then read it with maximum respect and possibly kneeling down with joined hands and after | telling the Lord: 'Speak, O Lord, that your servant may listen to you.' After reading, imprint on the sacred text a kiss as sign of affection and love, as the Church prescribes that the Priest does at Mass after reading the Gospel. Furthermore, it is necessary to make a short reflection on the things read and to formulate a practical resolution for the day."

Let us set for us a rule in reading the Bible and let us be faithful.

To those who read for a quarter of an hour the Holy Gospel, Leo XIII of happy memory, through rescript of the Sacred Congregation for Indulgences (December 1898) conceded:

*An Indulgence of three hundred days* once a day.

*A plenary Indulgence* once a month, in a day of choice, to those who each day for a month dedicate a quarter of an hour

<sup>6</sup> "Devotion is valuable in every respect."

<sup>7\*</sup> See at the end of the book the prayers to be recited before and after reading the Holy Bible" [pp. 320ff].



for such reading. Conditions: confession, communion, and prayers according to the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff.

Pius X of *s. m.*,<sup>8</sup> on 28 August 1903 granted to all the members of the Pious Society of St. Jerome,<sup>9</sup> for the spread of the Holy Gospels, the plenary Indulgence on the feast of St. Jerome (30 September) or in any day of the octave, and an indulgence of three hundred days for the feasts of the holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (21 September, 25 April, 18 October, 27 December).<sup>10\*</sup>

This demonstrates how close to the hearts of the Supreme Pontiffs it is that souls go back to the daily reading of the Sacred Scriptures and make of them their favorite food.

EXAMPLE. – *Blessed Cottolengo*.<sup>11</sup> – He is a man of faith. To him could be applied the verse of the letter of St. Paul to the Ro-

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<sup>8</sup> *Di santa memoria* (of holy memory): Pius X would be beatified by Pius XII on 3 June 1951 and canonized on 9 May 1954.

<sup>9</sup> The Pious Society of St. Jerome was formed in 1902 as an autonomous entity, with its own funds and the contributions of associates, priests and lay persons. Eventually it passed to the dependence of the Holy See. The members (12 residents, plus other bona fide and honorary) had their first meeting on 27 April 1902 at the house of Msgr. James Della Chiesa, the future Pope Benedict XV. The aim of the “Pious Society”: “To promote the press and the spread of the Gospels in the Italian language, and to extend its action in all the countries wherein this language is spoken.” The first version of the Gospels that the Society started to diffuse was done on the *Vulgata*, with brief notes handled by the members of the same society (G. Clementi and G. Mercati, priests, and Mr. Nogara, lay). Already by 30 November 1902 the copies diffused were 119,702 (in 1944 the 516th reprint of the same edition would be made). Eventually the *Acts of the Apostles* were added to the Gospels and hence the entire New Testament, and it was thought to paraphrase in the current language even the whole Old Testament. The Society did not have commercial purposes and its publications were always of affordable prices.

<sup>10\*</sup> These indulgences are obtained only with the reading of the Gospel, not the other parts of the Bible.

<sup>11</sup> Giuseppe Cottolengo (3 May 1786 - summer of 1842), a native of Bra, Cuneo like blessed Don Alberione, was beatified on 29 April 1917 by Benedict XV. He will be canonized by Pius XI on 19 March 1934, who would define him as a “genius of goodness.” Founder of the *Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza*, in Turin, and of three religious congregations for the service of the poorest, he was, for Don Alberione, a model of faith in Providence and of canonical organization of his institutions (cf. AD nos. 131-134).

mans: “*Justus ex fide vivit,*”<sup>12</sup> inasmuch as his entire life was a continuous exercise of faith; “faith, but that kind of faith,” as he himself said, because of which he reached a very high level of sanctity and worked those miracles of good that all of us know.

Even as a child, Cottolengo paid great attention to the Sunday homilies of the Parish priest. Whoever had the fortune of seeing him said his attention so occupied him that he did not notice what was happening around him. And it was then delightful and touching to hear him at home when, changing his room into a Chapel, he repeated from the pulpit his explanation!

Then as a Priest, when at Mass the moment of reading the Holy Gospel came, he became totally inflamed and read strongly and slowly, so the words could be heard well. After the reading, he raised the Missal with both hands and planted on it a kiss as prescribed by the Liturgy, but in a way so affectionate and ardent as not to pass unobserved by anyone who assisted him. And in kissing it, he would press it so strongly to his lips that it seemed he wanted to suck from it what kind of beverage!

And he truly sucked from the Holy Gospel a mysterious drink that so inebriated him with the love of God and neighbor that afterward he went out and worked mad deeds of charity.

His love for the Bible, when already he had founded the Piccola Casa, is testified by and is still being testified by those biblical phrases that he wanted written in capital letters on the external walls of his Houses, words inspiring faith, hope, confidence in God; also those other sayings that he wanted printed on cards and made to hang on the inside walls.

And then to give an example of devotion which he desired in whoever had to prepare the Hosts for Holy Mass and Communion, *he himself gave it at times. While he prepared them, he had those passages of the Old and New Testament read to him that speak about the Lord’s Passion and the Institution of the Most Holy Eucharist.*

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<sup>12</sup> “The one who is righteous by faith will live.” (Rom 1:17) In reality the expression, essential as regards justification thanks to faith in Jesus Christ (and not through the Mosaic law or its works and rites) is of Hb 2:4; it is also found in Gal 3:11 and Heb 10:38 (which on this point at least seems to belong to the Pauline school).

LITTLE SACRIFICE – That we propose to read some passage of the Bible during the Mass or Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and get from it a practical resolution.

## CANTICLE [#]

205

*(Continuation of the Canticle of Moses)*

For they are a people devoid of reason,  
 having no understanding.  
 If they had insight they would realize what happened,  
 they would understand their future and say,  
 How could one man rout a thousand,  
 or two men put ten thousand to flight,  
 unless it was because their Rock sold them and  
 the LORD delivered them up?  
 Indeed, their “rock” is not like our Rock,  
 and our foes are under condemnation.  
 They are a branch of Sodom’s vinestock,  
 from the vineyards of Gomorrah.  
 Poisonous are their grapes and bitter their clusters.  
 Their wine is the venom of dragons and the cruel poison of cobras.  
 Is not this preserved in my treasury,  
 sealed up in my storehouse,  
 Against the day of vengeance and requital,  
 against the time they lose their footing?  
 Close at hand is the day of their disaster  
 and their doom is rushing upon them!  
 Surely, the LORD shall do justice for his people;  
 on his servants he shall have pity.  
 When he sees their strength failing,  
 and their protected and unprotected alike disappearing,  
 He will say, “Where are their gods  
 whom they relied on as their ‘rock’?  
 Let those who ate the fat of your sacrifices  
 and drank the wine of your libations  
 rise up now and help you!  
 Let them be your protection!  
 Learn then that I, alone, am God,  
 and there is no god besides me.  
 It is I who bring both death and life,  
 I who inflict wounds and heal them,  
 and from my hand there is no rescue.

To the heavens I raise my hand and swear:  
 As surely as I live forever,  
 I will sharpen my flashing sword,  
 and my hand shall lay hold of my quiver.  
 With vengeance I will repay my foes  
 and requite those who hate me.  
 I will make my arrows drunk with blood,  
 and my sword shall gorge itself with flesh -  
 with the blood of the slain and the captured,  
 flesh from the heads of the enemy leaders.”  
 Exult with him, you heavens, glorify him,  
 all you angels of God;  
 For he avenges the blood of his servants  
 and purges his people’s land.

206

*(Dt 32:28-43)*

## READING

**Parable of the Sower**

A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path and was trampled, and the birds of the sky ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground, and when it grew, it withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell on good soil, and when it grew, it produced fruit a hundredfold.” After saying this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.

*(Lk 8:5-8)*

## PRAYER

Come to our aid, O God of the universe, and put all the nations in dread of you! Raise your hand against the heathen, that they may realize your power. As you have used us to show them your holiness, so now use them to show us your glory. Thus they will know, as we know, that there is no God but you. Give new signs and work new wonders; show forth the splendor of your right hand and arm; rouse your anger, pour out wrath, humble the enemy, scatter the foe. Hasten the day, bring on the time; crush the heads of the hostile rulers. Let raging fire consume the fugitive, and your people’s oppressors meet destruction. Gather all the tribes of Jacob, that they may inherit the land as of old, show mercy to the people called by your name; Israel,

whom you named your first-born. Take pity on your holy city, Jerusalem, your dwelling place. Fill Zion with your majesty, your temple with your glory. Give evidence of your deeds of | old; fulfill the prophecies spoken in your name, reward those who have hoped in you, and let your prophets be proved true. Hear the prayer of your servants, for you are ever gracious to your people. Thus it will be known to the very ends of the earth that you are the eternal God.

*(Sir 36:1-17)*

**209**<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The jump in the numbering from 206 to 209 is explained by the fact that pages 207 and 208 of the original text show the images of the prophets Jonah and Micah, at other times not counted as they are considered pages outside the text.



THIRD PART

THE HOLY BIBLE  
AND CULT

(Life)





## HOLY SCRIPTURE CANCELS SINS

### ST. LUKE

As St. Jerome attests, St. Luke is believed to be a native of Antioch of Syria. His style testifies to us his good culture (*coltura*);<sup>1</sup> and his correctness in the use of technical terms when he talks of sicknesses and healings reveal him to be a good connoisseur of medicine. St. Paul himself calls him: “my beloved physician.” Tradition says that he is also a painter and to him would be attributed paintings of the Most Holy Virgin called “the Madonna of St. Luke.”

He was converted to Christianity through the work of St. Paul and he followed him in almost all his missionary journeys after having met him in Troas, and he was his faithful companion during his imprisonments in Caesarea and Rome.

He wrote the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. And there are those who understand as allusive to the Gospel of St. Luke the words of St. Paul: “according to my Gospel.” Then the Acts are in great part the narration of the missions of St. Paul; they narrate his experiences until the first imprisonment.

After St. Paul’s death, he preached in Greece and it seems that he died a martyr.

### THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE

St. Luke is the author of the third Gospel. He himself gives the reason and the purpose of his work. All the Fathers recog-

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<sup>1</sup> *Cultura*: cf. pp. 257 and 281 where reference is made, at least indirectly, to the importance of being cultured even in relation to knowledge of the Bible. Don Alberione would often insist on the need for auxiliary study, in view of the apostolate, more than for a culture that is end in itself: “We have to remember that we must not have too much trust in studies, but do it this way: study as if every good result depended on us, but hope in God because truly it is He who creates the fruits... We have to deal with a world that wants us to present ourselves decorously, like the Priest who preaches from the pulpit. Hence: to write well, to learn languages, style, and above all to be skillful in thought... Our press must bear Jesus: whoever reads it must therefore find in it the way, the truth, and the life” (*ER* 1, 1935, pp. 107-108).

nize in St. Luke the most elegant writer of the N.T., the echo of the ideas and words of St. Paul. Not only from Paul, however, but also from the other Apostles did he get the Gospel which he destined to the Gentiles.

The goal the Evangelist wanted to achieve is the truth, that is, the confirmation that he wants to give to the doctrine which Theophilus has already learned. Hence Luke does not give a primary instruction, but intends to communicate to Theophilus by means of historical events narrated in an orderly manner, the absolute certainty of the faith.

Concerning the composition of the third Gospel, we see a great similarity of material and arrangement between St. Mark and St. Luke; whence almost all are in agreement in admitting the dependence of St. Luke on St. Mark; and the second Evangelist would be one of those who wrote earlier than Luke.

Luke writes for the Greeks: in fact, he omits many things that cannot be of interest to the Gentiles, and on the other hand, he diligently relates what can be of praise for them.

The third Gospel is not only written in an elegant style. It is also a true work of history in the understanding of that time, with its well-ordered documents and with its prologue and idea; and it completes the first two Gospels by treating more lengthily the infancy of Jesus.

## **THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

The book of the “Acts of the Apostles,” according to what St. Luke himself attests, is the second part of a single work. The end of the third Gospel and the beginning of the Acts are so connected that we can affirm that the author wanted it that way. It is therefore probable that the author in writing the end of his Gospel already had the plan of the second part of his work.

The “Acts” clearly reveal the disciple of St. Paul: we can even say that the greater part of the book talks about the apostolate of St. Paul.

The aim of the book can be summarized in these words: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, St. Luke nar-

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 1:8.

rates how the Apostles, in virtue of the | Holy Spirit bore witness to Christ from Jerusalem to Rome. **215**

The “Acts” are the continuation, the complement, the crown of the Gospel; we can say they are the Gospel in compendium and in practice because they narrate the life of the Church, the triumphs of grace and of the Christian virtues. They are also the necessary introduction to the letters of St. Paul and of the other Apostles which, without the Acts, would be incomprehensible in some places.

REFLECTION XXI

**Holy Scripture cancels sins**

*“I will never forget your precepts;  
through them you give me life.”*  
(Ps 118/119:93)

In this third part we shall see in what way Holy Scripture is the fountain of life for our soul, that is, how the reading of it frees the soul from sins, fortifies it, and protects it from temptations; also, how it cancels purgatory, increases love for God and is useful for all the practices of piety: meditation, visit to the Most Blessed Sacrament, examination of conscience, etc.

On this first day of the third tenth of the month, we shall see how the reading of the Bible purifies the soul from sin and, detaching her from earthly things, raises her up to heaven.

\* \* \*

At Mass, the Priest, says a very short prayer, but one full of meaning and wonderful | effects: *“Per evangelica dicta, delectantur nostra delicta – through the words of the Gospel, may our sins be cancelled.”* **216**

The sacrosanct words of the Gospel cancel our sins in three ways. First of all because

a) *The reading of the Bible is a Sacramental.* We know that whoever receives a Sacramental, for example, he makes the Sign of the Cross with holy water, obtains the forgiveness of venial sins; thus it happens to anyone who reads Holy Scripture; he truly obtains forgiveness of venial sins committed.

A page of the Gospel, read with right intention and with sorrow for one's sins is enough to free and purify the soul from so many imperfections.

b) *Because it stimulates in us the love of God.* The soul of one who reads the Bible, willingly accepts the word of God, enjoys it and imagines to receive it from the very hands of his good Heavenly Father who, for a good seventy-two times, deigned to seize the pen and to write him. And he reads those sacred books as a loving son reads his faraway father's letter; he prostrates before God and with humility and confidence, repeats with the young Samuel: "*Loquere, Domine, quia servus tuus audit te* – Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."<sup>3</sup>

It is an act of love: the Church in fact prescribes that every Priest, after having read in the Mass the sacred text of the Gospel, kiss it; and Blessed Cottolengo<sup>4</sup> did it with so much affection and love that bystanders noticed it and after the Mass conversed about the edification they received from that act.

217 The holy priest, after reading the Gospel passage, was so inflamed with love that | his face assumed the color of red-hot ember, and kissing the Missal, seemed to suck from it the sublime truths it contained.

Oh! He who truly loves God's words can (*raffigurare*<sup>5</sup>) compare himself to the crowds who, drawn by and thirsty for the teachings of Jesus, thronged upon Him to listen to his words: "*turbæ irruerunt in eum ut audirent verbum Dei.*"<sup>6</sup>

Here we have the admirable example of the Most Holy Virgin. She, in recollection and in sweet silence, knew how to gather every word that came from the divine lips of her son, Jesus, and jealously kept them in her heart and meditated on them: "*Maria autem conservabat omnia verba hæc, conferens in corde suo.*"<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 1Sm 3:10.

<sup>4</sup> St. Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo's example is especially forceful (cf. note 11 of p. 204).

<sup>5</sup> *Raffigurare* (imagine) improper verb for *paragonare* (compare).

<sup>6</sup> Lk 5:1. The *Vulgate* has: "*Cum turbæ irruerent in eum ut audirent verbum Dei...*"; and the CEI, on v. 2, translates thus: "Mentre... la folla gli faceva ressa intorno per ascoltare la parola di Dio..." The NAB translation: "While the crowd was pressing in on Jesus and listening to the word of God..."

<sup>7</sup> Lk 2:51.

To him who greatly loves Holy Scripture, many sins are forgiven; as it happened in fact to Mary Magdalene who loved much, since much was forgiven her: “*Remittuntur ei peccata multa, quoniam dilexit multum.*”<sup>8</sup>

No one loves the Lord more than he who does not want anything except what He wants.

Now, one who habitually reads the Scriptures, little by little finds his desires divinized to the point of desiring only what the Lord desires, and to want only what He wants.

c) In the third place, Holy Scripture *disposes the soul for every pardon*. He who reads the Bible, if he is still in sin, sooner or later shall change. And this because the reading of the Bible is a very effective prayer; now we know that he who prays has every grace; the first of graces is precisely liberation of the soul from sin.

As proof of this we could cite numerous episodes of sinners converted through the reading of Holy Scripture. We remember that of St. Hillary, converted to faith in Christ while reading the first chapter of St. John’s Gospel; | the philosopher St. Justin, converted upon reading the Psalms; St. Theophilus of Antioch and Athenagoras, the Gospels; the Anglican minister Frederic William Faber, upon hearing the singing of the Psalm, “*Laudate pueri Dominum,*”<sup>9</sup> and so many other examples.

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The reading of the Gospel not only takes away sin from the soul, but transforms it too and communicates to it such a strength as to enable it to reach, with the aid of divine grace, the highest peaks of sanctity.

Try putting the Bible in the hands of a sinner. He will be incapable of continuing in his sin.

Look at the young cavalryman Ignatius, lying in bed because of a wound in his leg; he asks, in order to pass the time, for some novel where the deeds of some ardent champion are narrated, but Providence disposes that holy books be brought to him, among them the Holy Gospel. Those readings were for him a revelation and a real stroke of grace; we know that he left the hospital no longer that knight of Loyola but the heroic knight of Christ.

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<sup>8</sup> Lk 7:47.

<sup>9</sup> Ps 112/113:1.

The devil knows well the power that the sacred books communicate to the soul, and because of this he exerts all efforts to keep them away from the hands of the faithful. On our part, however, let us always carry them with us, at least a page, as the first Christians were doing, and this will be a powerful defense against his diabolical temptations.

EXAMPLE. – *Silvio Pellico*.<sup>10</sup> – The young patriot, languishing under the “Piombi” of Venice because of political intrigues, experienced in the solitude and rigors of imprisonment some beneficial effects for the good of his soul.

219 In prison, Pellico was allowed to read; and he, among the books, preferred the Holy Bible. It’s true that he had set it aside | during his dark days. He had even allowed a thin layer of dust to cover it, but one day he courageously defended it against the ignorant rudeness of the son of the prison guard and from then on he always loved it.

In fact, one day “one of the guard’s sons came to him,” so Pellico writes, “snuggling me, he said: Since you no longer read that kind of a book, you are no longer so melancholic, it seems to me.

“You think so?” I told him.

Picking up the Bible, with a handkerchief I wiped from it its dust, and after carelessly opening it, these words fell under my eyes: *Et ait ad discipulos suos: Impossibile est ut non veniant scandala: vae autem illi per quem veniunt! Utilius est illi si lapis molaris imponatur circa collum eius et proiciatur in mare, quam ut scandalizet unum de pusillis istis.*<sup>11</sup>

I was struck to find these words and I blushed that that boy noticed, from the dust that he saw over it, that I was no longer reading the Bible and that he presumed that I have become more amiable having become heedless of God.

“You wanton kid!” I told him with an affectionate scolding and I felt sorry for having scandalized him. “This is not *that*

<sup>10</sup> See note 1 on p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> It’s from Lk 17:1-2: “He said to his disciples, ‘Things that cause sin will inevitably occur, but woe to the person through whom they occur. It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin’ ”; cf. Mt 18:7.

*kind of a book* and since I have not been reading for several days, my state is worse...”

The boy went out. I felt a certain joy for having picked up the Bible again, for having confessed that I was ill without it. It seemed to me that I gave satisfaction to a generous friend, unjustly offended, that I became reconciled to him...

I placed the Bible on a chair, I knelt on the ground to read it, and that ego that does not easily weep, broke into tears...”<sup>12</sup>

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Today, to perform three mortifications so the Bible’s real meaning may be better and better penetrated.

CANTICLE [#]

Truly with you God is hidden,  
 the God of Israel, the savior!  
 Those are put to shame and disgrace  
 who vent their anger against him;  
 those go in disgrace who carve images.  
 Israel, you are saved by the LORD, saved forever!  
 You shall never be put to shame  
 or disgrace in future ages.”  
 For thus says the LORD,  
 the creator of the heavens, who is God,  
 the designer and maker of the earth who established it,  
 not creating it to be a waste,  
 but designing it to be lived in:  
 I am the LORD, and there is no other.  
 I have not spoken from hiding  
 nor from some dark place of the earth,  
 and I have not said to the descendants of Jacob,  
 “Look for me in an empty waste.”  
 I, the LORD, promise justice, I foretell what is right.  
 Come and assemble, gather together,  
 you fugitives from among the gentiles!  
 They are without knowledge  
 who bear wooden idols and pray to gods that cannot save.

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<sup>12</sup> The quote is from: S. PELLICO, *Le mie prigioni* (1832), chapters XXIV-XXV.

Come here and declare in counsel together:  
 Who announced this from the beginning  
 and foretold it from of old?  
 Was it not I, the LORD,  
 besides whom there is no other God?  
 There is no just and saving God but me.  
 Turn to me and be safe, all you ends of the earth,  
 for I am God; there is no other!  
 By myself I swear,  
 uttering my just decree and my unalterable word:  
 To me every knee shall bend;  
 by me every tongue shall swear,  
 Saying, "Only in the LORD are just deeds and power.  
 Before him in shame shall come  
 all who vent their anger against him.  
 In the LORD shall be the vindication  
 and the glory of all the descendants of Israel."

(Is 45:15-25)<sup>13</sup>

## READING

### Jesus reproves the murmurers

The Jews murmured about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen | the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

221

(Jn 6:41-47)

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<sup>13</sup> *LS* indicates "Is. XLV, 15-26." (Is 45:15-26) In the *Vulgata* chapter 45 of Isaiah has 26 verses, while in the new translations, 25: verses 23 and 24 are made one as verse 23.



## EZRA'S PRAYER

My God, I am too ashamed and confounded to raise my face to you, O my God, for our wicked deeds are heaped up above our heads and our guilt reaches up to heaven. From the time of our fathers even to this day great has been our guilt, and for our wicked deeds we have been delivered over, we and our kings and our priests, to the will of the kings of foreign lands, to the sword, to captivity, to pillage, and to disgrace, as is the case today. And now, but a short time ago, mercy came to us from the LORD, our God, who left us a remnant and gave us a stake in his holy place; thus our God has brightened our eyes and given us relief in our servitude. For slaves we are, but in our servitude our God has not abandoned us; rather, he has turned the good will of the kings of Persia toward us. Thus he has given us new life to raise again the house of our God and restore its ruins, and has granted us a fence in Judah and Jerusalem. But now, O our God, what can we say after all this? For we have abandoned your commandments, which you gave through your servants the prophets: the land which you are entering to take as your possession is a land unclean with the filth of the peoples of the land, with the abominations with which they have filled it from one end to the other in their uncleanness. Do not, then, give your daughters to their sons in marriage, and do not take their daughters for your sons. Never promote their peace and prosperity; thus you will grow strong, enjoy the produce of the land, and leave it as an inheritance to your children forever. After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and our great guilt – though you, our God, have made less of our sinfulness than it deserved and have allowed us to survive as we do – shall we again violate your commandments by intermarrying with these abominable peoples? Would you not become so angered with us as to destroy us without remnant or survivor? O LORD, God of Israel, you are just; yet we have been spared, the remnant we are today. Here we are before you in our sins. Because of all this, we can no longer stand in your presence.”

*(Ezr 9:6-15)*

## THE HOLY GOSPEL IS SALVATION FOR US

### ST. JOHN

John, son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of James the Greater, born in Bethsaida, and fisherman in the lake of Genesareth, was already a disciple of the Baptist. He was with his father and brother mending the nets when Christ called him. He was the beloved disciple of Jesus; he placed his head on Jesus' chest, and received at Calvary the noble task of taking Christ's place in the duties of a son towards Mary.

After the Ascension he was with Peter heading the Church of Jerusalem; he went with Peter to Samaria and then habitually lived in Jerusalem, perhaps to assist the Virgin. With Mary's demise, he went to Ephesus and headed the Churches of Asia. Persecuted by Diocletian, he was put, in Rome, in a cauldron of boiling oil, but he emerged from it unharmed. He was relegated to the island of Patmos where he wrote the Apocalypse. With the death of Domitian, he went back to Ephesus, where he died almost a centenarian.

The fathers are unanimous in attributing to St. John three letters, the Apocalypse, and the fourth Gospel.

### THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

The testimonies of the Fathers unanimously affirm that the Apostle St. John wrote the Gospel after the others, in his old age, during the last years of the first century, in Ephesus, against those who deny Christ's divinity in order to demonstrate with facts that Jesus Christ is the son of God and the Messiah. What the Fathers affirm is confirmed by the analysis of the fourth Gospel which, in its harmonious unity, leaving out many things useful to his thesis that are in the Synoptics, supposes them and completes them.

The fourth Gospel shows as its author a Hebrew who has lived long in Palestine, became part of the apostolic College, and writes for the Gentiles and among the Gentiles, when the Hebrew people were no longer a people. It also shows that its author is an

eyewitness. Such a witness, with all the aforementioned connotations, cannot but be the Apostle St. John the Evangelist.

This is the affirmation of the Fathers of the entire venerable antiquity, and today, after a century of debates, no serious critic denies St. John anymore the paternity of this book that is unique in the literature of the world, a sublime Gospel that is the worthy crown of the Synoptics, the most beautiful story of Jesus written with the pen of love. Only John could write the fourth Gospel “which transcends the regions of the Angels and goes straight to God.” (Augustine)<sup>1</sup> only John who felt the heartbeats of Jesus, who admired the gentleness of the Virgin Mother, and who received heavenly secrets, could write the wonders of the fourth Gospel. He who pressed his ears on the heart of Christ and heard its beatings, meditated for long years on the words of the Master. And the divine words, after so many years, went out with love from his heart, shining in their true mysterious and luminous meaning. Thus John, by touching on the spiritual reality of events, became the true historian of Christ, leaving to the Synoptics the glory of being his chroniclers, while he, with his Gospel completes them, sublimates them, makes them speak divinely, and he is well portrayed by the eagle that flies in the heavens...

## REFLECTION XXII

224

**The Holy Gospel is salvation for us**

*“I long for your salvation, Lord;  
your teaching is my delight.”*  
(Ps 118/119:174)

The Church prescribes that the Priests recite, before the reading of the Gospel passage contained in the Breviary, the beautiful prayer: “*Evangelica lectio sit nobis salus et protectio:*

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<sup>1</sup> There is a record of an important commentary on John by St. Augustine of Hippo: the *Tractatus in Ioannem* (124 homilies on the Gospel and 10 on the first letter) partly spoken and partly dictated starting from the year 406 to after 418. Another important biblical commentary by Augustine are the *Enarrationes in Psalmum* (or *in Psalmos*), a theological-spiritual work founded on the mystery of the unity of Christ with the Church, the praying voice of *Christus totus* (the whole Christ), and on the unity of Old with the New Testament.

May the reading of the Gospel be for us salvation and protection.” And we, taking from this our starting point: we consider in what way the Holy Gospel is salvation for us; and we shall say that the reading of the Holy Gospel is salvation: 1<sup>st</sup>. Because it is in itself a great merit; 2<sup>nd</sup>. Because it purifies our intentions; 3<sup>rd</sup>. It’s a valid aid to spiritual perfection.

225 1st. *It is a great merit.* The reading of the Holy Bible is called the great sacramental because it is part of the revelation and Incarnation of the Divine Word. There are so many persons who would like to do a lot of good works, to do a lot of charitable works, but are deprived of means; they would want to hear many masses, but they do not have the time; they would like to do many things to increase their merits, but they lack the capability, the health, the time. Let these souls read the Sacred Scriptures and this shall make up for all the good works that they would like to do. They shall | have a great merit in heaven. Because if every good work is meritorious, how much more meritorious is the reading of the word of God which is one of the first Sacramentals! It is always available to us; and its merit comes immediately after that of the Sacraments.

2nd. *It purifies our intentions.* It is a fact that the Bible and sin cannot stay together. Those sacrosanct Scriptures, those words, the sublime examples that we read in them have in them a mysterious force and detach little by little the soul from the things of the earth and raise her to heaven. We read, for example, Jesus’ words: “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.”<sup>2</sup>

We read the words of the Psalms: “How long will you people mock my honor, love what is worthless, chase after lies? Know that the Lord is God, our maker to whom we belong, whose people we are, God’s well-tended flock.”<sup>3</sup> “I rejoiced when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mt 6:24,33.

<sup>3</sup> Ps 4:3; 99/100:3.

<sup>4</sup> Ps 121/122:1.

The soul feels herself raised up to heaven; she tastes the beauty and sweetness of her blessed goal for which God has created us; the exiled man rejoices as an exile who after a long journey looks forward to his return to his homeland.

Whoever reads the Scriptures consorts with the Heavenly Father, with the Angels, with the Saints: he shall have heavenly aspirations! He shall assume even the way of thinking and speaking of God and of those blessed spirits.

It is impossible to read the Bible and to continue | doing sinful works, that is, to live in enmity with God.

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3rd. *The Holy Gospel is a valid help for spiritual perfection.* Oh, how varied are the effects produced by the words of God! The discourses and writings of men often not only have no good effect, unfortunately sometimes they are bad ones. How many times does it happen that an advice is given to a sinner, and instead of benefiting from it, he hardens the more in his vice! The words of God have a marvelous effect!

A book, an advice has only so much strength as the sanctity of the one who gives the advice or writes the book: that book shall have as much strength as the author has infused it with. The fruit that came to souls from the *Imitation of Christ*,<sup>5</sup> the *Practice of the love of Jesus Christ*,<sup>6</sup> the *Filotea*<sup>7</sup> of St. Francis de Sales,<sup>8</sup> etc., is incalculable.

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<sup>5</sup> The *Imitation of Christ*, a work of monastic origin, gradually attributed to Gerson di Vercelli (also called Gersenio Giovanni da Cavaglià, Benedictine, abbot of Vercelli), or to Jehan de Gerson of Paris (Theologian and philosopher – Gerson, Champagne, 1363 - Lyon 1429), or to the Augustinian Thomas à Kempis. It shows the atmosphere of the so-called *devotio moderna*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. ALPHONSUS M. DE LIGUORI, *Pratica di amar Gesù Cristo*, 18<sup>a</sup> ed., San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1999.

<sup>7</sup> When the third edition of *Filotea. Introduzione alla vita devota (Filotea. Introduction to the devout life)* came out, the author wrote this premise: “This booklet came from my hands in the year 1608... When I quote the words of Holy Scripture, it is not always to explain them, but rather to explain myself through them, inasmuch as they are more worthy of love and respect. If God hears me, you will get benefit from it and receive many blessings.”

<sup>8</sup> Francis was born in the castle of Thorens, in Savoy (France), to a family of ancient nobility, and died in Lyon on 28 December 1622. He studied jurisprudence in Paris and in Padua. But in the course of his academic attendance, his theological interests became preeminent, until his choice of the priestly voca-

What are we to say if a book were written not by a saint, but by God himself? This book would contain in itself the greatest grace, since God is grace himself. Now the Bible is precisely the book of God. He is its principal author. It follows then that the Holy Bible is the book most suited and most useful for spiritual reading and all other books of piety with respect to the Bible are like fireflies compared to the sun.

He who habitually nourishes himself with the Bible finds the way to perfection very easy, just as one who has been well-nourished before departing finds a long journey easy.

The spiritual reading of whatsoever book is so different from that of Holy Scripture! There is an infinite distance like that between earth and heaven, between the natural state and the supernatural state, or between spiritual Communion and sacramental Communion.

227 The words of Holy Scripture are the mystical grain of mustard seed about which Jesus speaks in the Holy Gospel, seed that will sprout and grow into a majestic plant. “*Semen est verbum Dei: God’s word is a seed.*”<sup>9</sup> It can fall along the road, among the rocks, amidst thorns; but if it falls on good ground, what a fruit! The Gospel says: “It bears fruit, some thirty, others fifty, and still others a hundredfold.”<sup>10</sup>

Hence: when our soul is discouraged and beaten, when we feel a greater need for grace and light, let us run to the divine book with faith and we shall have what we desire.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Andrew Avellino is converted upon reading the Bible.* – Andrew Avellino, first called Ancellotto, was born in Castrenuovo in the Lucca Region. While still very young, he was sent to study literature, and spent the most delicate period of his life amidst liberal studies, where his great soul found itself uncomfortable. Already enrolled for some time in the cleri-

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tion. He became bishop of Geneva. In the course of his mission, he came to know in Dijon Jeanne Frances Frémiot de Chantal, and from the devout and affectionate correspondence with the noblewoman came about the founding of the Order of the Visitation. Declared a saint in 1665, he will be proclaimed doctor of the Church in 1877 and patron of Catholic journalists in 1923.

<sup>9</sup> Lk 8:11.

<sup>10</sup> Mt 13:8,23.

cal militia, he went to Naples to study law there. He graduated in jurisprudence and undertook to defend causes in the church forum. One day, when a little lie escaped him while he was defending a cause, and soon after, having read in Holy Scripture the words: “For a stealthy utterance does not go unpunished, and a lying mouth slays the soul,”<sup>11</sup> he became so sorry and repentant of his fault that he resolved at once to leave such a kind of life, and he consecrated himself totally to divine worship. He asked and obtained admission among the Clerics regular.

All the time that his rules allowed him free time, he dedicated to prayer and to the study of Holy Scripture, and his biographers narrate that often, while he recited the Psalms, he heard the Angels singing on the air. He died, filled with merits, while going to the altar and pronouncing the biblical verse, “I shall ascend the altar of God.”<sup>12</sup> The Church celebrates his feast on 10 November.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Recite ten Glory be in thanksgiving to God for having given us Holy Scripture.

#### CANTICLE TO GOD THE CREATOR [#]

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All you peoples, clap your hands;  
 shout to God with joyful cries.  
 For the LORD, the Most High, inspires awe,  
 the great king over all the earth,  
 who made people subject to us,  
 brought nations under our feet,  
 who chose a land for our heritage,  
 the glory of Jacob, the beloved.  
 God mounts the throne amid shouts of joy;  
 the LORD, amid trumpet blasts.  
 Sing praise to God, sing praise;  
 sing praise to our king, sing praise.  
 God is king over all the earth;  
 sing hymns of praise.  
 God rules over the nations;  
 God sits upon his holy throne.  
 The princes of the peoples assemble

<sup>11</sup> Wis 1:11.

<sup>12</sup> Sal 42/43:4.

with the people of the God of Abraham.  
For the rulers of the earth belong to God,  
who is enthroned on high.

*(Ps 46/47:2-10)*

## READING

### The Canaanite mother

229 Then Jesus went from that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, "Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us." He said in reply, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman came and did him homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He said in reply, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their | masters." Then Jesus said to her in reply, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that hour.

*(Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30)*

## JEREMIAH'S PRAYER

Remember me, LORD, visit me, and avenge me on my persecutors. Because of your long-suffering banish me not; know that for you I have borne insult. When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart, Because I bore your name, O LORD, God of hosts. I did not sit celebrating in the circle of merry-makers; Under the weight of your hand I sat alone because you filled me with indignation. Why is my pain continuous, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? You have indeed become for me a treacherous brook, whose waters do not abide! Thus the LORD answered me: If you repent, so that I restore you, in my presence you shall stand; If you bring forth the precious without the vile, you shall be my mouthpiece. Then it shall be they who turn to you, and you shall not turn to them; And I will make you toward this people a solid wall of brass. Though they fight against you, they shall not prevail, For I am with you, to deliver and rescue you, says the LORD, I will free you from the hand of the wicked, and rescue you from the grasp of the violent.

*(Jer 15:15-21)*



## THE HOLY GOSPEL IS PROTECTION

## ST. PAUL

Paul, also called Saul, born in Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 9:30) of Jews of the tribe of Benjamin, Pharisees and Roman citizens during the first years of the Vulgar Age, was educated in Jerusalem under the famous Gamaliel (Acts 5:34), but did not have the opportunity to personally know Christ.

An ardent Pharisee, he distinguished himself for his hatred and animosity towards nascent Christianity, guarded the clothes of those who stoned Stephen and, after getting from the Prince of the Priests the broadest judiciary powers, persecuted the Christians even outside Palestine. Jesus, however, waited for him on the road to Damascus and transformed the persecutor into a zealous Apostle. It was about the year 35 A.D. and Paul was about thirty years old.

After preparing himself for about ten years of study, meditations, and revelations for the great work of conversion of the Gentiles, in the year 45 he began his missionary journeys taking as center of departure and return Antioch, metropolis of the Orient and a fulcrum of all the peoples of that time.

Four were the Apostle's journeys: dangerous journeys, often due to the difficult regions which he had to cross, but especially due to the persecutions of the Judaists who continually pursued him to hamper the work of evangelization.

It was during his journeys that St. Paul wrote his marvelous fourteen epistles; by means of them he kept in touch with the churches, making good his personal presence through letters.

Imprisoned towards Pentecost of 58 in Jerusalem and after two years of imprisonment in Caesarea, he leaves for Rome; he was shipwrecked in Malta and finally reaches the capital of the world where he stayed seven years and was judged and absolved by Burrus and Seneca, representatives of Nero. He was freed in the year 63. In those years, he evangelized Rome, watched over the Churches of Asia and from Rome wrote the letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Philippians.

Regaining his liberty, he followed up his apostolic trips, went to France and Spain according to some. He returned to the Orient and again passed Colossae, Troas, Miletus, and Crete. He went to Macedonia, then to Corinth and Necapolis. He returned to Rome, it is not known how, and, arrested with St. Peter in 66, after a horrendous imprisonment, was beheaded in 67 on the via Ostiense (on 29 June, according to tradition).

St. Paul is the apostle par excellence and in particular he is the apostle to the Gentiles. He traveled the whole Roman world, for thirty years always threatened and persecuted with implacable furor, hated by the Gentiles, persecuted by the Jews, accused, calumniated, beaten, stoned, betrayed; always in the jaws of death for Christ's glory, he preached the Gospel, signing his missionary trips with blood, and gloriously ended reddening with his blood the queen of the world.

### HIS DOGMATIC EPISTLES

LETTER TO THE ROMANS – In truth, it is not possible to give a clear-cut classification of the Pauline letters since each one contains both a dogmatic and a moral element. The division into three groups: dogmatic, moral, and pastoral, is made according to the element that prevails in them.

Paul many times wanted to visit Rome, but was not yet able to do it. At the end of his third journey, he planned to conquer for Christ even the west, thus the occasion so desired to visit the Roman Church offered itself to him. For this he writes to the Romans, announcing that in his trip to Spain, he will stop in Rome. This was the reason behind his letter.

**232** The letter to the Romans, however, more than a letter, is a treatise. In it St. Paul justifies his apostolate among the Gentiles and insists on the principal points of his preaching, especially on his principal thesis greatly contested by the Judaists, but of capital importance for the future of Christianity, that is: the grace of justification is merited by Christ for all men, both Jews and Pagans, without being based on preceding merits; justification does not depend on the observance of the Mosaic law, but on faith in Christ, rendered alive by good works.

LETTER TO THE GALATIANS – This letter is addressed not to a particular Church, but to a group of Churches scattered in Galatia.

In this Roman province St. Paul brought the Gospel during his first and second missionary journey. The Galatians welcomed enthusiastically the Gospel, but then they listened to the Judaists who demanded the observance of the Mosaic law and circumcision even for the Gentile converts. Knowing the dangerous plots of his enemies, St. Paul writes to vindicate his authority and to reestablish the true doctrine against the seductive Judaists.

The letter is principally dogmatic, like that to the Romans, and defends the thesis that justification depends on faith in Christ and not on the law of Moses, the observance of which is superfluous, even dangerous.

This letter is a real portrait of St. Paul: his vivacity, his ardor, and his zeal palpitate in it: there is the power of his reasoning combined with his affection as a father.

LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS – Epaphra, a disciple of St. Paul and Bishop of Colossae, having gone to Rome to visit the prisoner Paul, had manifested to him the new dangers that threatened the Churches of Asia, especially Colossae. The dangers come from the false Judeanizing teachers who are already the initiators of Gnosticism.<sup>1</sup>

Paul, after knowing these dangers, wrote this letter to the Colossians.

In the *dogmatic* part, he speaks of the benefits and of the dignity of Christ in relation to God, creation, and the Church, and confutes the false teachers, opposing to their fantasies the true Christian doctrine. He sublimely insists on Christ's divin-

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<sup>1</sup> This term, which comes from the Greek word *gnosis* (*knowledge* or *science*), refers to a group of philosophical-religious currents that spread during the II-III centuries in Rome, Alexandria of Egypt and in other places in the Mediterranean Basin. Until the discovery in 1945 in Nag Hammadi, in Upper Egypt of an entire Gnostic library, the scholars used few texts, and the sources for the study of Gnostic theories were composed of descriptions and citations contained in the confutations of Christian authors like Irenaeus of Lyonne. Gnostic testimonies were also some apocryphal Gospels like *La Sofia di Gesù Cristo* (The Wisdom of Jesus Christ) or the *Apocrifa di Giovanni* (The Apocrypha of John) supposed to contain a doctrine revealed by Jesus only to some apostles or chosen disciples and destined to a few followers.

233 ity, on the universality of redemption, and on the necessity of Christianity for salvation; he brands the emptiness of the Jewish observances and of the ascetic practices of the false doctors, and condemns their exaggerated cult of the Angels.

In the *moral* part, he talks about the duties of Christians, whether general or particular, of the different states of life.

I LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS – St. Paul had founded in Thessalonica a flourishing Church; forced by the intrigues of the Jews to leave the city and not being able to go back there, he sent Timothy. After receiving from the disciple, who reached him in Corinth, news regarding that Church, he wrote this letter.

Aside from the prologue and the epilogue, it contains a historical part wherein St. Paul justifies his conduct towards the Thessalonians and praises them for having responded to his concern; and a dogmatic-moral part wherein he exhorts them to be virtuous, gives his answer about the lot of those who die before Christ's coming, in connection with judgment, and finally exhorts them to fulfill all their duties.

II LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS – In the first letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul spoke of Christ's return; but the Thessalonians understood that Christ's return and the end of the world were imminent and many concluded that they no longer had to work but just to wait doing nothing.

To remedy these disorders, St. Paul writes this second letter where, speaking of Christ's coming, he says that the Anti-Christ must come first; and therefore the faithful should not think that his coming is really near; however, since the time is uncertain, they had to be prepared and constant in their faith. He censures idleness, calling to mind the law of work; he exhorts to virtue and avoidance of the disobedient.

LETTER TO THE HEBREWS – The letter to the Hebrews is addressed to the Hebrews of Palestine and particularly those in Jerusalem. St. Paul's<sup>2</sup> immense charity could not forget his brothers in the flesh.

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<sup>2</sup> In *LS*, the *Letter to the Hebrews* is considered St. Paul's. Scholars show some facts that make such an attribution problematic. In *Hebrews*, unlike the 13

In the *dogmatic* part, the Apostle, without condemning whoever still practices the ancient customs, shows the foolishness of him who believes himself bound by the yoke of the old law, and proves the superiority of the N.T. over the O.T. from the fact that Christ, the Son of God, is the author of the N.T. and well superior to the Angels and Moses, who gave the old law. He then speaks of the priesthood of Christ and shows in every aspect its absolute superiority over the Jewish one, concluding that the O.T. was a shadow of the reality that is the N.T.

The *moral* part is the conclusion of the dogmatic part, and makes the necessity of faith and good works felt.

## REFLECTION XXIII

234

**The Holy Gospel is protection**

*“This is my comfort in affliction,  
your promise that gives me life.”*  
(Ps 118/119:50)

Yesterday we saw how the Holy Gospel is salvation for our souls. Today we shall see how it is a valid protection against the devil, against the passions of the flesh, and against the world.

I. *The Holy Gospel is protection against the devil.* – Bringing with us the Holy Gospel is like bringing with us the Most Holy Eucharist, that is, Jesus Master, true and living. Just as

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other letters considered “Pauline,” the name of Paul never appears, also because the document lacks the usual Pauline formula of address. In Heb 13:23, there is a direct reference to the recipients from the anonymous author together with Timothy (“I must let you know that our brother Timothy has been set free. If he comes soon, I shall see you together with him.”) which could make us think of Paul. It is Paul who names Timothy as his collaborator, brother or spiritual son in Rom 16:21; 1Cor 4:17; 16:10; 2Cor 1:1,19; Phil 1:1; 2:19; Col 1:1; 1Thes 1:1; 3:2,6; 2Thes 1:1; in the two letters to Timothy and in Phlm 1. *Hebrews* strikes us, however, for its new and original treatment of the theme of Christ’s priesthood, while the great ideas bearing Paul’s thought are not present there. The drafter of *Hebrews* has been identified as Barnabas or Apollo, whose Alexandrian culture (Greco-Hellenist) and perfect knowledge of the Scriptures in the Greek language (the Septuagint) are known. Hence, today, it is held that this letter is not Paul’s handiwork, even if in it we see an influence of his thought.

after Holy Communion Jesus, in his body, blood, soul and divinity, is truly present in our soul, so, in His Truth, He is really with him who carries his Holy Gospel.

The Gospel is not only an image like, for example, the Crucifix, but it is something of Jesus, or, better, it is Jesus himself, since being God, and therefore very simple and indivisible, where he is present as Truth he must also be present as Goodness, omnipotence, etc.

He who carries with him the Holy Gospel is in very good company: he is with Jesus.

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235 Before the coming of Jesus, the devil's kingdom was very vast and the holy Gospel tells us how the Divine Master many times found himself before possessed persons who he freed from their very deplorable slavery. Until the coming of | Jesus Christ, Satan's kingdom was always expanding, but when the time of the good news came, it began to decline more and more.

Today, cases of possession are very rare among Christian peoples. Among the infidels, however, the missionary often enough meets persons possessed by the devil. How can one explain this fact? Very simple: the devil, prince of darkness, flees at the appearance of the light of the Gospel.

It is impossible to reconcile the devil and the Gospel, inasmuch as they are opposed to each other.

The Holy Church, having understood such truth, has established that during exorcisms, the Priest drive away the demon from the poor one possessed by the reading of four Gospel texts and the recitation of several Psalms.

The Gospel is the sworn enemy of Satan.<sup>3\*</sup>

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<sup>3\*</sup> "Attend to the reading of the Holy Bible: when the enemy of old (the devil) sees you occupied with it, he flees from you as one usually flees from an armed enemy." (*St. Peter Damian*)

[He lived in the years 988-1072 (for others: Ravenna, 1007 - Faenza, 22 February 1072). A man of severe penances and prolonged prayers, St. Peter Damian came out from the beloved solitude of his contemplation in Fonte Avellana (which would also shelter Dante Alighieri), accepting to be bishop and cardinal to better promote the purification and renewal of the Church afflicted by serious abuses. He is the author of important liturgical, theological, and moral writings].

II. *The Holy Gospel calms, dulls the passions of the flesh.*<sup>4\*</sup> – The human heart, because of original sin, became a nest of poisonous serpents. How many passions agitate the poor son of Eve!

An infinity of other vices follow the capital vices (pride, avarice, impurity, anger, gluttony, envy, laziness) and St. Augustine, on such a consideration, exclaimed: “In fact, human beings are a mass of perdition.”<sup>5</sup>

When passions come to a boil, try to put | the Holy Gospel in your heart and you will immediately feel a great relief, and like a mysterious medicine, it will calm your poor agitated heart.

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Pope Alexander VI had given the book of the Psalms as gift to Cristopher Columbus. Christopher, as a very devoted son, became very happy, and he always carried it with him as a precious treasure. He used to read it in moments of adversity, when discouraged, and all the times that his spirit was agitated he himself affirmed that he always was greatly comforted and relieved by it, especially during the time of his imprisonment.

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<sup>4\*</sup> “There is no temptation, no adversity, no disgrace, no calamity that does not find its relief in Holy Scripture, and to which it does not give aid through its consolation, counsel, or some other remedy.” (*St. Thomas of Villanueva*).

[St. Thomas Villanueva was born in Villanueva, Spain, in 1486. He graduated in philosophy and joined the Augustinian Community. Ordained priest, he became Superior for life of his community. Elected archbishop of Valencia, he sent missionaries throughout the world, evangelizing especially Peru. He helped the needy to the point of creating an orphanage in the bishop’s palace, and he was engaged in youth pastoral. He defended the diocese from the Muslim threat and founded the Seminary College of the Presentation. A great preacher, he converted more by his example than by his words. For his theological depth on the Virgin Mary, he is likened to St. Bernard. He died in 1550].

<sup>5</sup> If the Church has not defined the number of those who willingly choose hell, Augustine already spoke of the *massa damnationis* compared to the small number of the elect; even St. Gregory the Great and other Fathers and Doctors of the Church affirm that the damned are more numerous. Even if he many times defended free will, Augustine arrived at sustaining predestination, a position picked up and intensified by Luther, an Augustinian monk, for whom after the original sin man becomes part of a multitude of the damned and cannot do any more good and save himself; the only way to salvation is faith in the fact that God will not take into account original sin and will save the believer.

What a strong tranquilizer of passions is the Holy Gospel! <sup>6\*</sup> The heart becomes lofty in its aspirations, strong in difficulties, serene and calm amidst darkness and struggles.

Church History tells us that numerous Christians always carried with them the Holy Gospel and many Martyrs, so Eusebius says, were found with the sacred papers hanging on their neck.

The Breviary expressly tells us that the Virgin Cecilia carried continually with her the Holy Gospel: “*Virgo semper in corde suo, Evangelium ferebat,*” And so much was the strength that the Roman Virgin drew from it that she knew how to resist with admirable strength her husband, her brother-in-law, and the Emperor himself, who, as a consequence of her tenacity, condemned her to death.

237 Where did the Holy Virgin draw her strength in the most painful circumstance of the passion and death of her beloved Jesus? Why did she not lose heart | and get discouraged? Because she knew well from the Holy Scriptures, which she learned to read and love since she was very young, that the Redeemer had to suffer and die, but would have risen on the third day, and that gave her strength and courage.

III. *The Gospel furthermore protects us from the dangers of the world.* – By world we mean everything that does not come from God and does not work according to Him, but according to the spirit of hell.

A young man feels that the Divine Master is calling him to a more perfect life, and he would like to say yes, to follow the divine call, but he encounters infinite difficulties from his relatives and friends; and postpones with the risk of losing his vocation!

These are the dangers of the world. Prudence is a must so one may not be soaked with its sayings and so be damned.

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<sup>6\*</sup> “The Gospel possesses a mysterious power and an undefinable efficacy that influences minds and hearts: meditating on it one experiences what is experienced when contemplating heaven. It is not a book but a sort of living being, endowed with a power that does not know obstacles.” (*Napoleon I*)

[Napoleon Buonaparte (or Bonaparte), born in Corsica, in Ajaccio on 15 August 1769, from parents of Tuscan origin, died at the age of 52 on 5 May 1821, an exile in the island of St. Helena, a British colony in the South Atlantic Ocean].



We must oppose, as an antidote, the Gospel sayings to these diabolical ones, if our eternal salvation is dear to us!

The reading of the Gospel shall give light and strength against every danger and every lie. The sacrosanct words of the Gospel, as the Apostle says, are living and active and are sharper than any two-bladed sword: "*Vivus est enim sermo Dei et efficax, et penetrabilior omni gladio ancipiti.*" (Heb 4:12)

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*Consequences:* To see to it that in every family, in the schools and among all classes of persons there be the Holy Gospel,<sup>7</sup> since it is not only an image, but Jesus-Truth himself.

Numerous misfortunes we merit by our sins do not fall upon us because of the Gospel that we bring with us.

EXAMPLE. – *Ven. Contardo Ferrini.*<sup>8</sup> – He is the exemplary model of students; the apologetics professor who in his study of

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<sup>7</sup> On this, read nos. 136-145 of *AD* wherein Don Alberione refers to the study of the Scriptures made obligatory by Pius X for clerics (no. 137) and mentions a "special persuasion that the Gospel, much less the Bible, may not be given to the people. The reading of the Gospel used to be something almost exclusive for non-Catholics, who were interpreting it according to their private understanding." (no. 139) So Don Alberione singled out "three things" to do: "that the Gospel entered every home alongside the Catechism" (n. 140); "that the book of the Gospel be the model and inspirer of every Catholic publication" (no. 141); "that the Gospel be given a cult" (no. 142). The spread of the Gospel could have been inspired by the activity of the Pious Society of St. Jerome, active since 1902 (cf. note 9 on p. 203).

<sup>8</sup> Contardo Ferrini (born in Milan on 4 April 1859 and died 1902 in Suna, along Lago Maggiore), was declared *venerable* in 1931. He would be beatified by Pius XII on 13 April 1947. A celibate layman, he was defined "a star of holiness and science." He was a professor in various universities, as mentioned in *LS*, and his relics were interred, by insistence of Father Agostino Gemelli, in the crypt of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, of which Ferrini was an ideal precursor, if not for anything else, for his great desire to reconcile science and faith, culture and religion. A man of international culture (he studied even in Berlin), he was considered a model Catholic professor, noted for his "inexhaustible love for prayer." He was an esteemed collaborator of "*Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali e Discipline Ausiliarie*" that stimulated by the sociologist Toniolo and by Talamo, sought to unite Catholic writers and devotees of the social sciences. "What struck me most in Ferrini – wrote Toniolo – was his great humility, all the more greater as great was his doctrine, goodness, and merits." Professor Ferrini thought of death without fear, believing in the promise of Christ: "Sweet is the sound, o Jesus, of your holy word: *a little while and you will see me.*"

law seeks to defend the Church; the saint who lived in the world, teaching on the chair of Universities.

Finding himself in Milan, in the Beccaria Lyceum where he took a course of studies brilliantly, he tried to spend usefully the time that his fellow students spent for recreation. Desirous of being able to read Holy Scripture in its original text, he expressed to the prefect of the Ambrosian Library, Mons. Ceriani, his desire to know Hebrew. The learned prelate willingly consented and offered to teach him himself the Hebrew and Syriac languages with the first elements of Sanskrit and Coptic.

Let us now listen to what his colleague and friend, Count Paolo Mapelli, says about Ferrini's reading of the Bible: "...He had a predilection for the study of the Bible which he read in the Hebrew text... He knew by heart the letters of St. Paul, which, even as a student, he recited enthusiastically since he had a felt admiration for Paul of Tarsus."

He taught successively in the Universities of Pavia, Messina, Modena and Parma, while exercising a real apostolate. He lived a holy life. The Church has initiated the cause of his Beatification by declaring him Venerable by a decree dated 8 February 1931.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Today amidst temptations and difficulties, I will put my hand on my heart or where I carry the Gospel passage, saying: "*Through the words of the Gospel, may our sins be forgiven.*"

#### CANTICLE OF TOBIT [#]

Blessed be God who lives forever,  
 because his kingdom lasts for all ages.  
 For he scourges and then has mercy;  
 he casts down to the depths of the nether world,  
 and he brings up from the great abyss.  
 No one can escape his hand.  
 Praise him, you Israelites, before the Gentiles,  
 for though he has scattered you among them,  
 he has shown you his greatness even there.  
 He scourged you for your iniquities,  
 but will again have mercy on you all.

So now consider what he has done for you,  
 and praise him with full voice.  
 Bless the Lord of righteousness,  
 and exalt the King of the ages.  
 “As for me, I exalt my God,  
 and my spirit rejoices in the King of heaven.  
 Let all men speak of his majesty,  
 and sing his praises in Jerusalem.”  
 O Jerusalem, holy city, he scourged you  
 for the works of your hands,  
 but will again pity the children of the righteous.  
 Praise the Lord for his goodness,  
 and bless the King of the ages,  
 so that his tent may be rebuilt in you with joy.  
 May he gladden within you all who were captives;  
 all who were ravaged may he cherish within you  
 for all generations to come.

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(*Tb 13:2-5,7,9-12 [Tb 13:1-5,6,7-10]*)<sup>9</sup>

## READING

### **Jesus exhorts the carrying of the cross and to save oneself**

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.

What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? What could one give in exchange for his life?

Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this faithless and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.

Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.

(*Mt 16:24-28; Mk 8:34-39; Lk 9:23-27*)

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<sup>9</sup> The translation does not correspond, verse by verse, to the Latin text of the *Vulgate* borne by the original edition, and summarily indicated by the reference “Tobia capo 13.”

## PRAYER

**To be freed from sin**

**240** LORD, Father and Master of my life, permit me not to fall by them! Who will apply the lash to my thoughts, to my mind the rod of discipline, | that my failings may not be spared, nor the sins of my heart overlooked; lest my failings increase, and my sins be multiplied; lest I succumb to my foes, and my enemy rejoice over me? LORD, Father and God of my life, abandon me not into their control! A brazen look allow me not; ward off passion from my heart, let not the lustful cravings of the flesh master me, surrender me not to shameless desires.

*(Sir 23:1-6)*

## THE BIBLE IN THE FORMATION OF THE CLERGY

### MORAL EPISTLES

I LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS. – Corinth was evangelized by St. Paul for 18 months in the year 52, with abundant fruits especially among the poor pagans. After Paul left for Ephesus, the Corinthians, instructed by others, especially by Apollo, broke into parties. Upon receiving in Ephesus the news regarding the Church of Corinth, first through letter and then by voice, St. Paul hastened to write this long letter in order to uproot the abuses and to respond to the questions raised by the Corinthians. The letter was written from Ephesus perhaps in the year 57.

The body of the letter has two parts. In the first, he reproves the Corinthians for their parties, for their scandalous licentiousness, their lack of mutual trust due to their quarrels. In the second, he responds successively to five questions proposed by the Corinthians: marriage and celibacy; meat sacrificed to idols; order in the religious meetings, and decorum in the celebration of the divine mysteries; the importance, value and use of the supernatural gifts; future resurrection.

II LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS. – After the first letter, St. Paul sent Titus to Corinth with another disciple of his, so that they could come back to inform him regarding the state of the Church of Corinth. He met the disciple probably in Philippi and from him he heard with great pleasure about the great love the Corinthians had for him. Hearing as well that there were some in Corinth who accused him as inconstant, ambitious and usurper of the name of apostle, he hastened to write this letter, which is a long apology of his conduct and of his apostolate; at first veiled and then open.

It can be divided into three parts:

First part: Veiled apology: he confutes the calumnies by showing that he was not fickle, inconstant, arrogant, proud, and he defends his way of doing.

Second part: Digression on the collection for the poor of Jerusalem.

Third part: Open apology: he vindicates his dignity as an apostle, by showing that not only he is not inferior, but even superior in everything to his adversaries.

This letter was written a little after the first one, perhaps from Philippi.

LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS. – Ephesus, the capital of proconsular Asia, was chosen by St. Paul as the center of his preaching. He went there towards the end of his second journey, but stayed only for a short time. During the third journey, he stayed there for three years founding there a flourishing Christianity. After St. Paul's departure, the Gnostic heresies soon began to abound. The Apostle, a prisoner in Rome, having come to know the state of the Churches of Asia, especially of Colossae and Ephesus, wrote the four letters of the first imprisonment: to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians and to Philemon.

The Letter to the Ephesians, in its dogmatic part, gives prominence to the greatness of the work accomplished by Jesus Christ; it affirms that all, Jews and pagans, are called to become adopted children of God in the Church, which is destined to unite all in her bosom. In the moral part, it traces rules for a Christian life and speaks of general duties, as well as particular ones.

LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS. – Philippi was the first European city evangelized by St. Paul. The Apostle arrived there during his second missionary journey and stayed there probably also during his last journey.

This letter is a thanksgiving of St. Paul to the Philippians for the generous offering that Epaphroditus in the name of the Philippians brought to St. Paul during his first Roman imprisonment. Hence, it is not appropriately doctrinal, but is more of a newsletter concerning the imprisonment of Paul, to Timothy and Epaphroditus; it has only some hint about the Judaists.

It was written in Rome at the end of the imprisonment, that is, towards the end of the year 62 or the beginning of 63.

LETTER TO PHILEMON – Philemon was a Christian, rich, of Colossae, a friend of St. Paul and he had as a slave Onesimus

who, after stealing from his master, had escaped to Rome among the vagabonds. Converted by St. Paul, | however, and convinced to go back to Philemon, Onesimus goes back with this short letter of St. Paul.

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In it the Apostle, after a brief prologue of thanksgiving and praise to Philemon, presents immediately persuasive reasons to Philemon and clearly says that he is imploring him for Onesimus, asking for forgiveness and promising that he himself will restore the money stolen.

He concludes with greetings and asks Philemon for hospitality on his next visit.

#### REFLECTION XXIV

### **The Bible in the formation of the clergy**

*“How can the young walk without fault?  
Only by keeping your words.”  
(Ps 118/119:9)*

We have already said that Holy Scripture is the most beautiful book for spiritual reading; it is useful for all times, for all circumstances of life and for every personal condition. All can find therein abundant and healthy food for the soul.

If it is so for Christians in general, how much more for those called to the Priesthood.

The Bible is especially for young boys who tend and aspire one day to become God’s ministers. It is to these little ones that the Holy Spirit reveals the secrets and the divine beauty of the Bible. Jesus himself tells us: “I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the | wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.” (Lk 10:21; Mt 11:25)

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The office of preaching the divine word to the faithful belongs to Priests. In fact, the Bishop during the ordination of the Deacon says: “Receive the power to read the Gospel in the Church of God.” Such words confer precisely on the ordinand the power to instruct the faithful in the faith.

St. Paul reproves the Corinthians because some were saying they belong to Apollo, others to Kephias, and others to Paul; and

this because some received the Gospel from Apollo, others from Paul, and others from Peter. The Apostle, on the contrary, wants them to say: we belong to Christ, that is, we are formed according to his holy Gospel.

The young man who habitually reads the holy Gospel builds his house on solid rock, while receiving an unshakable formation, a gentle and delicate spirit.

Wonderful are the books of St. Thomas, St. Bernard, St. Alphonsus and of other distinguished writers even if not saints as for example Alessandro Manzoni, Dante, etc.; the beauty of the Gospel, however, is infinitely superior; the reading of it is much more effective than that of any human book.

How many young men, upon reading and hearing the Holy Gospel read, gave up everything to withdraw and follow Jesus! Hence, Holy Scripture is firstly for you, O young men.

245 St. Anthony Abbot,<sup>1</sup> a very cultured young man of 18 years, after hearing these words of the Gospel: “If you want to be perfect, sell what you have and give to the poor,” goes home, sells everything, and the money of the sale he distributes to the poor and then retreats to the desert where he reaches a very high level of sanctity and became famous for his miracles and struggles against the demons who visibly appeared to him under the most frightening forms.

St. Paul the Apostle commanded his disciple Timothy to read the Sacred Scriptures: “...attend to the reading, exhortation and teaching...” (1Tm 4:13) And to St. Titus he says that one of the principal qualities of the bishop must be knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures. Furthermore, he tells him to choose, for ordination, only those who are strongly attached to the words of truth.

St. Paul himself boasted of having learned the law of Moses and the Prophets in the school of Gamaliel.

St. Jerome, a supreme master of Holy Scripture, wrote very beautiful letters addressed to clerics in order to encourage them to read Holy Scripture. For example, he tells the cleric Neputian: “Read the Sacred Scriptures very often: do not even set aside the sacred lessons from your hands. Learn what you will

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<sup>1</sup> The example of this great saint, transformed upon hearing and reading the Bible, is referred to several times in *LS*: pp. 147, 155-157, 290, 311.



have to teach.” The great Doctor was so convinced of the necessity of Holy Scripture in the formation of youthful souls, that he has continuous and very ardent expressions inviting to sacred reading.

In all the letters that St. Jerome wrote to the Roman virgins like Marcella, Paola, Algasia, Asella, he recommends that they read the Bible, and the chaste spouses of Christ so desired that sacred reading that they stormed with letters the faraway holy Doctor, for him to soon translate other books and to send them to them.

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There are seven Sacred Orders. In three of them | the Church recommends the reading of the Sacred Scriptures, their practice and their teaching.

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In ordaining the Lector, the Bishop says: “It is the task of the Lector to read what must be communicated to the faithful... What you will read with your lips, believe with your heart, accomplish with your works, so that you may teach your listeners with your word and example.”

To the Subdeacon he says: “Receive the book of the Epistles, with the power to read them in the Holy Church of God, in behalf of both the living and the dead.”

Entrusting the book of the Holy Gospels to the Deacon, he says: “Receive the power to read in Church the Gospel, in behalf of both the living and dead.”

During the Episcopal ordination, the entire Sacred Scriptures is put in the hands of the Bishop to be ordained and to him are repeated all the fervent exhortations that St. Paul addressed to the Bishop St. Titus.

If for so many times and with such solemnity the Church recommends the reading, practice and preaching of Holy Scripture, this means that the reading of it is very important: whoever is faithful and listens to this command of the Church could be killed but never overcome: “*Sacerdos Dei Evangelium tenens et praecepta Dei custodiens, occidi potest, vinci non potest,*” so St. Epiphanius wrote.

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If you want fervent souls, give them the Holy Gospel; and you shall see the transformation that shall take place in those souls!

The sacred book is very effective in raising up vocations! It is Jesus himself who through those printed words calls and invites the soul to follow him.

247 When a young man enters the Pious Society of St. Paul, and soon loves the Holy Gospel, | kisses it and reads it with pleasure, in a very short time he enters the spirit of the House and makes big steps to sanctity.

Let us pray to the Lord, as a beautiful act of charity, so that he may give us the grace of forming our hearts on Holy Scripture and so that every one called to the priesthood may learn quickly to love and read the Bible, and so become divine little by little, until becoming another God, another *Christus*. Priests, as the Apostle St. Peter writes, are other Gods: "*Dii estis.*"<sup>2</sup> And about what must the Priest speak and write, if not about Holy Scripture and what is contained in it?

Let us therefore speak and write in our own language which is the scriptural.

EXAMPLE. – *Mysterious dream of St. Jerome.*<sup>3</sup> – Born of a Christian family in the year 342. At age 12, Jerome was sent to Rome to study. Here he became passionately interested in the Latin and Greek classics, so much so that he was continually seen with the works of Virgil, Cicero, Terence, Lucretius, Se-

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<sup>2</sup> Ps 81/82:6; Is 41:23; Jn 10:34.

<sup>3</sup> References to this "supreme" doctor of Scriptures and to his opinions are on pp. 96, 152, 176n, 198, 203, 213, 245, 247, 297. Jerome (Hieronymus, from the Greek *Ieronimos*, "who has a sacred name") is the principal translator of the *Vulgata*. His essential profile is taken from *De viribus illustribus* (no. 135), a work of 393 by Jerome himself and from his letters. Born in Stridonius, in Dalmatia, around the year 347, in 360 he went to study in Rome, where he received baptism in 366. Jerome's life was especially marked by three periods: the Oriental period (372-381), the Roman period (382-385) and the second Oriental period. Pope Damasus' death (December 384) and strong tensions with the clergy of Rome forced Jerome to go back to the Orient. On August of 385, he established himself in Bethlehem. The years 386-393 marked an intense literary activity above all in the area of translation and commentary of the Scriptures. Death caught up with him on 30 September 419 (or 420), when he was commenting on the book of Jeremiah. Towards the year 570, an anonymous pilgrim of Piacenza wrote that Jerome rested under the church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem, alongside the tombs of Paola and Eustochius. The existential itinerary of this doctor found in the love and study of the Bible the roots of sanctity.

neca, and others of distinction. And his love for them grew to the point of exaggeration.

Here is what he himself wrote in this regard: “Wretched me, I fasted before reading Cicero. After having spent nights awake, after the remembrance of my sins made me shed many tears, I used to take Plautus.” But the Lord healed him through an exceptional vision.

Here is how he describes it to us: “While the serpent of old thus toyed with me, around the middle of Lent (probably Lent of 375) an internal fever came to me which, finding my body so exhausted due to lack of rest, consumed it in such away that my bones were hardly joined together. Already my funeral rites were being prepared; my body became colder and colder; the only remaining warmth made my heart beat. Suddenly, my spirit fell into rapture and I was led to the court of the Supreme Judge. The light was so blinding, those who surrounded him exuded a splendor so vivid that, after falling to the earth, I did not dare to look up. They asked | who I was; I answered that I was a Christian. You lie, the Judge told me; you are a Ciceronian and not a Christian, because where your treasure is, there your heart is.<sup>4</sup> I fell silent, and under the beatings (since the Judge ordered that they whip me), even more tormented by bitter remorse, I repeated within myself this verse of the Psalm: *“For who among the dead remembers you?”*<sup>5</sup>

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I exclaimed crying: Lord, have pity on me, have pity on me. This cry echoed between the blows. Finally those who were present fell at the feet of the Judge and prayed to him to forgive my youthfulness, to grant me the time to do penance, to severely punish me if I happened to again read pagan books. To draw me away from misery wherein I found myself, I would have promised even more; therefore, I swore, and taking his name as witness, I said: Lord, if henceforth I keep and read worldly books, let me be treated as one who has denied You. After this oath, they freed me, and I returned to the world. Everyone was surprised in seeing me open my eyes; these shed a flood of tears that my sorrow convinced even the most unbe-

<sup>4</sup> Mt 6:21; Lk 12:34.

<sup>5</sup> Ps 6:6; cf. Is 38:18; Sir 17:22.

lieving. This was not one of those vain dreams that deceive us: I appeal to that tribunal, before which I lay prostrate, I appeal to that sentence that scared me. Would to God that such a torture may never be applied to me again. When I woke up I still felt the beatings, and my shoulders were still aching. From that moment, I studied the sacred books with greater ardor that I had not applied in reading profane books.”

The Lord thus gave to the Church the supreme Doctor of Holy Scripture, to whom we owe the translation and the commentary of the whole Bible.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – I shall recite the litany of the Sacred Writers (see at the end of this book) so that the Holy Gospel may be loved, read and assimilated by all those called to the Priesthood.

#### CANTICLE OF THANKSGIVING [#]

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“A strong city have we;  
 he sets up walls and ramparts to protect us.  
 Open up the gates to let in a nation that is just,  
 one that keeps faith.  
 A nation of firm purpose you keep in peace;  
 in peace, for its trust in you.  
 Trust in the LORD forever!  
 For the LORD is an eternal Rock.  
 He humbles those in high places,  
 and the lofty city he brings down;  
 He tumbles it to the ground,  
 levels it with the dust.  
 It is trampled underfoot by the needy,  
 by the footsteps of the poor.  
 The way of the just is smooth;  
 the path of the just you make level.  
 Yes, for your way and your judgments,  
 O LORD, we look to you;  
 Your name and your title are the desire of our souls.  
 My soul yearns for you in the night,  
 yes, my spirit within me keeps vigil for you;  
 When your judgment dawns upon the earth,

the world's inhabitants learn justice.  
 The wicked man, spared, does not learn justice;  
 in an upright land he acts perversely,  
 and sees not the majesty of the LORD.

*(Is 26:1-10)*

## READING

### Requirements of the Clergy

For this reason I left you in Crete so that you might set right what remains to be done and appoint presbyters in every town, as I directed you, on condition that a man be blameless, married only once, with believing children who are not accused of licentiousness or rebellious. For a bishop as God's steward must be blameless, not arrogant, not irritable, not a drunkard, not aggressive, not greedy for sordid gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, temperate, just, holy, and self-controlled holding fast to the true message as taught so that he will be able both to exhort with sound doctrine and to refute opponents.

For there are also many rebels, idle talkers and deceivers, especially the Jewish Christians. It is imperative to silence them, as they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what they should not.

One of them, a prophet of their own, once said, "Cretans have always been liars, vicious beasts, and lazy gluttons." That testimony is true. Therefore, admonish them sharply, | so that they may be sound in the faith, instead of paying attention to Jewish myths and regulations of people who have repudiated the truth.

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To the clean all things are clean, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is clean; in fact, both their minds and their consciences are tainted. They claim to know God, but by their deeds they deny him. They are vile and disobedient and unqualified for any good deed.

*(Ti 1:5-16)*

## PRAYER

### Longing to enter the house of the Lord

Grant me justice, God;  
 defend me from a faithless people;  
 from the deceitful and unjust rescue me.  
 You, God, are my strength.

Why then do you spurn me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
with the enemy oppressing me?  
Send your light and fidelity,  
that they may be my guide  
And bring me to your holy mountain,  
to the place of your dwelling,  
That I may come to the altar of God,  
to God, my joy, my delight.  
Then I will praise you with the harp,  
O God, my God.  
Why are you downcast, my soul?  
Why do you groan within me?  
Wait for God, whom I shall praise again,  
my savior and my God.

*(Ps 42/43:1-5)*

## THE BIBLE SHORTENS PURGATORY AND AUGMENTS THE BEATIFIC VISION

### PASTORAL LETTERS

I LETTER TO TIMOTHY. – This letter to Timothy is the first of the group of pastoral letters, so called because they are addressed to pastors of souls and give rules relative to the government of the Church.

It is a very intimate letter wherein the thoughts follow each other spontaneously in an entirely subjective order that cannot be reduced into a schematic unity. In fact, after a brief prologue, Paul exhorts Timothy to fight against false teachers, teaches him how to behave during public prayers and worship, what qualities must the sacred ministers have, how to behave with regard to heretics and various classes of Christians; he goes back to speak about false teachers, and closes with particular advices, then with the epilogue.

It was written between the years 64 and 67.

II LETTER TO TIMOTHY. – This letter, even more intimate and personal than the first, can be called St. Paul's testament since it was written in the year 67.

Timothy, left behind by Paul in Ephesus, was governing this Church when the Apostle, again imprisoned in Rome, wrote him this letter. Although, while narrating that he appeared before Nero, he says that he was freed "from the mouth of the lion," he says that his death is certain and calls to himself his beloved disciple to be encouraged and to give him the last reminders.

This very tender letter, which unites exhortations with prophecies about the Apostle's death and the future of the Church, mixed with personal news, contains exhortations | for making fruitful the grace of the priesthood, animated by the example of Paul and by the resurrection of Christ; as well as instructions regarding heresies to combat, by remaining firm in the doctrine received, in the preaching of the Gospel, and in the accomplishment of one's duties.

LETTER TO TITUS. – Titus, converted by St. Paul from Gentilism, often accompanied his Master, to the Council of Jerusalem and during the third missionary journey. He was charged to visit this or that Church. After the first Roman imprisonment, St. Paul evangelized with Titus the island of Crete and left Titus there to organize the various Churches founded in the island. After leaving Crete, St. Paul visited the Churches of Asia, then of Macedonia, and in the year 64 or in 66, he arrived in Necapolis, the capital of Epyrus. Perhaps from Necapolis he wrote this letter to tell Titus to join him so he could give him instructions. This letter must be contemporaneous to the first letter to Timothy, for they have the same simple and natural style, the same phrases and deal with almost with the same pastoral issue.

#### REFLECTION XXV

### **The Bible shortens Purgatory and augments the beatific vision**

*“I will keep your teachings always,  
for all time and forever.”*  
(Ps 118/119:44)

Heaven is all our hope; it is our only treasure; it consists in seeing God face to face, in possessing him, and enjoying him.

253 It is in view of heaven that God wrote to men his long letter! For it we have been created, for it also we labor and live. | Our prayer must be like that of the Psalmist: “One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek: To dwell in the Lord’s house all the days of my life, to gaze on the Lord’s beauty, to visit his temple.” (Ps 26/27:4) That is, so that we can win for ourselves heaven.

St. Thomas,<sup>1</sup> the supreme and principal Theologian and philosopher of the Church, asked by the Lord what he wanted as

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding St. Thomas Aquinas (1224/1225-1274, Dominican, canonized in 1323, doctor of the Church since 1567, feast on 28 January), often he is spoken of in *LS*: pp. 51f (of his example as reader, scholar and commentator of the Bible), p. 91 (as companion of Bonaventure and profound expert of the Song of Songs), p. 200, note 4 (of his thought regarding the truth and the freedom of



recompense for his precious and numerous writings, replied: "*Non aliud nisi te*": I want nothing else, O Lord, except You, and your Heaven.

In the second place, one who reads the Sacred Scriptures, not only learns that he is created for heaven, but shortens his Purgatory, if unfortunately he will fall there, because his eyes will sooner be capable of contemplating God's face.

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First of all, we have said that the Bible makes man know his end, why he was created. And for well six hundred times the Bible speaks to us about heaven, our end.

The Divine Master narrated to us several and very beautiful parables regarding the kingdom of heaven.

But then, the whole of Holy Scripture, as we have hinted, is only to tell man that he is created for heaven. Both the Old and the New Testament are a continuous exhortation to live well and to flee from evil; and for what purpose? To be able one day to win the reward, that is, to enter heaven.

The Sacred Scriptures often are represented by a lamp that gives light to man so that he may not take the wrong road: "*Mandatum lucerna est, et lex lux*: for the bidding is a lamp, and the teaching | a light" (Prv 6:23) and the Lord Jesus said that on judgment day he will judge all men according to this light, that is, if they have acted, yes or no, according to the precepts contained in Holy Scripture: "*Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.*" (Zep 1:12)<sup>2</sup> And in the Psalms we read: "*Lucerna pedibus meis, verbum tuum, et lumen semitis meis*: Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path." (Ps 118/119:105)

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biblical doctrine), p. 244 (as author of wonderful books). The doctor and supreme theologian of the Church, has had a primary influence in the scholastic system of seminaries and church universities, and hence also in the thought of Don Alberione and of the Paulines of the beginnings. Thomas, as a friar preacher, was dedicated to the reading of the word of God and to *contemplata aliis tradere* (to communicate to others the result of his own contemplation). As a thinker he attempted a synthesis between philosophy and Christian faith and between nature and grace. Patron of universities, colleges, and Catholic schools, Thomas was a master of clear and concise communication, free, rational, and capable of exercising his intelligence regarding the mysteries of the revealed Word.

<sup>2</sup> "I will explore Jerusalem with lamps..."

It is always the Lord who, through his law, brings light to our path, so that we do not deviate from the right path to heaven.

Ah, how the hope and the desire for heaven comes alive in him who often reads the Bible; he will quickly understand the misery of this earth and the beauty of heaven, such that he formulates resolutions of wanting to acquire it at all cost.

St. Basil says that the Bible is “a great drugstore from where each can take at pleasure the best remedies, the strongest corroboration for one’s spirit.”

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In the second place, the reading of the Bible accelerates and augments the beatific vision of God, that is, heaven, by the fact that it shortens Purgatory. He who reads frivolous and even bad books shall have as a consequence thoughts, earthly and worldly desires and hence, when he will present himself before God’s tribunal, the eyes of his intelligence will be blurred and perhaps covered by mud; found therefore inadequate to contemplate God and not accustomed to those divine mysteries, he will first have to stay long in Purgatory and there be purified and make his eyes capable of contemplating the resplendent | face of the Lord, since heaven is nothing else but the face to face contemplation of our God.

Read the book on Purgatory by St. Catherine of Genoa and you will soon be convinced of the immense pain that those poor souls suffer, forced to stay separated from their God!

Instead he who often reads the Sacred Scriptures demonstrates to want only one thing: to know the Lord and this desire of his shall certainly be satisfied because there is the infallible word of Jesus that says: “*Beati qui esuriunt, et sitiunt iustitiam: quoniam ipsi saturabuntur.*” (Mt 5:6)<sup>3</sup> In heaven no desire shall be left unsatisfied: the Blessed will pass from mystery to mystery, and God shall reveal himself to those who sought him: “*Inquirentibus se remunerator sit.*” (Heb 11:6)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”

<sup>4</sup> “...he rewards those who seek him.”

His eyes will be powerful as those of an eagle which, at a young age, is carried by its mother up high towards the sun, so that it may get used to solar rays.

He who reads the Bible gets used even now to contemplate what would constitute the object of his eternal beatitude; and as soon as his soul shall be free of this mortal body, he will fly towards God, and being used to contemplate the sublime mysteries, he will more quickly be admitted to the vision of God.

The Evangelist St. John who continually aspired to know the divine mysteries is almost always portrayed with an eagle close by, and this in order to indicate that his flights in the contemplation of God were marvelous. With what height and sublimity, in fact, does his Gospel begin! He even starts from the nature | of God, begins his Gospel with the narration of the eternal generation of the Word. In the face of such height we cannot but exclaim with St. Paul: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God." (Rom 11:33)<sup>5</sup>

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Let us then open the holy book and let us read it; let us nourish ourselves often with it because in this way we will augment our eternal blessedness, since the Bible is nothing but a preparation for it. And as St. Augustine says, "the doctrine of Holy Scripture is the Science of sciences, the food, the delicious nourishment of archangels, the glory of the Apostles, the faith of the patriarchs, the hope of the prophets, the crown of martyrs, the strength of virgins, the relief of monks, the comfort of bishops, the dispensary of priests, the primer of children, the doctrine of widows, the beauty of the married, the resurrection of the dead, the everlasting protection of the living. This is the doctrine for which we are ornamented with faith, confirmed with hope, and strengthened in charity. This is the doctrine that *"Whoever shall have found it, shall find life and shall draw salvation from the Lord."*<sup>6\*</sup>

Observe one who has read, with right intention, a passage of the Bible. He looks around in wonder. It seems to him almost impossible that he is still on earth. Oh, yes, in body he is still on earth, but in spirit he is in heaven.

<sup>5</sup> Because of a printing error, *LS* indicates "Rom. XXI, 33." (Rom 21:33)

<sup>6\*</sup> St. Augustine, *Serm. XXVIII*.

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EXAMPLE. – *St. Bede*. – He made England and the Church famous for his holiness and his writings. Educated since childhood in piety and study, he very soon | manifested the very excellent qualities with which the Lord had favored him.

He very soon consecrated himself to the Lord through religious vows, dedicating himself at the same time to studies to which he felt himself strongly inclined.

However, it was not vanity or his own satisfaction that he sought in that noble occupation since he himself confessed that it was not vainglory that moved him to study literature, neither did he apply himself to the sciences for simple culture of the soul, but directed everything to the glory of God and to greater understanding of Holy Scripture. And for this purpose, although already very learned, he made himself a humble student in order to learn the Greek language.

His love and study of Holy Scripture was so known,<sup>7</sup> that the Archbishop of York<sup>8</sup> used to call him often so he may read and explain with him the Sacred Books and to talk about spiritual matters.

It is said that he read daily for six hours the Sacred Books and he learned them so well that later he knew neither to write nor speak without connecting verses of the Holy Bible.

His principal work is his commentary on Holy Scripture that even today is of immense use to Bible commentators.

His books were read in the Churches by Priests like the Gospel and the Epistles are read; they are so full of wisdom and interwoven with passages from Holy Scripture.

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<sup>7</sup> A short time prior to his death that took place in 735, concluding the history of his people and giving a list of his works, Bede gives us this self-portrait: "I spent my whole life in this monastery [of Wearmouth and Jarrow], dedicating myself entirely to the study of the Bible and while I followed the discipline of the Rule and the daily duty of singing in church, it was always sweet to me to learn, to teach, to write... I ask you, O good Jesus, who benevolently have granted to me to draw with sweetness the words of your science, to grant me also, you who are kind, to reach you, source of all wisdom, and to stand before your face." Bede was first of all a reader of the Bible. His exegetical work, his penetration of Scripture, make him one of the major interpreters of the Bible during the whole of the Latin High Medieval Age.

<sup>8</sup> In the original text, there is "Jork".

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Recite an act of sorrow for the little care that till now the sacred book enjoys.

CANTICLE OF CANTICLES [#]

O LORD, you are my God,  
 I will extol you and praise your name;  
 For you have fulfilled your wonderful plans of old,  
 faithful and true.  
 For you have made the city a heap,  
 the fortified city a ruin;  
 the castle of the insolent is a city no more,  
 nor ever to be rebuilt.  
 Therefore a strong people will honor you,  
 fierce nations will fear you.  
 For you are a refuge to the poor,  
 a refuge to the needy in distress;  
 shelter from the rain, shade from the heat.  
 As with the cold rain,  
 as with the desert heat,  
 even so you quell the uproar of the wanton.

(Is 25:1-5)

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READING

**Parables of the hidden treasure, of the pearl, and of the net**

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away.

Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

“Do you understand all these things?” They answered, “Yes.” And he replied, “Then every scribe who has been instructed in the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who brings from his store-room both the new and the old.”

[Mt 13:44-52]

## DAVID'S PRAYER

Who am I, Lord GOD, and who are the members of my house, that you have brought me to this point?

Yet even this you see as too little, Lord GOD; you have also spoken of the house of your servant for a long time to come: this too you have shown to man, Lord GOD!

What more can David say to you? You know your servant, Lord GOD!

For your servant's sake and as you have had at heart, you have brought about this entire magnificent disclosure to your servant.

And so - "Great are you, Lord GOD! There is none like you and there is no God but you, just as we have heard it told..."

*(2Sm 7:18ff)*

## THE BIBLE AND SACRED LITURGY

## ST. JAMES THE LESSER

St. James the Lesser is so called to differentiate him from another James, the brother of the Apostle St. John called the Greater and killed by sword by Herod between the year 42-44 in Jerusalem.

He was the son of Cleophas and Mary, relative of the Most Holy Virgin, and he was, with his brothers Jude, Simon, and Joseph,<sup>1</sup> a cousin of Christ. In fact, in the Gospel he is often called the Lord's brother: now we know with certainty that Our Lady did not have other children except Jesus and that on the other hand the Gospel uses the same word – brother – to indicate both brothers and cousins.

He was one of the twelve Apostles; Jesus Christ appeared to him in particular after the resurrection, and it seems that Christ chose him as Bishop of Jerusalem.

For about thirty years he held his seat in Jerusalem, with such prudence and holiness that he was admired even by his enemies, the Jews. St. Paul calls him one of the columns of the Church and visits him when he passes by Jerusalem.

He was martyred between 62 to 64, under the pontificate of Ananias, in a popular uprising instigated by the Scribes and Pharisees. His feast is celebrated on May 1 along with St. Philip, the Apostle.

## LETTER OF ST. JAMES

The Letter of St. James is addressed to Jewish Christians dispersed among the pagan nations in order to encourage them during persecutions, stimulate them to conform their lives to the Christian faith and to put them on guard against some (Simonites,<sup>2</sup> Nicho-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 8:9-24: the story of Simon and the origin of simony. The Simonites do not exist; probably Don Alberione refers to "simoniacs," as on p. 270, where he names them still with the Nicholaites.

laites<sup>3</sup>) who, wrongly interpreting some words of St. Paul, were saying that there is no need for good works, but faith is enough.

St. James fights against this destructive idea, and although he speaks of many other virtues, he insists on justice and charity and clearly says that faith is vain without good works and one is not saved with showing off knowledge and doctrine, but with Christian virtues. This letter has more the form of a moral exhortation than of a letter.

The short prologue is followed by exhortations to constancy, to a living faith accompanied by works. The letter moves on to censure one who aspires to act as a teacher, and speaks of true and false wisdom. After having recommended peace and harmony, it threatens the heartless rich, speaks of patience, of oaths, says what Christians must do in various circumstances, especially in case of sickness, and ends by recommending prayers for sinners.

This letter, written in Jerusalem towards the year 60, seems to suppose the letter to the Romans, because it explains the ideas of St. Paul, badly understood, that faith requires good works and justification does not come from the works of the law, but from Christian deeds.

## The Bible and Sacred Liturgy

*“Wonderful are your decrees;  
therefore I observe them.”*  
(Ps 118/119:129)

We already have mentioned several times that the Holy Bible is not only light for our mind, way for our will, but also strength and grace for our heart. Since this is the main scope of the sacred Liturgy, that is, to get for the heart through the Sac-

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<sup>3</sup> Gnostics belonging to at least two different sects, one during the apostolic times that derived its name from that of the deacon Nicholas of Antioch (Acts 6:5), the other that was connected with the Barbelognostics and flourished in the I-II centuries after Christ. The first, denounced in the Apocalypse (Rv 2:6,14-15), believed in compromising with idolatry and sexual liberties; the second, into which the first seems to flow, was part of Egyptian gnosis, and it also gave great importance to the sexual element.



raments and Sacramentals all the needed grace for sanctification, let us talk about it here, in this third part of the month that precisely aims to show how to hope for graces.

We shall therefore see what Liturgy is, its importance, and what relationship it has with the Bible.

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Sacred Liturgy can be defined as: *The complex of acts of public cult established by church authority.*

Liturgy includes everything that refers to these acts of public cult, hence a number of elements, like the persons involved in worship, liturgical actions and objects, places and liturgical times.

*Liturgical persons* are, for example, all the lower ministers who, at Mass, assist the higher minister, that is, the Deacon, who, in his | turn, assists the Priest. If the Priest has the faculty of celebrating the Holy Mass, he does not have the faculty, however, of conferring this on others; hence, above him there must be the Bishop who occupies the highest level in the sacred hierarchy of Order.

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Liturgical personnel also are all those who make up, for example, a procession.

*Liturgical actions* are the celebration of the Holy Mass, with all the complex of its ceremonies; chant, blessings, consecrations, administration of the Sacraments and of Sacramentals; the recitation of the Breviary; processions, etc.

*Liturgical objects* are all the objects that are used for the various sacred rites. Some objects are consecrated, like the chalice and the paten, others are simply blessed, like crosses, religious images, paintings, vestments, water, incense, etc.

*Liturgical places* are all the Basilicas, the churches, the sanctuaries, chapels, oratories, monasteries, cemeteries, etc.

*Liturgical times:* here comes in the first place the liturgical year, in its marvelous cycle that makes us see the entire life of Jesus and of Our Lady, the feasts of the various Saints, the various hours during which the breviary must be recited or the Holy Sacrifice celebrated, etc.

All of these contribute to make up Sacred Liturgy wherein every Christian, we can say, continually lives and from which he can draw priceless spiritual treasures, because Liturgy pos-

sesses all that is beautiful, devout, and holy the Church, inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit in the course of twenty centuries, was able to concentrate in her rites.

263 Millions and millions of the faithful throughout the world | drank from those pure and abundant springs and sanctified themselves.

From just one liturgical formula that is well meditated can spring out a more abundant font of living water of devotion, that hundreds of pages of certain books of piety cannot do.

How can we explain this? We can explain this by the fact that the most wise Church drew, we can say, all her liturgy from the Holy Bible, and therefore this Liturgy shares the power and efficacy of the Sacred Books.

1. As we have mentioned, the Liturgy includes words: the Breviary, Missals, Books of Rites, Ceremonials, Pontificals, etc. Two thirds of the words making up these books are taken from the Bible.

You hear so many things from your Priests. Perhaps you read so many of their writings. Well, a good part of what you hear or read, if you open the Holy Bible, you find there.

2. In Liturgy there are many very beautiful ceremonies. The essential part of them is taken from the Bible. Many ceremonies of the O.T., it is true, have not been taken the way they were, but were not abrogated, only perfected, just as Holy Baptism replaced the circumcision of the Hebrews. Others instead were taken as they were. The Church took from the Bible even the division of the Hours in which Priests have to recite the Holy Office. In substance, however, the entire Liturgy comes from the Bible. Numerous rites and acts of worship that the Roman Liturgy has, if we open the Holy Gospel or the Acts of the Apostles, we find them there in all their beauty.

3. Furthermore, the Church takes from the Sacred Scriptures all the spirit and soul of her Liturgy and her Liturgy could be called: *evangelical Liturgy*.

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It is necessary to understand the spirit of Liturgy, in its words, ceremonies, and objects. It is an error to reduce the Lit-

urgy to the simple things that appear like ceremonies or chant. A Christian, and much more one called to the Priesthood, must have much deeper understanding: his reflection must not stop at the surface of liturgical things, acts, or words, but making use of books and translations, he must try to penetrate the spirit of every liturgical ceremony and word.

A few years back, unfortunately, Liturgy was like the famous apocalypse book, closed with seven seals; today, thanks to the Lord, it is no longer so: never before have numerous translations, books and liturgical magazines opened the way to make known the secrets and ineffable beauty of the Liturgy.

It is consoling to see that, in very many parishes, the faithful assist at Mass, at Vespers and at all the Liturgical Functions, especially at those of the Holy week, with their book in hand, and follow step by step the Priest, in his liturgical actions, with immense profit for their souls.

And now let us pray so that this most laudable custom may become more and more widespread, and so that all, reading the Holy Bible, may learn to discover in it the spirit and end of all the Holy Liturgy which is: the Glory of God and peace to men.

EXAMPLE. – *Ezra reads the Law before the people.* – Now when the seventh month came, the whole people gathered as one man in the open space before the Water Gate, and they called upon Ezra the scribe to bring forth the book of the law of Moses which the LORD prescribed for Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, therefore, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which consisted of men, women, and those children old enough to understand. Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate, he read out of the book from daybreak till midday, in the presence of the men, the women, and those children old enough to understand; and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law.

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Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the occasion; at his right side stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah, and on his left Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, Meshullam. Ezra opened the scroll so that all the people might see it (for he was standing higher up than any of the people); and, as he

opened it, all the people rose. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people, their hands raised high, answered, "Amen, amen!" Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD, their faces to the ground. (The Levites Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah explained the law to the people, who remained in their places.) Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God, interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.

Then (Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, and) Ezra the priest-scribe (and the Levites who were instructing the people) said to all the people: "Today is holy to the LORD your God. Do not be sad, and do not weep" - for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. He said further: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to our LORD. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!" (And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Hush, for today is holy, and you must not be saddened.") Then all the people went to eat and drink, to distribute portions, and to celebrate with great joy, for they understood the words that had been expounded to them.

*(Neh 8:1-12)*

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – I shall seek to speak with someone regarding the beauty of the Bible and I shall advice him to read it.

#### CANTICLE OF DAVID [#]

266 I waited, waited for the LORD;  
 who bent down and heard my cry,  
 drew me out of the pit of destruction,  
 out of the mud of the swamp,  
 set my feet upon rock, steadied my steps,  
 and put a new song in my mouth,  
 a hymn to our God.  
 Many shall look on in awe  
 and they shall trust in the LORD.  
 Happy those whose trust is the LORD,

who turn not to idolatry  
or to those who stray after falsehood.  
How numerous, O LORD, my God,  
you have made your wondrous deeds!  
And in your plans for us  
there is none to equal you.  
Should I wish to declare or tell them,  
too many are they to recount.  
sacrifice and offering you do not want;  
but ears open to obedience you gave me.  
Holocausts and sin-offerings you do not require;  
so I said, "Here I am;  
your commands for me are written in the scroll.  
To do your will is my delight;  
my God, your law is in my heart!"  
I announced your deed to a great assembly;  
I did not restrain my lips;  
you, LORD, are my witness.  
Your deed I did not hide within my heart;  
your loyal deliverance I have proclaimed.  
I made no secret  
of your enduring kindness to a great assembly.  
LORD, do not withhold your compassion from me;  
may your enduring kindness ever preserve me.  
For all about me are evils beyond count;  
my sins so overcome me I cannot see.  
They are more than the hairs of my head;  
my courage fails me.  
LORD, graciously rescue me!  
Come quickly to help me, LORD!  
Put to shame and confound  
all who seek to take my life.  
Turn back in disgrace those who desire my ruin.  
Let those who say "Aha!" know dismay and shame.  
But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you.  
May those who long for your help always say,  
"The LORD be glorified."  
Though I am afflicted and poor,  
the Lord keeps me in mind.  
You are my help and deliverer;  
my God, do not delay!

*(Ps 39/40:2-18)*

### Institution of the Most Holy Eucharist

When the day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread arrived, the day for sacrificing the Passover lamb, he sent out Peter and John, instructing them, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." They asked him, "Where do you want us to make the preparations?" And he answered them, "When you go into the city, a man will meet you carrying a jar of water. Follow him into the house that he enters and say to the master of the house, 'The teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" He will show you a large upper room that is furnished. Make the preparations there." Then they went off and found everything exactly as he had told them, and there they prepared the Passover.

When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it (again) until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, "Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you (that) from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.

"And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me is with me on the table; for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed." And they began to debate among themselves who among them would do such a deed.

*(Lk 22:7-23)*

### PRAYER

"LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below; you keep your covenant of kindness with your servants who are faithful to you with their whole heart. You have kept the promise you made to my father David, your servant. You who spoke that promise, have this day, by your own power, brought it to fulfillment. Now, therefore, LORD, God of Israel, keep the further promise you made to my father David, your servant, saying, 'You shall always have someone from your line to sit before me on the

throne of Israel, provided only that your descendants look to their conduct so that they live | in my presence, as you have lived in my presence.' Now, LORD, God of Israel, may this promise which you made to my father David, your servant, be confirmed. "Can it indeed be that God dwells among men on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple which I have built! Look kindly on the prayer and petition of your servant, O LORD, my God, and listen to the cry of supplication which I, your servant, utter before you this day.

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*(1Kgs 8:23-30)*

## THE BIBLE FOUNTAIN OF PIETY

## ST. PETER

Simon, son of John or Jonah, was a native of Bethsaida, in Galilee. Already a disciple of John the Baptist, he was led by his brother Andrew to Jesus who changed his name to Peter.

After the miracle of the fish, he definitively followed Jesus Christ and was named apostle, rather, the prince of the Apostles; and among the twelve he is always remembered as the first. He had a great faith and an ardent love for the Divine Master.

During the passion, too presumptuous in his faith, he endangered himself and unfortunately denied his Master in spite of the protestations he had made during the last supper. But then, having repented and reformed, he made reparations with an indefectible love.

In fact, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, he was the first to bravely preach the name of Jesus: imprisoned, he did not stop bearing witness to Jesus.

We know that he went to Antioch and founded there the Christian community. After the martyrdom of James the Greater, miraculously freed from prison, he left Jerusalem and “went to another place,” as the Acts tell us (Acts 12:17). Hence, his departure for Rome go back to this time and the ancient Christian writers as St. Clement of Rome, St. Irenaeus, Tertullian and St. Ignatius Martyr attest to his stay in the eternal city.

**270** We do not know what other apostolic journeys he undertook eventually.

Tradition is unanimous in establishing the martyrdom of St. Peter in the year 67: his feast takes place on 29 June.

We have two letters by St. Peter.

I LETTER OF ST. PETER – This letter, addressed to Christians spread in the provinces of Asia, was written in Rome, perhaps between 63 and 65 A. D, and it supposes the existence of the persecution of Nero throughout the empire because it speaks about it and gives advices relative to it.



The letter exhorts at first to live as Christians in charity; it then speaks of the duties of Christians in relation to authority, and according to the different social classes; finally it exhorts the pastors to be watchful, the faithful to be subject to them, and ends with exhorting to the Christian virtues.

The simple doctrine and practice, expressed with sublime seriousness, while it consoles in afflictions and confirms in the faith, preaches against the Simoniacs and the Nicholaites, and about the need for good works for eternal salvation.

II LETTER OF ST. PETER. – Although it was not universally recognized until the IV century, this letter is certainly St. Peter's, bearing his name and many particulars that only St. Peter could write. It cannot be denied, however, that it differs in style from the first letter; but this is well explained by the different secretaries that St. Peter had in writing his letters. The second letter seems addressed to the same recipients as the first, from Rome, in the year 67.

The purpose of the letter, which can be said to be the testament of the Prince of the Apostles, is to inculcate the need for good works, of fighting the heretics who exchanged freedom for license, and denied the return of Jesus Christ.

This letter is the testament of a father who, seeing death in the face, gives his children the last, heartfelt warnings, and represents, almost more than the first, St. Peter's ardent spirit.

## REFLECTION XXVII

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### **The Bible fountain of piety**

*"I lift up my hands to your commands;  
I study your laws, which I love."  
(Ps 118/119:48)*

By the word *piety* we mean the complex of devout practices: prayers, acts of virtue, the good actions themselves that we do during the day.

Saying, however, that the Bible is the fountain of piety, we do not to speak only of the external act, like the recitation of the

Holy Rosary, Communion, etc., but we mean the *spirit* that vivifies these acts, without which all the acts of piety, even the most holy, like Holy Communion, all without distinction would be like marble statues, indeed very beautiful, but lifeless.

When the soul prays with humility, repenting of its failures and does all for pure love of God, and tends toward him with a heart in tension, then we can say that it has the spirit of piety. Such spirit therefore does not consist in only vocal prayers nor in good exterior works; but rather in a habitual conformity of our will to that of God.

272 Piety, as the Apostle St. Paul teaches, *is useful for everything* and for all: “*Pietas ad omnia | utilis est*” (1Tm 4:8); it is useful to infants and to innocent children, so that they may keep their innocence; it is useful to the young, for them to overcome the crisis of youth, a very delicate stage of their life; it is useful to adults, to the elderly, to masters and servants: to everyone it is indispensable for living and dying in God’s grace.

It is useful in prosperity and in misfortune, in abundance and in misery, for living well and for dying well. Piety is always necessary because man needs that the grace of God assist him and strengthen him.

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The virtue of piety springs principally from two sources: the Tabernacle and the Bible. We shall focus our reflection on this second source.

“Nothing is more advantageous for the salvation of souls, than to know the divine scriptures,” St. John Damascene<sup>1</sup> said.

“The Sacred Books are of supreme advantage for Christians,” Cassiodorus<sup>2</sup> affirmed.

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<sup>1</sup> John Damascene (650 ca. - 750 ca., priest, doctor of the Church). In the many areas wherein he exercised his capabilities as writer and orator (dogmatics, exegesis, morals, asceticism, poetry), he did so in perfect harmony with the tendencies proper to his time and with the expectations of the reading public to which he wanted to address himself.

<sup>2</sup> Cassiodorus (490 ca. - 583 ca.). A Roman politician and writer. He was probably born in Calabria of a senatorial family of remote Siriac origins. His father was a prefect of the praetorium of Theodoricus, king of the Goths, and Cassiodorus followed the same career. In 535 he tried but failed (in collabora-

The spirit of piety has a nourishment that is *spiritual reading*. All the masters of asceticism recommend and have beautiful praises for spiritual reading: St. Augustine calls spiritual books *his delights*, and principal of these his delights was Holy Scripture.

“What above all occupies me in my meditations is the Gospel: from it I draw everything necessary for my poor soul. I discover in it ever new lights, mysterious and hidden meanings: and I understand and know by experience that the kingdom of God is within us,” so St. Therese of the Child Jesus<sup>3</sup> has written.

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tion with Pope Agapitus) to establish a Christian university in Rome. In the year 537 he retired to private life, dedicating himself ever more to study and religion. In the lands of his family (in Squillace) in Calabria he founded a religious community called *Vivarium*, whose characteristic feature was the acknowledged importance of the intellectual activities of the monks. The *Vivarium*, although it did not survive beyond the VII century, was important for its preservation of ancient Greek and Latin books and for the creation of a model of monastic life that was to influence later the Benedictine order. Cassiodorus is one of the founders of medieval civilization in the West.

<sup>3</sup> Therese of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face (1873-1897), Carmelite, canonized on 17 May 1925; the “most beloved child of history” (Pius XII) was proclaimed doctor of the Church by Pope John Paul II on 19 Oct. 1997. Therese’s discovery of what will be “an entirely new little way” of sanctity goes back perhaps to the end of 1894. Her encounter with the words of the prophet Isaiah belongs to this period: “As a mother comforts her son, so will I comfort you; in Jerusalem you shall find comfort.” (Is 66:13) Ah! Never have most tender, most harmonious words have made my soul joyful. The lift that must raise me till heaven are your arms, Jesus! For this I do not need to grow, on the contrary, I must remain small, and become so ever more.” Therese is doctor of pure grace: she saw that everything depends on the gratuitous Love of the Father. Another great intuition of Therese consists in the discovery of *love*, starting from the reading of 1Cor: “Love gave me the key of my vocation. I understood that if the Church has a body composed of many members, the most necessary, the most noble organ of all of them is not lacking; I understood that the Church has a heart and this burns with love. I understood that love alone moves the members of the Church... I understood that love encloses all vocations, that love is everything, that it embraces all times and all places; in a word, it is eternal... my vocation is love (Ms B, 3v, in *Opere complete*, p. 223).

In the original edition of *LS* the passage quoted above, as the other two respectively of Damascene and Cassiodorus, were placed in the note, out of context. We thought it more opportune to insert them in this section of the text.

273 It is indispensable for one who wants to progress fast and securely in the path of perfection, for one who wants to have as guide a book for spiritual reading. For this purpose, most recommended | are the books of St. Francis de Sales, those of St. Alphonsus, of Ven. Oliér,<sup>4</sup> of St. Ignatius, of St. Teresa of Avila, of Scupoli,<sup>5</sup> etc. All very wonderful books, indeed, but always human. There is one that stands above all, and which is the source of all the others: the Holy Bible; this is the best book for spiritual reading, this is the clearest fountain from where all the ascetical writers drew their teaching, and their books are nothing but rivulets coming out from this immense sea.

What better book is there to incite the soul to patience, than that of Job? What more effective book than the Song of Songs in order to fire up the soul with love for God and to bring her to prayer?

Aware of this, the Supreme Pontiffs, especially Pius X, Leo XII and the current Pius XI, have very vibrant recommendations that Holy Scripture, especially the Gospel, be read daily.

Here is what Pius X says in a letter of 21 January 1907 to Card. Cassetta:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Jacques Olier (Paris 1608 - 1657), priest, founder of the Society of St. Sulpice. He studied with the Jesuits and his spiritual director was Vincent de Paul, who assisted him even in the moment of death. For the sharpness of his introspection and the finesse of his sentiment – manifested also in the formation of the young – he can be compared to St. Francis de Sales.

<sup>5</sup> Lorenzo Scupoli (Otranto 1530 - Naples 1610), Theatine priest-writer of ascetics since 1577, calumniated and accused for an unknown fault, he was, through a decree of the General Chapter of 1585, reduced to the state of lay brother. His most famous work, *Certamen spirituale*, appeared anonymously in Venice in 1589. In 1610, a few days after his death, it was released in Bologna for the first time (it was already in its 50th edition) with the author's name. *Il combattimento spirituale (The spiritual combat)* is a "treatise of spiritual strategy" carried out with an ascetical method that is simple and practical, in 66 chapters of solid doctrine. It aims to lead the reader towards a perfection entirely interior, based on the denial of self and consummated in union with God.

<sup>6</sup> Francesco di Paola Cassetta (Roma 1841 - 1919). He studied in the Roman Seminary and graduated in theology and in *utroque iure*. A priest since 10 August 1865, he wanted to go as a missionary among the non-Christians. Out of obedience he remained in Rome, where he dedicated himself to the education of the youth. He was ordained bishop and in turn he ordained Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII. He was the prefect of the

“From the moment that we have resolved to restore<sup>7</sup> everything in Jesus Christ, we could desire nothing better than to introduce among the faithful the habit of reading, not just frequently, but daily the Holy Gospels, since it is precisely this reading that demonstrates and makes us see clearly through what way we can and must attain that desired restoration.”

Likewise, Benedict XV, his most worthy successor, writing to the same Card. Cassetta, president of the Pious Society of St. Jerome,<sup>8</sup> says that failure in the reading of the Holy Gospels is the cause of the deviations in today’s society: “Experience teaches, more than what may be needed to mention it, | that the deviations in today’s society come from the fact that the life, the doctrine and the works of Jesus Christ have fallen into very deep oblivion, and neither do men care to inspire from them their daily actions”; and not only was the Holy Pontiff content to lament such a great evil, but he worked with all his soul so that the reading of the Holy Gospel would return as a daily habit among families led astray by liberalism. He wanted that he himself be the effective president of the Society of St. Jerome and on 8 October 1914, he issued as his second papal document, a magnificent brief, wherein he praises the same Society for the

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Congregations of the Council and of Studies, and librarian of the Holy Roman Church. Even as a cardinal, he was a generous and ardent promoter of the most modern forms of Catholic activity, having as his ideal in life the effusive love of St. Paul. His rich inheritance from his family, by testament, was placed entirely at the disposition of the Propaganda Fide for the poorest missions.

<sup>7</sup> Don Alberione will still say: “There is no other solution for all the questions that are being fomented even today among men than this: *Instaurare omnia in Christo*. Does not salvation come from there?” (*Pr* 5, p. 28; Sermons to the Pauline communities – for the canonization of Pius X – 23 May 1954). In April 1960, during the retreat-convention of the Paulines in Ariccia, he will add: “Know better, imitate, pray to and preach the only Master Jesus Christ: in whom everything is unified and recapitulated, *omnia instaurare in Christo - In ipso omnia constant - Magister vester unus est Christus*” (*UPS* II, pp. 243-244). A few days earlier, he had said: “The Son of God came to repair the first construction, to restore man and his faculties. For this he restored the mind (he is Truth), restored the will (he is Way), restored the sentiment (he is Life)” (*UPS* I, p. 369).

<sup>8</sup> See note 9 of p. 203.

work undertaken as “very good in itself and very pleasing to Him.” He confirmed and recommended very much the “*Gruppi del Santo Vangelo*” (*The Holy Gospel Groups*) which are a gathering of persons aiming to read, study and meditate on the Holy Gospel; these are holy meetings that even today, through the work of the current Pius XI, are enjoying ever greater development. And the very consoling reawakening<sup>9</sup> of religion and of Christian piety in every city and village of Italy in good part is due to this return to the Holy Gospel.

Since piety is the divine life in us, the more we approach the fount, the purer and fresher shall be the water that we shall draw: and so the more spiritual books draw from the Gospel, the more they are effective and useful for souls.

You hear or read so many things concerning ascetics and the spiritual life, but if you take the Bible in hand and open it, you will find there all those truths in all their genuine beauty.

All the spiritual books<sup>10</sup> we could liken them to equally many rays of light that take origin, life and warmth from Holy Scripture.

**275** If a soul is lukewarm, does not feel in itself | spiritual warmth, in a word, does not have the spirit of piety, let it take hold of the Bible and read. It will immediately feel its heart burning with holy desires, its mind illumined with a divine light to enable the will to conceive energetic resolutions.

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<sup>9</sup> An example of moral and spiritual “reawakening” with a consequent change of life is found on p. 21. Here Don Alberione speaks of a reawakening obtained through a more assiduous reading of the Gospel. *La Bibbia nella vita della Chiesa* (CEI 1995), in no. 9 says: “In synthesis, we can register three fundamental signs of a promising biblical reawakening among us: a radical and interior renewal of faith, drawn from the fount of the Word of God; the conscious affirmation and assumption of the primacy of the Word of God in the life and mission of the Church; the promotion of a more prompt ecumenical journey sustained by the Scriptures.”

<sup>10</sup> “He who reads the divine Book assumes the divine language, speaks the divine language, acquires the divine effectiveness... Many sermons, many books, many exhortations would be much more effective if, instead of man, God spoke” (15 January 1935, *Unione Cooperatori Apostolato Stampa*, n. 1, p. 3). “Do not look for books of asceticism that foster a sentimental piety, but the Gospel and therefore a solid piety.” (June 1941, *IA* 1, p. 34)

“In the world of the spirit, the Gospel is the sun and all the human creatures that come after, are but planets and satellites of planets.” (*Papini*)<sup>11</sup>

There, in the Holy Gospel, the very loving Heart of Jesus beats: let us go and rest in his heart. He will warm us and make us know what he wants from us.

This is why St. Bernard came out with this very meaningful expression: If I read or write, no book, no writing satisfies me, if I do not read or write the name of Jesus.

Most effective are the novenas and tridiums wherein one proposes to read and meditate on a scriptural passage; at times a phrase or a short verse is enough to convert a soul and from lukewarm transform it to fervorous, and even if dead, to raise it up, as it happened to so many: a classic example: St. Augustine who is a convert of Holy Scripture.

Indeed, there are so many books but the main one is the Bible. It is God himself who tells us to read it and to assimilate its teachings. One day, the Lord spoke to Ezekiel and told him: “Son of man, eat what is before you then go, speak to the house of Israel.” (Ez 3:1ff) The prophet took the book and ate it and his mouth, as Ezekiel himself said, “became sweet as honey.”

In this let us imitate Mary Most Holy, in her daily reading of the Sacred Scriptures, and we shall have a very solid nourishment and our | spirit shall become strong and robust in the path of goodness.

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<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Papini (Florence 1881 - 1956). Since his youth he had no patience for conventional studies, he was a voracious reader and a frenetic cultural organizer. His adventurous wanderings from pragmatism to futurism, fascism, and Catholicism are the demonstration of his restless conscience as an intellectual, active in a world that has consumed every certainty and value. The outbreak of the first world war generated in him a profound examination of conscience that ended with his adhesion to official Catholicism. Such conversion was publicized with enormous resonance, as an exemplary result of a manifestly desacralizing intellectual event. With his book *La Storia di Cristo*, (*The Story of Christ*) of 1921, he won great international fame. During the last years of his life, a long sickness forced him to immobility and deprived him of the of sight and speech, yet without taking him away from an intense activity as a scholar and writer. – Also this citation of Papini, located in the footnotes, we have thought more opportune to insert in the text.

EXAMPLE. – *St. Cyril of Alexandria.* He is the most celebrated Doctor and defender of Mary's divine Maternity, the victor of the impious Nestorius who first dared to blaspheme against the Mother of God, Mary Most Holy. St. Cyril is rightly called the Doctor of the Incarnation, since he broadly discussed and proved that Jesus Christ is truly God and Man.

When in the year 431 the Council of Ephesus was convoked, Cyril was designated by Pope Celestine I to open and preside over the Ecumenical Council. The Saint, during the first session, gave a magnificent discourse on the divine maternity of Mary, demonstrating the sweet truth through clear and limpid arguments, interwoven with numerous texts from Holy Scripture, so much so that after the session, all the 198 Bishops convened unanimously signed the condemnation of Nestorius and proclaimed the Divine Maternity.

All the biographers point out an energetic and courageous character in St. Cyril. He is a very vigilant Bishop and pastor so much so that at the first appearance of rapacious wolves among his flock, he knew how to put on guard and in safety his faithful and no heresy, during his episcopate, infiltrated them.

Where did St. Cyril get so much science and energy against the enemies of the Christian faith? Certainly, a good part from Holy Scripture. He read it very often, and his favorite solace was precisely the reading of the Holy Books.

Till now most precious are his commentaries on the books of the Kings, the Psalms, the Proverbs, the Song of Songs, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, the twelve Minor Prophets, the Four Evangelists. Among his so many other works, we remember his very beautiful work to prove that the Most Holy Virgin is truly the Mother of God; that little work is nothing but a collection of the best texts of Sacred Scriptures that prove the legitimacy of this title given to Mary Most Holy.

The feast of this Doctor of Mary is celebrated on 9 February.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – If we desire special graces, let us propose to make a triduum or a novena, during which to read every day a passage from the Gospel.



## CANTICLE [#]

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Truly with you God is hidden,  
 the God of Israel, the savior!  
 Those are put to shame and disgrace  
 who vent their anger against him;  
 Those go in disgrace who carve images.  
 Israel, you are saved by the LORD, saved forever!  
 You shall never be put to shame or disgrace in future ages.  
 For thus says the LORD,  
 The creator of the heavens, who is God,  
 The designer and maker of the earth who established it,  
 Not creating it to be a waste, but designing it to be lived in:  
 I am the LORD, and there is no other.  
 I have not spoken from hiding  
 nor from some dark place of the earth,  
 And I have not said to the descendants of Jacob,  
 "Look for me in an empty waste."  
 I, the LORD, promise justice, I foretell what is right.  
 Come and assemble, gather together,  
 you fugitives from among the gentiles!  
 They are without knowledge who bear wooden idols  
 and pray to gods that cannot save.  
 Come here and declare in counsel together:  
 Who announced this from the beginning  
 and foretold it from of old?  
 Was it not I, the LORD, besides whom there is no other God?  
 There is no just and saving God but me.  
 Turn to me and be safe, all you ends of the earth,  
 for I am God; there is no other!  
 By myself I swear, uttering my just decree  
 and my unalterable word:  
 To me every knee shall bend;  
 by me every tongue shall swear,  
 Saying, "Only in the LORD are just deeds and power.  
 Before him in shame shall come  
 all who vent their anger against him.  
 In the LORD shall be the vindication  
 and the glory of all the descendants of Israel."

*(Is 45:15-25)*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *LS* shows "Is. XLV, 15-26." (Is 45:15-26) In the *Vulgate* ch. 45 of Isaiah has 26 verses, while the new translations have 25: verses 23 and 24 equal verse 23.

## READING

**How to prepare for Communion**

278 For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you | drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying. If we discerned ourselves, we would not be under judgment; but since we are judged by (the) Lord, we are being disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

*(1Cor 11:23-32)*

## PRAYER

Blessed may you be, O LORD, God of Israel our father, from eternity to eternity. Yours, O LORD, are grandeur and power, majesty, splendor, and glory. For all in heaven and on earth is yours; yours, O LORD, is the sovereignty; you are exalted as head over all. Riches and honor are from you, and you have dominion over all. In your hand are power and might; it is yours to give grandeur and strength to all. Therefore, our God, we give you thanks and we praise the majesty of your name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should have the means to contribute so freely? For everything is from you, and we only give you what we have received from you. For we stand before you as aliens: we are only your guests, like all our fathers. Our life on earth is like a shadow that does not abide.

O LORD our God, all this wealth that we have brought together to build you a house in honor of your holy name comes from you and is entirely yours. I know, O my God, that you put hearts to the test and that you take pleasure in uprightness. With a sincere heart I have

willingly given all these things, and now with joy I have seen your people here present also giving to you generously.

O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, keep such thoughts in the hearts and minds of your people forever, and direct their hearts toward you. Give to my son Solomon a wholehearted desire to keep your commandments, precepts, and statutes, that he may carry out all these plans and build the castle for which I have made preparation.”

*(1Chr 29:10ff)*

## METHODS FOR READING THE BIBLE

## LETTERS OF ST. JOHN

I LETTER OF ST. JOHN. – This first letter seems to have been written as a preface to the fourth Gospel; and it is its summary; hence it is not written for particular Churches, but for the whole Church. It was written in Ephesus and published as an introduction to the Gospel. However, it concerns particularly the Churches in Asia Minor where, from the partnership of the Judaists with the philosophers was born Gnosticism that humiliated the Savior's dignity, saying that his union with God was only moral and fleeting, and it denied the hypostatic union because God could not unite himself to the flesh, which is evil by nature since it originates from the principle of evil; and it denied redemption because man did not need any redemption, but only instruction and for that *gnosi* (knowledge and understanding of the mysteries) is enough.

These are the errors that St. John combats in this letter wherein Jesus Christ is affirmed as true God and true man, mediator, victim, and source of grace and pardon.

280 II LETTER OF ST. JOHN. – Although this letter does not bear the name of St. John, and for its shortness would not have been known to all the ancient Churches, it is undoubtedly of St. John, who has an inimitable style, and this letter has his style and doctrine. The Elderly who writes cannot but be the Venerable Old Man of Ephesus, who survived the Apostles and regarded as immortal. | The Apostle of charity condemns energetically the heretics and cuts them off the Church.

The letter is addressed to the Chosen Lady and to her children; but we do not know if this Chosen Lady is a woman or a Church. He felicitates her for the virtues of her children, exhorts her to grow in faith, in charity, and in zeal and to guard against the heretics. He promises a visit.

The letter must have been written from Ephesus, probably during the last years of St. John, towards the year 100.

III LETTER OF ST. JOHN. – What has been said of the second letter is also said for this one. Like the second it is without the name of John. Instead it has “The Presbyter.” It was written in Ephesus during the last years of the first century, focuses on the same heretics, and is a very beautiful example of the private correspondence of the long-living Apostle.

This third letter is even more private than the second because it has for its purpose to praise Gaius (a wealthy and zealous Christian) for the hospitality he gave to the Gospel workers, and to warn him against a certain Diotrophes and to recommend a certain Demetrius to him.

## REFLECTION XXVIII

### Methods for reading the Bible

*“How sweet to my tongue is your promise,  
sweeter than honey to my mouth!”*

(Ps 118/119:103)

The Bible is God’s word and this is food for the soul. Now, in order that food may do good, it has to be taken rightly.

The same for the Bible. It contains priceless and very precious treasures of truth; of living and vital truths capable of producing the most marvelous effects.

In the XX Reflection<sup>1</sup> we saw the dispositions necessary for reading the Bible, but this is not yet enough for reading it with profit. We still need to see what order to follow in reading the 72 books making up the Bible.

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The methods for reading the Bible can be many; we mention here the three principal ones. The Bible can be read according to the *theological order*, the *familiar order* and the *liturgical order*.

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1. *Theological Order*. – It consists in reading the various books of the Holy Bible according to the order with which they are presented by the Council of Trent, that is, beginning from Genesis,

<sup>1</sup> On pp. 199ff.

then Leviticus, Exodus, etc., and ending with the Apocalypse, the way they are generally printed in the editions of Catholic Bibles.

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This method is advised for people of average culture. Here all the scholars can be included as well as those who want to enjoy a true culture. The Song of Songs could be set aside. Some say it's better to have it sent to a more mature age.

Following this order, dedicating a quarter of an hour a day, in two years' time we could go through the entire Bible with the ordinary notes.

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2. *Familiar Order.* – It is the order advised by many authors of asceticism. It is the method so much preferred and recommended by Audisio,<sup>2</sup> the known author of sacred eloquence. It consists in reading first all the books of the N.T. because, as the aforementioned author says, “having in the N.T. their development and fulfillment all the shadows, the figures, the prophecies, as well as the | priesthood and the laws of the O.T., from the Gospel of Jesus Christ must come out such a light as to dissipate the darkness that envelops the writings of the Visionaries of Judah: like the splendor of the light that radiated from the face of Him transfigured in Tabor was reflected in the faces of Moses and Elijah.”

And among the books of the N.T. he advises reading first of all the historical books as the easiest and most suitable for preparing the biblical mentality, then the didactic books and lastly the prophetic ones which are the most difficult.

This method is most recommended and very useful.

One would understand very little of Isaiah's prophecies if he has not first read the four Gospels. Instead, one who, after reading the Holy Gospel, goes to read the prophets, finds in them admirable beauty; every word and phrase we can say contains a mystical meaning and has a connection with the books of the New Testament.

In practice: read the *historical* books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.

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<sup>2</sup> GUGLIELMO AUDISIO, *Lezioni di eloquenza sacra*, Marietti, Torino 1858-1859. The Royal Press of Turin had published volumes II and III of this work already in 1846.

The *didactic* books: all the letters of the Apostles: St. Paul, St. Peter, St. John, St. James, St. Jude.

The *prophetic* books: the Apocalypse.

Then, the historical books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth; the four books of Kings; the two books of Paralipomenon; Ezra, Nehemia, Tobit, Judith, Esther, and the two books of the Maccabees.

The *didactic* or *wisdom* books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus.

The *prophetic* books: Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations of Jeremiah, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel; the twelve Minor Prophets.

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3. *Liturgical order*: it is the order established by the Church and which all Priests are bound to follow.

Our infallible and very wise teacher, the Church, has seen to it that Priests read, a little every day in the Holy Mass and in the Breviary, the principal passages of the Holy Bible. And every priest is obliged under pain of sin to read them, and he who consciously neglects them could even commit a grave sin.

From this it appears how necessary is the reading of the Bible and how important it is for the Church that the souls of her Priests nourish themselves at a table prepared with so much love and wisdom by God himself! She knows well that no one could be a good shepherd of souls without reading the Bible. How can he teach one who does not know? How will a shepherd of souls be able to lead his sheep to salutary pastures if he does not know these pastures?

This is why during the first centuries of the Church, for the priestly ordinations, it was necessary to know the entire Psalter by memory and to know very well all the other books of the Bible! Otherwise one could not be ordained a Priest.

And what is left for the faithful to do? They must follow in all fidelity their Pastor, their captain, certain that they are on the good way and having everything their soul desires.

*In practice*: We cannot go to the details and say here what are the passages to be read day after day. Let us be content with saying something in general.

284 During the Sundays that precede Advent, that is, during the month of November, the Church establishes that the prophets be read: Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, | Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Then when Advent has begun, the prophet who made the greatest and most numerous prophecies about the Messiah, Isaiah, is read.

After Christmas and Epiphany, the letters of St. Paul to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus, Philemon and to the Hebrews are read. And thus the Christmas season ends.

With the Septuagesima Sunday, the time of Penance<sup>3</sup> begins and so the Church lets the Book of Genesis be read. In it the sin of Adam and Eve and their punishment are narrated.

Then comes the Time of the Passion and here we read the lamentations of the Prophet Jeremiah.

After Easter, the Church proposes the reading of the Apocalypse wherein are narrated the victories of the Immaculate Lamb. Then are read the letters of the Apostles St. James, St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude.

So the path opens to the long series of the Sundays after Pentecost that represent the life of the Church. Here the Historical and the Wisdom Books are inserted into each other. During the month of July, it's the four Books of Kings. In August, the four Wisdom Books: the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus. Then, in September, the easier Historical Books: Job, Tobit, Judith, Esther, and finally in October, the books of the Maccabees.

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It is true, the Bible can be read in whatever order; for example, we can open casually and read the first passage that turns up.

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<sup>3</sup> At the end of Epiphany, the time of Septuagesima began, followed by the Sexagesima and Quinquagesima Sundays, while with Ash Wednesday Lent began. Septuagesima therefore indicated 70 days before Easter: "During the days of the Septuagesima and Lent, the Church, our Mother, multiplies her efforts so that each of us may diligently be aware of our miseries, be actively prodded to amend our habits, and detest especially our sins cancelling them through prayer and penance; since assiduous prayer and penance for sins committed obtain for us divine help without which every good work of ours is useless and sterile." (Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947)



This is the manner employed by the very learned St. Alphonsus, and he says that he has found this method very effective.

Among the methods, however, the most useful and effective is | certainly that indicated by the Church, that is, the liturgical method. He who follows it certainly makes great progress in the way of holiness and knowledge. “*Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris.*” (Jn 8:12)<sup>4</sup>

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EXAMPLE. – *Dante Alighieri.* – Dante’s name is intimately bound with his principal work, the immortal “*Commedia*” to which the admiration of posterity has given the adjective “*Divina.*”

And the *Divina Commedia* is precisely also a testimony of the veneration accorded to the Sacred Bible during Medieval times and in particular of the study that Dante had made of it.

Alighieri in fact must have been very familiar with the Sacred Scriptures if very often he cites passages from them; if he embellishes his poem with biblical examples from the Old and the New Testament; if he gets his grandiose images of the earthly paradise, in great part from the apocalyptic visions of St. John and Ezekiel.

Even more, as regards the Sacred Scriptures, he has left us verses that have remained famous and that even today we willingly use.

Speaking of interpretation, he exhorts the Christians to submit themselves to the teaching and guidance of the Church:

Avete il novo e ’l vecchio Testamento,  
e il Pastor della Chiesa che vi guida:  
questi vi basti a vostro salvamento.<sup>5</sup>

And speaking of heretics he says:

... gli stolti  
che furon come spade alle Scritture  
in render torti li diritti volti.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> “Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.”

<sup>5</sup> DANTE ALIGHIERI (Florence 1265 - Ravenna 1321), *La Divina Commedia*, Paradiso, V, 76-78: “The new and the old Testament you have / And the Pastor of the Church who guides you: / Let these be enough for your salvation.”

<sup>6</sup> DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Divina Commedia*, Paradiso, XIII, 127-129: “... the fools... / who were like swords to the Scriptures / To distort whatever right there is.”

And if this poem of Dante, after six centuries since it was written, is until now encompassed by a very luminous halo and holds first place among the textbooks in Catholic universities, it is due to the fact that in it are contained, under elegant poetic vesture, the most sublime truths of the Holy Gospel and of Catholic Theology.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Recite the chaplet to St. Paul, printed at the end of this book.

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## CANTICLE TO GOD THE CREATOR [#]

All you peoples, clap your hands;  
 shout to God with joyful cries.  
 For the LORD, the Most High,  
 inspires awe, the great king over all the earth,  
 Who made people subject to us,  
 brought nations under our feet,  
 Who chose a land for our heritage,  
 the glory of Jacob, the beloved.  
 God mounts the throne amid shouts of joy;  
 the LORD, amid trumpet blasts.  
 Sing praise to God, sing praise;  
 sing praise to our king, sing praise.  
 God is king over all the earth;  
 sing hymns of praise.  
 God rules over the nations;  
 God sits upon his holy throne.  
 The princes of the peoples assemble  
 with the people of the God of Abraham.  
 For the rulers of the earth belong to God,  
 who is enthroned on high.

*(Ps 46/47:2-10)*

## READING

**Efficacy of persevering Prayer**

He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily

bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone in debt to us, and do not subject us to the final test.”

And he said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,’ and he says in reply from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.’ I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.” And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

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What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?”

*(Lk 11:1-13)*

## PRAYER

### For the Chosen People

Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us, look, and see our disgrace: Our inherited lands have been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners. We have become orphans, fatherless; widowed are our mothers. The water we drink we must buy, for our own wood we must pay.

Our fathers, who sinned, are no more; but we bear their guilt. Slaves rule over us; there is no one to rescue us from their hands. At the peril of our lives we bring in our sustenance, in the face of the desert heat; Our skin is shriveled up, as though by a furnace, with the searing blasts of famine. The joy of our hearts has ceased, our dance has turned into mourning; the garlands have fallen from our heads: woe to us, for we have sinned! Over this our hearts are sick, at this our eyes grow dim: that Mount Zion should be desolate, with jackals roaming there!

You, O LORD, are enthroned forever; your throne stands from age to age. Why, then, should you forget us, abandon us so long a time? Lead us back to you, O LORD, that we may be restored: give us anew such days as we had of old.

*(Lam 5:1ff)*

FOR THE PRESS APOSTOLATE  
THE BIBLE IS LIFE

**ST. JUDE**

St. Jude, is different from Judas Iscariot;<sup>1</sup> his surname is Thaddeus which means *praise, confession*; and also Lebbeus, found in the Greek text of St. Matthew and meaning *man of ingenuity and intelligence*.

He was the brother of St. James the Lesser, of St. Simon of Jerusalem, and of one called Joseph. They were all sons of Cleophas and of Mary, sister of the Most Holy Virgin.

This apostle was dear to his divine Master; and this, more than because of bonds of blood, is due to his contempt of the world, his ardor and the vivacity of his zeal. It is not known when and how he became the disciple of Jesus Christ. The Gospel says nothing about him until the place where he is numbered among the Apostles.

After the Ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit, Jude joined the other Apostles in order to spread the doctrine that had to lead men to salvation.

It is said that he preached in Judea, Samaria, Idumea and Syria and above all in Mesopotamia. The holy apostle returned to Jerusalem in 62, after the martyrdom of St. James his brother, and assisted at the election of St. Simeon for the governance of the Church of this city.

Nothing is known of the place and time of his death. His feast is celebrated on 28 October.

St. Jude left us a letter.

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<sup>1</sup> Or Iscariota, literally “man from Kerioth” (a Palestinian village). *Thad-daios*, a word of uncertain origin, could mean, like the Hebrew *Lebbeo*, “of great heart, courageous.” Comparing the catalogue of apostles in Lk 6:16, Mt 10:3 and Acts 1:13, it seems that Jude, son of James, and Thaddeus were the same person, the probable author of the letter of Jude.

**LETTER OF ST. JUDE****289**

This letter has many similarities with the second letter of St. Peter. We do not know, however, which of the two is anterior to the other, but certainly they were almost contemporary and the similarity depends on their almost equal time and scope. That of St. Jude, however, is better and more sustained in style, without so many repetitions.

He vigorously attacks the proud and lascivious false teachers, threatening for them the most severe punishments, while he exhorts the Christians to remain firm in their faith and to do their duties.

It seems that the letter was written to the Jewish Christians of the diaspora, towards the year 65.

**REFLECTION XXIX****For the Press Apostolate the Bible is life<sup>2</sup>**

*“In your kindness give me life,  
to keep the decrees you have spoken.”*  
(Ps 118/119:88)

Today’s reflection is connected with those of days 9 and 19<sup>3</sup> as the continuation of the topic: The Bible and the Apostolate of the Press.

a) *The motive* with which God was moved to give to men the priceless gift of Holy Scripture was *love*. God, in fact, is called: he | who loves souls: “*Deus qui amat animas.*” (Wis 11:27) It is the same for the Apostle of the Press. The motive that moves him to work, is likewise love: “*Amor mi mosse, che mi fa parlare.*” (Love moved me; love makes me speak)<sup>4</sup>

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Love is a sacred flame in the heart of the Apostle. God is fire itself: “*Ignis, charitas.*” When the flame is very much alive, it

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding scientific and popular publications dealing with biblical exegesis, see PCB, *L’interpretazione della Bibbia nella Chiesa*, 1993, n. 36.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 97ff and 191ff.

<sup>4</sup> DANTE ALIGHIERI, *La Divina Commedia*, Inferno, II, 72.

tends to expand; and by its nature heat warms; and what is good wants to communicate itself: “*bonum est diffusivum sui.*”<sup>5</sup>

Saints want Heaven, but not alone by themselves; and St. Paul said to his disciples: “*Gaudium meum et corona mea.*” (1Thes 2:20)<sup>6</sup> And to win as many as he can, the apostle of the press has gone up the highest pulpit: “*Clama, ne cesses, quasi tuba exalta vocem tuam.* – Cry out full throated and unsparingly, lift up your voice like a trumpet blast.” (Is 58:1)

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291 b) *The effectiveness* of the Press Apostolate is similar to that of the Holy Bible: it possesses an interior force that is truly divine. Reading the divine Scriptures, the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church obtained light and urgings to become saints and to ardently desire the salvation of souls; reading the divine Scriptures, St. Augustine, St. Ignatius, St. Anthony Abbot, St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi proposed a new life that not only attained perfect observance of the commandments, but rose up to the evangelical counsels and to the highest perfection. All the Saints, all men, from the reading of the | Bible draw the virtues of fortitude, justice, prudence, and love of neighbor. It works on everyone, having divine powers: it is a sacramental.

And a similar virtue is also inherent in the Press Apostolate: 1) for *what it contains*, that is Truth God, or God-Truth; 2) for

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<sup>5</sup> It is a Neoplatonic saying, taken from the writings of Plotinus (philosopher who lived from 203/5 to about 270 A.D.) and eventually entered, perhaps through a Syriac monk of the V-VI century, the Pseudo-Dionisius Areopagite (*De coelesti hierarchia* 4) the writings of Thomas Aquinas and hence Scholasticism. Important for the metaphysics of Plotinus was the process of emanation or outward flux of realities from the invisible One. Plotinus offered metaphors of this emanation, as the radiation of heat from fire, or cold from snow, or the fragrance of a flower, or light from the sun: what is good, he concluded, spontaneously spreads for the simple reason that it is good. Those beings that have reached their perfection of being do not keep it for themselves but express it, thus generating external images of interior activities. The same concept is adopted today as a slogan of free and spontaneous communication in the Internet.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 1Thes 2:19-20: “For what is our hope or joy or crown to boast of in the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming if not you yourselves?”

*its end* of healing the mind and raising the will and the heart to eternal goods; 3) for its *origin* and *institution*.

The apostolate always has such power, but especially when it publishes, comments on, applies the Bible. All the powers of the Sacraments, Sacramentals and prayers originate from the Sacrifice of the Holy Mass, that is, from Calvary; and the more they draw from this divine spring, the more they are effective.<sup>7\*</sup>

Likewise, the entire Press Apostolate, periodicals and books, is effective by power of the Bible, of the preaching of Jesus, of the Gospel; and has much more efficacy to the degree that it draws from, approaches, defends, responds to, ardently desires, and applies the Gospel itself.

c) The sacred writers do not rely on themselves, but on God; hence, the spirit of prayer. Furthermore, they aim at the Lord, that is, at his divine glory and peace for men; and here enters right intention. These are two elements, essential for effectiveness: so that the apostle may sanctify himself and may save men.

The spirit of prayer and right intention | are the conditions of divine grace; they can be translated thus: "*I rely on God, I aim at God.*" That is justice, truth, order, because it means recognition of what is God and what is man. Philosophy and Theology, ascetics and experience, the Church and the Councils are in accord in proclaiming these principles. But aside from the theoretical part, one must will and feel in conformity with the faith. Let prayer precede, accompany, and follow the apostolate: right intention should be the moving spirit that determines writing, printing, and diffusing.

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The *diffusion* of the Gospel in particular and of the Bible in general must remain as the essential work of the Press Apostolate.

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<sup>7\*</sup> "Read therefore the Sacred Scriptures, my brothers, read them so that you may *not be blind and guides of the blind*. Read the Sacred Scriptures and you will find clearly what to accept and what to flee. Read them, for they are sweeter than any honey, sweeter than any bread, more inebriating than any wine. Study them and you will see that the God of gods is the breadth of his charity, the height of his majesty, and the depth and immensity of his Wisdom." [Author not named: probably it is St. Augustine]

The Apostle of the Press who did well this part, would already accomplish the essential part of this ministry; all the rest, done alone and without the Bible, would not be sufficient since Biblical work is necessary and irreplaceable.

The task is: aim so that *in every family* the Gospel be put in a place of honor; that it be read by the Head of the house to the whole gathered family; that it be explained in a convenient way and with the guidance of a good approved commentary.

See to it that the Gospel is read *in Schools*: God is the best educator, Jesus Christ is the true Teacher by nature, by office, and by vocation. The soul of the child, in his innocence and simplicity, is most suited to receive the divine teachings: "*Revelasti ea parvulis.*" (Lk 10:21)<sup>8</sup>

Let it be read in every school, from kindergarten to the University. This is unthinkable: schools excluding Him who is the only Teacher.

**293** See to it that it is read *in Church*: on Sundays at least let the Gospel be read: and where possible, its explanation; let it be read during Lent, during the hours of adoration, during evening prayers, in Catholic Action meetings.

Work that it be read and meditated upon by *individuals*; inasmuch as it is especially here that reflection helps to penetrate well the divine thought and the heart to generate resolutions. Let especially the professionals, artists, government people or those posted in public offices read it.

EXAMPLE. – *Origen*. – He is the most fruitful writer the Church has had. His biographers in fact tell us that the works written by him number more than six thousand of which the principal ones deal with Holy Scripture.

While yet very young,<sup>9</sup> his father, St. Leonidas, made him study by memory passages of the Sacred Scriptures and he learned them so well that whatever passage he was asked, he could recite what comes after without mistaking a syllable.

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<sup>8</sup> "You have revealed them to the childlike."

<sup>9</sup> Moved by youthful radicalism, he sells the Greek manuscripts he possessed for a tiny sum (to indicate renunciation of anything that is not knowledge of God) and dedicates himself to an extremely austere life.



Having a very ardent desire to read the letter of the good heavenly Father, in the genuine language in which it was written, he completely dedicated himself to the study of Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Latin, and because of his tenacious will, and assisted by divine grace, he came to know them perfectly so much so that later he was able to compose his principal work, the *Exapla*.<sup>10</sup> Such a grandiose work gives and arranges in six columns the Hebrew text and the Greek versions<sup>11</sup> in such a

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<sup>10</sup> The *Exapla* is one of the most important works of Origen. It consists in the edition of the Old Testament (compiled around the year 240 AD) where the Hebrew text and the various Greek translations appear side by side on six columns. Unfortunately, of the work that reveals an impressive penetration in the search textual criticism, only fragments remain.

<sup>11</sup> Together with Jerome, Origen is the greatest “literal” and critical exegete of antiquity. He possesses an inexhaustible curiosity for the different readings or variants that he finds in the manuscripts of both the Old and New Testaments. He takes note and explains everything. For him, however, the Greek text prevails over the Hebrew because it was that which the apostles gave to the Church. The literal meaning of the text is explained accurately with the aid of Greek philology and the history of the usages and customs of the Hebrew people, and hence with the help also of Hebrew interpretations, inasmuch as he was also in touch with some rabbi. The “literal” meaning for Origen is the philological and etymological meaning of the word or phrase. Instead, by literal meaning, we mean what the human author intended and wanted to express. With his literal meaning (better to say literalist, or adherence to the letter) Origen runs the risk of not grasping the figurative language which exists as well in the biblical text (for example, the parables and metaphors). Origen nonetheless knows also the “spiritual” sense, inspired by the Spirit. Like Paul he accepts that the entire Old Testament had been written as “a figure” or “as a warning to us” (cf. 1Cor 10:11), as a prophecy or figure of Christ. As to the exegesis of the New Testament, it ought to apply to every Christian what is said of Christ. In short, Origen’s method – which has influenced so much the reading of the Bible in the Church – foresees a threefold meaning of the Scripture in its totality (cf. *De Principiis*, IV, 2), which corresponds to its three-point anthropology: a corporal (or literal) meaning; a psychic (or moral) one; and one that is spiritual (or mystic). H. de Lubac, *Exégèse Médiévale* I/1, 198-211, traces to the exegetical practice of Origen the doctrine of the four-fold meaning that will be enunciated by the monk Cassianus (360-435): the *literal* meaning; the *allegorical* meaning which consists in the affirmation of Christ as the center of history; the *tropological* meaning, which concerns the behavior of the Christian; and the *anagogical* meaning which makes one experience and have a foretaste of the future, eternal goods (see note 7 of p. 40).

way that with a glance one can see what the Hebrew text says and what the Greek version say. In the first column the Hebrew text written with Hebrew letters is given. In the second column is the same Hebrew text written with Greek letters. In the third, fourth, fifth and sixth columns there are respectively the translations<sup>12</sup> into Greek by Aquila, Simmacus, the Seventy, and Theodosius.

**294** Commenting on the Gospel of St. John, the great doctor says that no one can understand the meaning of this Gospel, all of it to demonstrate the Divinity of Jesus Christ, if he has not, like St. John, rested on the heart of the Divine Master, and has not received from Jesus himself, Mary as Mother.

Origen, like St. Augustine, propounds as principal means for progressing in the way of perfection the reading of Holy Scripture; and he says that in order to grasp its meaning well, the work of Mary Most Holy, who knew perfectly the Bible, is necessary.

The study of the Bible, Origen continues, makes us know Jesus, his virtues, while indicating to us the means for practicing them; it makes us know his commandments and precepts, following which we shall reach safely the top of the mount of perfection.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Recite the prayer: *O gloriosissimo Apostolo (O most glorious Apostle)*, found at the end of this book, so that all those called to the Press Apostolate may learn to draw from the Bible the truth, the way, and the life.

#### CANTICLE TO GOD, LAWGIVER [#]

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the sky proclaims its builder's craft.  
One day to the next conveys that message;

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<sup>12</sup> In *LS* there is allusion to the translation of the Bible by Msgr. Martini (p. 81, note 8) and to the translation of the *Vulgata* by Jerome (pp. 245-248). For Don Alberione translations have a considerable pastoral and apostolic value. On the matter, *Dei Verbum* reaffirms the need for appropriate and correct translations (no. 22).

one night to the next imparts that knowledge.  
 There is no word or sound; no voice is heard;  
 Yet their report goes forth through all the earth,  
 their message, to the ends of the world.  
 God has pitched there a tent for the sun;  
 it comes forth like a bridegroom from his chamber,  
 and like an athlete joyfully runs its course.  
 From one end of the heavens it comes forth;  
 its course runs through to the other;  
 nothing escapes its heat.  
 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.  
 The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,  
 giving wisdom to the simple.  
 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.  
 The command of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eye.  
 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.  
 The statutes of the LORD are true, all of them just;  
 More desirable than gold, than a hoard of purest gold,  
 Sweeter also than honey or drippings from the comb.  
 By them your servant is instructed;  
 obeying them brings much reward.  
 Who can detect heedless failings?  
 Cleanse me from my unknown faults.  
 But from willful sins keep your servant;  
 let them never control me.  
 Then shall I be blameless, innocent of grave sin.  
 Let the words of my mouth meet with your favor,  
 keep the thoughts of my heart before you, LORD,  
 my rock and my redeemer.

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*(Ps 18/19)*

## READING

### **Opposition between the Gospel and human wisdom**

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the learning of the learned

I will set aside.” Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made the wisdom of the world foolish? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not come to know God through wisdom, it was the will of God through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who have faith. For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

296 Consider your own calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that no human being might | boast before God. It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord.”

*(1Cor 1:17-31)*

## PRAYER

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountains quaking before you. As when brushwood is set ablaze, or fire makes the water boil! Thus your name would be made known to your enemies and the nations would tremble before you, while you wrought awesome deeds we could not hope for, such as they had not heard of from of old. No ear has ever heard, no eye ever seen, any God but you doing such deeds for those who wait for him. Would that you might meet us doing right, that we were mindful of you in our ways! Behold, you are angry, and we are sinful; all of us have become like unclean men, all our good deeds are like polluted rags; We have all withered like leaves, and our guilt carries us away like the wind. There is none who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to cling to you; For you have hidden your face from us and have delivered us up to our guilt.

Yet, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands. Be not so very angry,

LORD, keep not our guilt forever in mind; look upon us, who are all your people. Your holy cities have become a desert, Zion is a desert, Jerusalem a waste. Our holy and glorious temple in which our fathers praised you Has been burned with fire; all that was dear to us is laid waste. Can you hold back, O LORD, after all this? Can you remain silent, and afflict us so severely?

*(Is 63:19–64:11)*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *LS*, in accordance with the *Vulgate*, indicates “Is. LXIV, 1-12.” (Is 64:1-12)

## BY WHOM AND WHERE MUST THE BIBLE BE READ

### THE APOCALYPSE

St. John entitled this mysterious book Apocalypse because there he announces the events through which the Church will reach the final Triumph. He wrote it during his exile in Patmos, towards the year 95.

“The Apocalypse is a closed book; it is of the highest prophecy where there are as many mysteries as words, and every word has many meanings,” (St. Jerome) and since the greater part of the prophecies shall take place at the end of the world, for now it is temerity to pretend to explain them. It is better to read it while humbly adoring the divine mysteries, and making treasure of the sublime teachings with which it is flowered.

To understand this book, which is a true masterpiece of poetry, of harmony in its symbols, in its numbers and in its images, but also a masterpiece of obscurity because it is a prophecy, and prophecy must not serve us but must invigorate the faith of Christians who will live in the times when those things will happen, it will be well to show its plan in its harmonious divisions.

Aside from the prologue and the epilogue, it has three parts:

First part: Christ appears and gives John the task of writing his message to the seven Churches of Asia Minor. The letters follow.

Second part: This contains five series of imaginary visions, which are:

1) The seven seals: conquest, war, famine, death, martyrdoms, end of the world, the golden thurible.

298 2) The seven trumpets: hail and fire; sea of blood, | the star “Wormwood,” eclipse, locusts, cavalry, heavenly hymn.

3) The seven signs: the devil, the sea monster, the beast of the earth, the sign of evil men, the sign of the good men, references to the end and to judgment.

4) The seven bowls: poured out on the earth, on the sea, on rivers, on the sun, on the throne of the beast, into Euphrates.

5) The struggle between Christ and the devil: the fall of Babylon lamented by the earth, celebrated by the heavens, the victory of Christ over the beast, over the false prophet, the struggle through the centuries and the final victory over the devil.

Third part: the final judgment, new heavens and a new earth, the heavenly Jerusalem, glory of the Saints in Heaven.

## REFLECTION XXX

### **By whom and where must the Bible be read**

*“I long for your salvation, Lord,  
your teaching is my delight.”*  
(Ps 118/119:174)

The Bible, since it is addressed to all men and all men are children of God, must be read by all.

But in order not to say some things in general, let us go down to practice and say that the Bible must be read: 1. in families, 2. in schools, 3. and in church.

\* \* \*

1. *In families* the Gospel must be posted in the most honored place of the house, in a place where everyone can see, read and kiss it. It must always be open in such a way that every member of the | family has the ease and the opportunity to stay several times during the day with the divine Teacher, to lend his ears and to listen to his voice.

This is an act that is most pleasing to Jesus Master. In fact, we know the reply he gave to Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus. “As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary (who) sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing.

Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.” (Lk 10:38-41) Let us also prostrate ourselves, several times during the day, at the foot of the Divine Master, and humbly tell him to deign make us hear his voice of truth and life.

How much better would families be if they read the Holy Gospel daily! They would have as head Jesus Christ himself, and their spiritual and material affairs cannot but be successful.

The reading of the Bible should be read preferably by the head of the family and all the members of the family should listen to him with the greatest respect and reverence. Or else it is advised to have it read even by a child, of the best behavior and the most innocent. So that divine things after their reading may produce among souls a lasting fruit, it is indispensable to make a short prayer before and after the reading, better if the same is said together. After the reading, the head of the family or one who can, should say some words of explanation or commentary so that | each one can make a practical resolution for the day.

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Amidst those families that practice what we have said above, Jesus Christ truly stays. “*Non ambulans in tenebris*,” they shall not walk in darkness because they have in their midst the light, Jesus, who has proclaimed himself as “*lux mundi*,” the light of the world.

Blessed are the families who read the Bible, they belong to Jesus!

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2. *In Schools.* Yes, even in schools the Bible must be read; rather, especially here because, if there is a place where the presence of Jesus Master is necessary, it is precisely the school. Jesus Christ is the educator by nature; it is He who is the main Teacher of humanity: “*Unus est enim magister vester*,”<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christ. And St. Paul rightly reproves the Corinthians who were saying that they had as teacher, some Paul, some Kephas, others Apollo; and he tells that that only one is their teacher, Jesus Christ.

If in the world there is one worthy to be proclaimed teacher and raised to the office of educator of youth, it is precisely Jesus Christ. Who has more than He the power to teach? Who knows more than He the heart and the mind of each student and can

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<sup>1</sup> “You have but one master.” (Mt 23:8,10)



fully satisfy one and the other? No one. No one more than Jesus loves the little ones and knows how to attract them to himself and to educate them!

Yes, return, O Jesus, return to all the teaching chairs of our schools and attract to yourself all the children and form them according to your loving Heart. You have said: "Let the children come to me." (Mk 10:14) Well, draw them all to you; sanctify them all!

It is unfortunate that Jesus Christ was dragged down from many teaching posts, and his place occupied by the children of darkness. Those schools were not anymore temples, as Tommaseo says,<sup>2</sup> but dens. Let us pray so that Jesus Christ may return to every school and his truth shine in the minds of all children.

In all the schools may the beautiful custom of reading before the lessons the Holy Gospel and of studying it return. May the Lord let the day come soon when we can give to all children textbooks, anthologies, etc., inspired by the Holy Gospel.

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3. *In Church.* Here we no longer have a mere advice to read the Gospel, but an explicit precept of the Church which orders that the Priest at Mass read it aloud, and all the faithful listened to it with the greatest reverence as they stand.

During solemn masses it is prescribed that it be incensed and sung with maximum solemnity between two lighted candles.

There is also another prescription of the Church which imposes on parish priests to foster on all Sundays in that Mass where there is the greatest attendance of people, an explanation of the Holy Gospel.

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<sup>2</sup> Niccolò Tommaseo (Sebenico 1802 - Florence 1874), belonging to a family of business persons, he studied in Padua where he met Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), establishing with him a long-lasting friendship. A dreaming and restless spirit, he eventually lived in Milan, establishing contact with Manzoni, and then in Florence and Venice. He was the author of numerous works of literary and linguistic character, among which the *Nuovo Dizionario de' Sinonimi della lingua italiana* (1830); the *Dizionario della lingua italiana* (1859); a commentary on the *Divina Commedia* (1837); the novels *Il Duca di Atene* (1837) and *Fede e bellezza* (1841-1842); the volume of political issues, *Dell'Italia* (1835).

Today it is much recommended that Parish Priests make, especially during the Lenten season, a brief daily explanation of the Gospel: and this is already done in very many parishes of Piedmont, of the Veneto area and of Emilia. Let us pray so that such a practice, so beneficial to souls, may be used in all the parishes of Italy.

302 Two are the nourishments, according to the Imitation of Christ, that the Church gives to souls: the Eucharist | and the Bible;<sup>3</sup> let us nourish ourselves with both. The soul shall be satisfied in all its faculties: intelligence, sentiment, and will.<sup>4\*</sup>

Let us now ask for the grace so that the reading of the Bible may become universal and on our part let us resolve to do everything we can so that the Bible may enter all families, and be read, meditated upon, and lived. And blessed are we if at the moment of our death we will be able to say that we have evangelized, that we have proclaimed peace. We will be able to rightly hope for the reward and crown of the Evangelists.

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<sup>3</sup> Of these two indispensable tables, the Bible and the Eucharist, book and bread, *LS* talks often (pp. 15-16, 136, 138, 192, 234, 267ff). If we reread p. 20, we will notice how much Don Alberione thinks apostolically: "How well does the Gospel stay on the altar! If in the Most Blessed Sacrament, under the species of the spotless Host, Jesus Christ is really present in Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the Sacred Scriptures, Jesus Truth is there, under the species of white paper." On the importance of the book of the Bible for the whole Church, cf. *Dei Verbum*: "The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy... Therefore, like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture. For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them; and the force and power in the word of God is so great that it stands as the support and energy of the Church, the strength of faith for her sons, the food of the soul, the pure and perennial source of spiritual life (no. 21). Consequently these words are perfectly applicable to Sacred Scripture: "For the word of God is living and active" (Heb. 4:12) and "it has power to build you up and give you your heritage among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32; cf. 1Thes 2:13)

<sup>4\*</sup> "I plead with you to read them (the sacred books) and to meditate each day with singular affection on the words of our Creator: observe what is the Heart of God in the words of God, so as to stir up yourselves to yearn for more ardently the eternal goods, and so that our soul may be inflamed by the most ardent desires for eternal happiness." (*St. Gregory the Great*)

EXAMPLE. – *St. Epiphanius* – He is another very prolific writer of the first centuries of the Church, a passionate student of the Holy Bible. Even while very young, he showed great love for study; hence his pious parents sent him to study: the reading of the Bible became his delight, his favorite intellectual nourishment. Desiring to ever better understand Holy Scripture in its genuineness, he gave himself to the study of those languages in which it was written. His biographers attest that not yet twenty years old, he already knew very well Greek, Hebrew, Copt, Syriac, and Latin. After going to Egypt to visit those desert monks, he fell so much in love with that life that he immediately decided to found a monastery. He was a monk and a father of monks, but at the same time, he never set aside the practice of sacred reading and of writing.

His invitations directed to the monks who lived under his wise guidance to read the Bible were very fervent! He did not let any occasion pass without recommending and inculcating the reading and study of the Bible. And he was the first to give the example. Metaphrastes, his biographer, tells us that | his manner of living was that of a perfect religious: solicitous and prudent in the government of the monks; neglecting nothing of the common observances, he spent the whole day in the study of Holy Scripture and in various occupations, dedicating still a good part of the night to the exercise of prayer.

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In 367, he was elected bishop of Cyprus, and, although he was most engaged in the defense of his flock against the many rapacious wolves that had infiltrated his flock and were causing massacre, yet he never left his Bible: from there he drew strength and courage, from there he drew his very strong and incontrovertible arguments in fighting the heretics and he succeeded. The followers of Origen received from Epiphanius a mortal blow to the heart. Against the Antidecomarianites he excellently defended the virginity of Mary Most Holy before, during and after giving birth, and he expressly says that Mary is the true Mother of God.

St. Epiphanius was not only content with studying and commenting on the Sacred Scriptures, he also made biblical archeological studies, that even today are of great use to commentators of Scripture.

The Church celebrates the feast of this illustrious doctor on 12 May.

LITTLE SACRIFICE. – Recite the “*Te Deum*” in thanksgiving to God for having given us the Bible.

#### CANTICLE OF DAVID [#]

Happy the nation whose God is the LORD,  
 the people chosen as his very own.  
 From heaven the LORD looks down  
 and observes the whole human race,  
 surveying from the royal throne all who dwell on earth.  
 The one who fashioned the hearts of them all  
 knows all their works.  
 A king is not saved by a mighty army,  
 nor a warrior delivered by great strength.  
 Useless is the horse for safety;  
 its great strength, no sure escape.  
 But the LORD’S eyes are upon the reverent,  
 upon those who hope for his gracious help,  
 Delivering them from death,  
 keeping them alive in times of famine.  
 Our soul waits for the LORD,  
 who is our help and shield.  
 For in God our hearts rejoice;  
 in your holy name we trust.  
 May your kindness, LORD, be upon us;  
 we have put our hope in you.

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(*Ps 32/33:12-22*)

#### READING

#### **Jesus sends the disciples to preach the Gospel to all the world**

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents (with their hands), and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” And behold I am with you always, until the end of this age.

*[Mt 28:16-20; Mk 16:16-18]*

### PRAYER

O God, you are my God - for you I long!  
 For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts,  
 like a land parched, lifeless, and without water.  
 So I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory.  
 For your love is better than life; my lips offer you worship!  
 I will bless you as long as I live;  
 I will lift up my hands, calling on your name.  
 My soul shall savor the rich banquet of praise,  
 with joyous lips my mouth shall honor you!  
 When I think of you upon my bed,  
 through the night watches I will recall  
 That you indeed are my help,  
 and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy.  
 My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.  
 But those who seek my life will come to ruin;  
 they shall go down to the depths of the earth!  
 They shall be handed over to the sword  
 and become the prey of jackals!  
 But the king shall rejoice in God;  
 all who swear by the Lord shall exult,  
 for the mouths of liars will be shut!

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*(Ps 62/63:2-12)*

We believe<sup>1</sup> it useful for souls to still cite the beautiful chapter taken from the book about the Press Apostolate by the Primo Maestro, Theol. James Alberione that bears the title:

### **Devotion to Holy Scripture**

**To the Gospel and in general to the Holy Bible  
a relative devotion of latria is to be rendered:  
with the mind - with the will - with the heart**

#### **With the mind**

The cult of latria is a supreme cult and it is also called adoration. It has God as its end. If it goes directly to the Lord, it is absolute; if instead it passes through an object that represents him, it is relative.

307 Better than a painting or a sculpture, the Sacred Scriptures represent to us the Most Holy Trinity; the Holy Gospel represents to us the adorable Person of Jesus Christ, better than a painting or a crucifix made up of some perceptible material. It is | therefore cult of adoration, that is, latria, but relative.

This doctrine is of faith, since it was defined by the Fourth Council of Constantinople (VIII ecumenical).

The Council of Nicea II, VII ecumenical (7 Sess., 13 Oct. 787), quoting the Symbol of Faith and the six preceding ecumenical Councils, decreed: "The holy and venerable images, like the cross, whether painted or in mosaic or in other material, can and should be portrayed both in Churches and in houses, in the streets, on panels, vases and habiliments, for as long as they are images of the Savior, of the Mother of God, of the Angels and Saints.

"Through them, one who looks at them is raised to think of the original and to imitate it. It is also licit to give to these im-

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<sup>1</sup> He who writes here and adds the chapter is the compiler, B. Ghiglione, but we presume with full approval if not also with previous suggestion of Don Alberione.

ages, according to ancient usage, a certain veneration by means of kissing, greeting, or incensing, illumination, bowing and prostrating (προσκύνεσις, *proscúnesin*), as is also the usage toward the image of the cross, the Gospels, and other sacred objects, but not worship proper (*latría*), which is not fitting except to the divine nature alone. To the image instead what is befitting is only relative veneration. The honor rendered to it goes to the original, that is, to the person that is represented by it.”<sup>2\*</sup>

*Here there is already a cult and a testimony that this cult reflects an ancient custom.*

Ecumenical Council of Constantinople IV – VIII (869-870).<sup>3</sup>

Can. III. – “We decree that the sacred image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, liberator and savior of all, be adored with the honors equal to the book of the Holy Gospels. Since, as through the words contained in the book all achieve | salvation, in like manner through the action of the colors of the image, all, both the wise and the ignorant, receive benefit, as is clearly apparent. In fact, the same truths that express and teach the disposition of the syllables, also preach and inculcate through the disposition of colors. Now it is something worthy that, given the similarity of reasons and a very ancient tradition, as far as honor is concerned, when they refer to primary objects, by derivation images should also be honored and adored, in the same manner as the sacred book of the holy Gospels and the Crucifix.

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<sup>2\*</sup> Hengenröther, *Storia Universale*, Vol. III, p. 40.

[Joseph Hergenröther, theologian and historian of the Church (Würzburg 1824 - Bregenz 1890). He studied in his own country and in Rome, at the Collegio Germanico, and obtained his doctorate in theology in Munich in 1850. From 1852 he taught church history and canon law in Würzburg. Pius IX invited him to Rome in 1867 as a consultant for the preparation of Vatican Council I and in the commission “de ecclesiastica disciplina.” Leo XIII made him cardinal in 1879, designating him prefect of the Pontifical Archives, which Hergenröther obtained that they be opened for all scholars for the greater growth of historical studies].

<sup>3</sup> The Council of Constantinople IV is generally considered by Catholics as the 8th General Ecumenical Council. It affirmed the primacy of the jurisdiction of Rome; it condemned iconoclasm and tried to defeat the supporters of Photius (810 - 895 circa) who, installed again and deposed as Patriarch of Constantinople, is venerated as a saint by the Orthodox. In canon 21 of the said Council, Pope Hadrian II recognized for the first time the priority of Constantinople over Alexandria.

“If anyone therefore does not adore the image of Christ the Savior, let him not see his figure when he shall come into the glory of his Father to be glorified and to glorify his Saints (2Thes 1:10); but let him be separated from his communion and from his glory. And those who do not behave thus, let them be excommunicated by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

*Here enters the cult of adoration, and it is recognized as a very ancient tradition.*

*Holy Scripture:* – God lets the tablets of the law, written by himself, be placed in the Ark, where there was the manna as well. Moses says: “I returned and after coming down the mountain, I placed in the Ark that I had made the tablets. They are still there, in keeping with the command the Lord gave me.” (Dt 10:5)

The book of the law is placed alongside the Ark, in the Holy of Holies; and only the true priests carried the Ark with the book of the law. When he finished writing the words of this law, Moses said to the priests: “Take this scroll of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord, your God, that there it may be a witness against you.” (Dt 31:26)

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As we can see here, God already in the Old Testament unites in honor and in cult the manna, figure of the Eucharist, Christ-Life, with the tablets and the book of the law, a part of the Bible and image of the Gospel, Jesus-Truth. Now if God disposed this for the figures, much more it had to happen in reality. Hence, we can honor the Gospel with a cult similar to that given to Christ himself.

*Tradition:* Both the Council of Nicea II and that of Constantinople IV respectively allude to an *ancient* and a *very ancient* Tradition; also, the cult given to the Gospel is taken as a reason to confirm the cult rendered to the images of the Savior. Furthermore, the Council of Constantinople, in Can. I against Photius, writes: “If we want to walk along the constant and regal path of divine justice without stumbling, we must hold on to the definitions and sentences of the Holy Fathers as ever burning lamps which illumine our steps, which are according to God.” Hence, in admitting the cult of the book of the Holy Gospels, we follow the steps of the Fathers and of Christian tradition.

In the current Liturgy the Holy Gospel and the Sacred Scriptures are honored:



a) By making of them the major part of the Breviary, a great part of the Holy Mass and also in that didactic part (until the Offertory); then in the center of the Divine Sacrifice with the words of the Consecration, and during Communion. The entire structure of the Holy Mass is based on the Bible.

b) Through the kissing of the Gospel, today by the Celebrant; before, also by the ministers and by the people (Mioni: *Manuale di S. Liturgia*, Vol. I, p. 235, note; Card. Mermillod).

c) Through the lighting of candles and incensation before it is sung by the Deacon during solemn Masses.

*Reason:* – Where the motives are equal, so also must be the cult; now the Council of Constantinople IV in decreeing the adoration of the image of the Savior, aside from Tradition, precisely bases itself on the similitude of reasons between the crucifix and the book of the Holy Gospels and the image of the Redeemer. Hence, the adoration of the book of the Gospels and by extension that of Holy Scripture, must be admitted. Even better, if we can adore an image of the Savior, with more reason we can adore Holy Scripture which, according to Comely, does not only contain the word of God, but is the word of God itself. (*Introduzione alla S. Scrittura*, n. 1).

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Faith in the Gospel must be:

a) *Catholic:* that is, the Holy Spirit enlightens each one of the readers but not *infallibly*; on the contrary, He enlightens the Church infallibly when she interprets according to the mind of the Divine Master. Hence, before reading we should have adequate religious instruction. In reading let us have with us a commentary approved by the Church.

b) *Christian:* which means reading the Gospel with that love and spirit with which Jesus preached it to men. He aimed only at glorifying the Father and to teach men the way to spiritual, temporal, and eternal peace. Let us try to make ourselves true and docile disciples of the Divine Master. The Gospel came from the Heart of Jesus; let us interpret it with a heart full of love.

c) *Simple:* because it is the innocent soul that understands Jesus; it is the humble soul that follows him. The simple and righteous of heart understand Jesus; the Pharisees extracted

**311** from his teachings justifications to condemn him | and to let him be condemned. What is needed is a heart similar to that of the Apostles and to that of the Mother of Jesus.

d) *Forceful*: The Gospel leads to conversion, but courage is needed to propose it to the lost and gone astray; courage is needed to sacrifice one's passion to follow Jesus.

### **With the will**

Cornelius a Lapide<sup>4</sup> says (vol. III, 3-4): What is the Gospel? It is the book of Christ, the philosophy, the Theology of Jesus Christ, the most joyful announcement of redemption, of grace and of the salvation of humankind, brought from heaven through him and conferred upon the believers themselves. Because J. C. proclaimed much more sublime and divine truths that God had not said through Moses and the prophets.

Because of this, to read or hear the Gospel is to read or hear the very voice of the Son of God. Hence, the Gospel must be heard with such reverence, as if Jesus Christ himself were speaking: just as we read that St. Anthony, St. Basil, St. Francis, and many saints did.

St. Augustine in his treatise XXX on St. John says: We listen therefore to the Gospel, just as if the Lord were present; the Lord is high above, but even here is the Lord-truth. In regard to this, in the temple when the Gospel is read, let everyone stand up, as if venerating in it Jesus Christ, and together let them yearn for heaven promised in the Gospel: and this by instruction of the Apostles. Let us listen to St. Clement (book II, *Const. Apost.* Ch. 61): When the Gospel is read, let all priests, deacons, and lay persons stand up with great silence.

**312** In the same sense, there is also another decree by Pope Anastasius to all the Bishops of Germany and Burgundy in

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<sup>4</sup> Cornelius Cornelissen van den Steen (Limburg 1567 - Rome 1637), Jesuit, was an untiring commentator of the Bible. Ordained priest in 1596, he was a professor of Sacred Scriptures in Louvain from 1596 to 1616 and then in Rome, at the Roman college, till his death. He made commentaries on the whole Bible except *Job* and the *Psalms*. A great part of his works was inserted by J.P. Migne in the collection *Cursus S. Scripturae*, vol. V-XX, Paris 1837-1845.

these terms: “You have informed us that when the Gospel is read some remain seated.” And a little later: “This, with apostolic authority, we command that in no way should happen in the future; but when the Holy Gospels are read in Church, the Priests, and all the others present, not seated but standing, and bowing in reverence in front of the Holy Gospel, should listen attentively to the word of the Lord and *adore* it with faith.” (*Can. Apost. de Consecrat.* dist. I)

This usage of standing up during the Gospel reading, Isidore of Pelusius<sup>5</sup> (lib. I, epist. 136) proves that it exists also for the Bishops. He in fact says: “Because when the same true pastor approaches to open the adorable Gospels, it is then that the Bishop finally rises and sets aside the vestment of imitation, meaning by this that present there is the Lord himself, the Leader, the God and the owner of pastoral art.”

Sozomen<sup>6</sup> condemns (book 9 of *Storia Trip.* c.<sup>7</sup> 39) the rite of the Alexandrians, among whom, contrary to the common usage, the Bishop does not stand up when the Gospels are read.

Finally, the Council of Constantinople IV, ecumenical VIII, Session X, Can. 3, establishes that to the Gospel must given an honor equal to that of the cross of Jesus Christ.

The Priest and the people, at Mass, at the start of the reading of the Gospel, make three signs of the Cross: on the forehead, on the lips, and on the heart. This indicates that through the power of the cross we ask to be willing to honor the Gospel with our mind, heart, and lips. The mind believes the Gospel because it is revelation itself, | the very word of God; with the

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<sup>5</sup> Pelusius is an ancient Egyptian city along the Nile, in a key location for commerce and for the Egyptian soldiers. Here the Roman commander Pompey died, and here was born the astronomer Claudius Ptolemy (who lived during the second century after Christ and worked in the famous library of Alexandria. During the Christian period monasticism developed in Pelusius. Here the monk Isidore carried out a long activity. He would appear less effective as an apologist of the orthodoxy of the faith, better as an interpreter (of the Antiochian school) of the Scriptures, reconciling the historical-literal sense with the spiritual (called *teoria*), but indulging at times in allegorical interpretation.

<sup>6</sup> O Salamones Ernias, of the V century, born in Palestine, in Bethelia near Gaza; he lived in Constantinople and was a church historian, jurist, but not theologian.

<sup>7</sup> Tripartite, chapter.

heart because we love it as our redemption and our salvation and in it we love Jesus; with the lips we courageously confess our faith before the world.

The life of the Christian is that which honors or dishonors the Gospel. The Christians of the early times were known by the pagans from their charity, their sobriety, their industriousness, and their courage. The good disciples bear witness to the goodness of the doctrine and life of their Master.

### With the heart

*Processions.* It is good that it is borne in procession to the extent allowed by liturgical laws. On this subject, we read in the *Osservatore Romano* (19-II-1933): “We know from Cencio Camerario the rite of carrying in procession, on the shoulders of the Deacons, among palms, thuribles of incense, the lighted candlesticks and following the standards of the city’s schools, an elegant and ornate lectern called ‘*Portatorium*,’ so that to the Gospel may be rendered an honor similar to that rendered to Jesus Christ himself.”

This custom is holy and venerable. It is truly worthy to be continued.

*Prayers.* In order to be free from temptations and misfortunes, it is very useful to bring along the Gospel. “The devils themselves are seized by fear in front of the code of the Holy Gospel, because it strikes in them a sacred horror.” St. John Chrysostom writes, Hom. 51, on St. John Evang., that the devils do not dare enter the place where there is a copy of the Gospel. Have it therefore in your homes, with you during the day, beside your bed at night and during sickness, in hospitals, etc.

314 Through this devotion, God worked many miracles. For example, St. Gregory of Tours, in his life of the Fathers, ch. IV, narrates that when a fire was devastating the city of Alvern, St. Gallus entered the Church; there he prayed long before the Holy Altar; then, rising, he took the book of the Gospel. With the Gospel he advanced against the fire and this was put off. Not even a spark remained of it. Other similar miracles are told by St. Martian and Nicephorus.

*Novenas and triduums.* Most useful are novenas and triduums done this way: for nine days or for three days, read a chapter of the Gospel.

(From Cornelius a Lapide, Vol. VIII, p. 2). The reverence of Christians regarding the Gospel was always marvelous; marvelous their love, marvelous their veneration. Nicephorus (in book 14, ch. 3) says that two Ecumenical Councils of Nicea, that of Chalcedon and of Ephesus, placed in the midst of their session hall the text of the Gospel, so that they may turn to it as to the Person of Jesus Christ; as if Jesus said: "Make a right judgment," St. Cyril says in his apology. Also, in the middle, in the Council of Trent, was found Holy Scripture.

It is established by Canon Law that during solemn oath-taking, the hand should be placed over the Gospel and thus one swears. And so even now we affirm or deny upon the Gospel, with an oath, saying: "So may God and these his holy Gospels help me."

As therefore we swear through God, so also through the Gospels, like they were his sacred word. And we ask here the grace that the Lord help us to confess the truth and to be faithful to our promises; and that the holy Gospels that are the image of God, help us.

At the end of the thirty<sup>1</sup> reflections that we made on the Sacred Scriptures, let us reflect still on how to use the Bible to our special benefit and we shall see:

1. When to read it; 2. Where to read it; 3. How to diffuse it and have it read.

### When to read Holy Scripture

Every Christian ought to make a law for himself and that is: to receive Holy Communion and to read the Bible every day. Better still, during the year there ought to be more readings of the Holy Bible than Sacramental Communions: Sacramental Communion in fact cannot be done by us except once a day. The Bible on the other hand we can always have with us and we can read it several times a day.

There are Religious Institutes, for example, the Salesians, who do that not just as a pious practice, but precisely as a rule established by their institutions. Bl.<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco, the glorious founder of said Religious, said that he did not know of any better method to become good Preachers, | than to read the Bible. And at another time, he revealed about himself that in order to become a good Director of young people and of Clerics, which he was, he did not know of anything better than to read the Holy Bible. To his Missionaries who were about to cross the Ocean, he advised that they take with them the Book of the Holy Gospels.

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Was the work of the Salesian Missionaries effective? Oh, what an immense good the sons of Bl. Don Bosco accomplish throughout the world, especially among the youth!

The *Imitation of Christ* places the Gospel on the same level as Sacramental Communion. And that should not surprise us. In

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<sup>1</sup> These initial lines and perhaps the whole conclusion seem to have been written by the compiler, B. Ghiglione, and approved by Don Alberione. – To the thirty reflections are to be added the chapter taken from *Apostolato Stampa* and placed on pages 306-314 of the original text.

<sup>2</sup> St. John Bosco, blessed at that time. See note 4 of p. 147.

fact, the Ecumenical Council Chalcedon IV goes even further and says that to the Holy Gospel is due the same act of *adoration* that is due to the Cross of the Savior Jesus Christ: “We establish that the Book of the Holy Gospel be adored with the same honor with which the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, liberator and Savior of all, is adored.”

We should reach the point of feeling pain on that day when, for some serious reason, it was not possible for us to do the usual reading of the Holy Bible; to feel that very deep pain that those devout souls feel when they cannot receive Holy Communion. For them that day seems lost; they are not satisfied; they feel in themselves a thirst, a mysterious hunger.

Oh, the Bible! Let us carry it with us, at least some chapter like a Viaticum of our life, and as a burning lamp in our hands, so that it may give light to our life and scatter the darkness of the infernal evil one.

### **Where to read Holy Scripture 317**

The Holy Bible can be read in schools, before the start of lessons. For one who is already ahead in the study courses, the reading of the Bible must be done every day. It is a light in their hands: *Lucerna in manibus vestris*.

How many times, during moments of affliction, doubts, difficulties in life, upon taking the Holy Bible one is consoled, enlightened, guided. Lots are thrown there casually, but the Lord guides them so that our eyes see the verse that suits us.

It is said that the very learned St. Alphonsus, when he failed to solve a difficult question, took the Sacred Scripture, opened it by chance, and found there the solution to the question.

In our days, books of piety and devotion have increased in number, but we shall not find any so practical and universal as the Holy Bible: it is for every class of persons, and is useful for any time of life.

He who is on the way to the Press Apostolate, without the Bible, will never understand anything of his divine apostolate. He would be like a Priest without power. What is a priest without power? How can he communicate light and strength to souls if he does not possess them?

One who is called to the Press Apostolate, who does not read and assimilate the divine truths of the Bible, places himself outside of his vocation. He could do some work of apostolate, but it will not be the life of souls. It will be a simple parade, something that is external and nothing more.

318 How easy it is for one who loves and reads the Holy Bible to understand, follow and penetrate immediately | the center of things. He, however, who does not love the Bible in the Press Apostolate, looks for peripheral books, fanciful titles, but does not go to the core. He could be compared to those superficial souls who have many devotions; they venerate this or that Saint, and entering the Church they immediately go straight to the picture of their Saint, and there perform reverences, bows and even genuflection's, and the Most Holy Sacrament, the Holy of Holies that should be the first to be greeted and respected, they do not give attention to.

May these souls find their way: it is the Church; may they find the truth: it is in the Bible; may they find their life: it is in the Holy Gospel!

### **How to spread the Bible and how to have it read**

The Bible must be read in schools, in families and by individuals. It is here that we must aim; we should let the Bible enter here. But in order to do this, it is necessary to arm ourselves with courage. It is necessary first of all to compose it, print it, and bind it with pure hands and heart: "*Innocens manibus et mundo corde.*"<sup>3</sup>

Then right intention is necessary. If this were wanting, whatever sermon, whatever sheet of paper, will have some effect, but it will not accomplish good, neither will it save souls.

Oh, if the grace that the Apostle desires for souls he himself possesses, indeed, his writings will do good, and souls will be sanctified!

Do not believe that to do the Press Apostolate it is enough to enlighten and teach souls; needed still is to move their will,

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<sup>3</sup> Ps 23/24:4: "The clean of hands and pure of heart."



stimulate their heart and make it love to practice virtue. For all this, indispensable is | grace which we cannot have except through prayer, mortifications, and sacrifices. Without them grace cannot pass from the Apostle of the Press to souls. **319**

Another thing that is necessary in order to be effective is to practice ourselves what we want to teach to others. That we walk ahead of others.

Let us now imagine the most beautiful scene of the Most Holy Virgin who, devoutly recollected, reads the Sacred Scriptures with immense love: every word for her is a thunderbolt of love and a push towards God.

In a second picture, let us imagine ourselves contemplating the Divine Master in the Synagogue who, on a Sabbath day, reads, interprets and meditates on the Sacred Scriptures. And let us conclude thanking the Lord as we sing the Magnificat, since he has given us this divine book, wherein we have the truth, the way, and the life.

## SOME PRAYERS

PRAYER TO BE SAID  
BEFORE READING THE HOLY BIBLE

“O Jesus, true light that illumines every man who comes to this world, I know that you have come from God in order to be our Teacher and that you teach us his ways in truth. Life and spirit are the words that you have spoken to us: but who is worthy to open the book and break its seals? You alone, you who were killed for us and have ransomed us from God with your blood. Grant me then to be able to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God and your unfathomable riches. Show me all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God that are hidden in you. Grant that your word penetrate my soul; guide like light my steps, brighten my way till the day dawns and darkness dissipates, you who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.”

Or else: “O Jesus Master, Way, Truth, and Life, have mercy on us.”

## PRAYER TO BE SAID AFTER READING

“O God, our Savior, you appeared to men to teach us so that, renouncing our impiety and worldly desires, we may live on earth sober, just, and pious. Grant us to change ourselves within by following You who, through kindness and love, made yourself externally similar to us.”

Or else: “Divine Heart of Jesus, you have promised peace and all the graces necessary for our state, have mercy on us.”

## FOR HIM WHO THIRSTS FOR SOULS AS JESUS

O Lord, in union with the Priests who today celebrate the Holy Mass, I offer You the divine Victim, Jesus Host and myself, a little victim:

1. In reparation for the innumerable blasphemies, errors and obscenities that are printed in many printing presses from which each day flows a river of paper that floods the world like a putrid torrent.

2. To invoke your mercy on the countless readers, perverse or innocent, that the scandalous press tears away from your Fatherly heart, thirsty for souls.

3. For the conversion of all writers and printers, blind ministers of Satan, false teachers who have raised up magisterial chairs against the Divine Master, poisoning every teaching, human thought and the sources of human activity.

4. In order to honor, love and listen only to Him whom You, O Heavenly Father, in your great Love have given to the world proclaiming, "This is my beloved Son: hear him."

5. In order to know that only Jesus is the perfect Teacher: that is, the Truth that enlightens, the Way or | model of all holiness, the true Life of souls, that is, sanctifying grace.

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6. In order to obtain the grace so that in the world may be multiplied Priests and Religious who are consecrated to spread the teachings of Christ by means of the press.

7. So that writers and workers of this press may be holy, full of wisdom and zeal for the glory of God and for souls.

8. To ask you so that the Catholic press may prosper, be disseminated, aided and multiply, raising up its voice so as to drown out the inebriating and bewitching din of the perverse press.

9. So that all of us may become aware of our ignorance and misery, and of our need to always stay before Your holy Tabernacle with supplicating eyes and heads bowed; O Lord, invoking your light, compassion, and mercy.

#### CHAPLET TO ST. PAUL

I. I bless You, O Jesus, for the great mercy granted to St. Paul in changing him from a bold persecutor to an ardent Apostle of the Church; and You, O great saint, obtain for me from Jesus and Mary Most Holy, a heart docile to grace and a complete conversion from my predominant fault.

*O Jesus Master, Way, Truth and Life, have mercy on us.*

*Queen of Apostles, pray for us.*

*St. Paul the Apostle, pray for us.*

323 II. I bless you, O Jesus, for having elected the Apostle Paul as a model and preacher of holy virginity; and You, O St. Paul, my dear Father, guard | my mind, my heart and my senses, so that I may know, love and serve only Jesus and employ all my energies for his glory.

*O Jesus Master, etc.*

III. I bless you, O Jesus, for having given through St. Paul examples and teachings of perfect obedience: and You, O great Saint, obtain for me from Jesus and from Mary Most Holy, humble docility to all my Superiors, certain that in obedience I shall be victorious over my enemies.

*O Jesus Master, etc.*

IV. I bless you, O Jesus, for having taught me, by the deeds and by the words of St. Paul, the true spirit of poverty; and You, O great Saint, obtain for me from Jesus and Mary Most Holy, the evangelical spirit of poverty, so that after having imitated you in life, I may be your companion in heavenly glory.

*O Jesus Master, etc.*

V. I bless you, O Jesus, for having given to St. Paul a heart so full of love for God and for the Church, and for having saved so many souls through his zeal. And you, our friend, obtain for me from Jesus and Mary Most Holy, an ardent desire to carry out the apostolate of the press, of prayer, of example, of good works, and of the word, so that I may be your companion in the reward promised to good Apostles.

*O Jesus Master, etc.*

#### PRAYER TO ST. PAUL

324 O most glorious Apostle, who with so much zeal strove to destroy in Ephesus those writings you knew well would pervert | the minds of the faithful, would that even now you cast a kind gaze upon us. You see how an unbelieving and unbridled press is trying to snatch from our hearts the precious treasure of our faith and the purity of our mores.

Enlighten, we pray you, O Holy Apostle, the mind of so many perverse writers, so that they may desist once and for all from causing damage to souls by their culpable doctrines and perfidious insinuations. Raise up amidst the Christian people holy Apostles and workers for the Press Apostolate that may labor with faith, humility and zeal to spread the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Ask for us the grace so that, always docile to the voice of the Supreme Hierarchy, we may never devote ourselves to reading perverse writings, but instead, try to read and as much as we can disseminate those that through their salutary shepherding help all to promote the greater glory of God, the exaltation of His Church, and the salvation of souls. Amen.

*(50 days indulgence)*

### Litany of the Sacred Writers

Lord, have mercy on us.		
Christ, have mercy on us.		
Lord, have mercy on us.		
Christ, hear us.		
Christ, graciously hear us.		
God the Father in heaven,	have mercy on us	
God the Son, Redeemer of the world,	” ”	
God the Holy Spirit,	” ”	
Holy Trinity, one God,	” ”	
Jesus, Word of the Father,	” ”	
Jesus, expectation of the Prophets,	” ”	
Jesus Master, Way, Truth, and Life,	have mercy on us	<b>325</b>
Jesus, font of the Holy Spirit,	” ”	
Jesus, Master of the Apostles and Evangelists,	” ”	
Jesus, light of the Fathers and of the Doctors,	” ”	
Mother of Christ,	pray for us	
Queen of Apostles,	pray	
Saint Joseph,	pray	
Saint Moses,	pray	
Saint David,	pray	
Saint Isaiah,	pray	
All ye Sacred Hagiographers and Prophets,	pray	

	Saint Peter,	pray
	Saint Paul,	pray
	Saint Jacob,	pray
	Saint John,	pray
	Saint Matthew,	pray
	Saint Thaddeus,	pray
	Saint Luke,	pray
	Saint Mark,	pray
	All ye Holy Apostles and Evangelists,	pray
	All ye Holy Apostolic Fathers,	pray
	Saint Athanasius,	pray
	Saint Basil,	pray
	Saint Jerome,	pray
	Saint Augustine,	pray
	Saint John Chrysostom,	pray
	Saint Gregory (the Great),	pray
	All ye Holy Fathers,	pray
	Saint Bernard,	pray
	Saint Thomas,	pray
	Saint John of the Cross,	pray
	Saint Francis de Sales,	pray
	Saint Alphonsus,	pray
	All ye Holy Doctors,	pray
	All ye Holy Writers,	pray
	Saint Benedict,	pray
326	Saint Francis,	pray for us
	Saint Dominic,	pray
	Saint Ignatius,	pray
	All ye Holy Fathers of the Religious,	pray
	Saint Theresa,	pray
	Saint Catherine,	pray
	All ye Saints of God,	intercede for us
	We beseech you,	spare us, O Lord
	We beseech you,	graciously hear us, O Lord
	From all evil,	deliver us, O Lord
	From all sin,	deliver
	Through the mystery of your Incarnation	
	and preaching,	deliver

Through your cross and passion, deliver  
 Through your resurrection and ascension, deliver  
 Through the coming of the Holy Spirit the Paraclete  
     and the inspiration of the Scriptures, deliver  
 Through the admirable infallibility of the Church, deliver  
 On the day of judgment, deliver  
 We sinners, we beseech you, hear us  
 That the apostolic gift and all ecclesiastical orders  
     you may deign to conserve in holy religion, we beseech you  
 That you may deign to lead all the erring  
     to the unity of the Church and all the  
     unbelieving to the light of the Gospel, we beseech you  
 Lamb of God, you take away the sins  
     of the world, Spare us, O Lord  
 Lamb of God, you take away the sins  
     of the world, Graciously hear us, O Lord  
 Lamb of God, you take away the sins  
     of the world, Have mercy on us  
 V) *Jesus, Way, Truth, and Life*  
 R) *Have mercy on us*

OREMUS. – Domine Jesu Christe, qui es Via, Veritas et Vita, **327**  
 fac nos tuam supereminentem scientiam spiritu Pauli Apostoli  
 ediscere, ut in viam mandatorum tuorum currentes, ad vitam  
 perveniamus sempiternam.  
 Qui vivis.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

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<sup>1</sup> “Let us pray. - Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Make us learn your most eminent knowledge in the spirit of the Apostle Paul, so that journeying in the way of your commandments, we may reach life eternal. You who...”





# INDEXES

## NOTICE

*The numbers refer to the marginal numbering of the text (corresponding to the original edition of 1933). The numbers followed by “n” refer to the notes; those followed by an “i” refer to the pages of the Introduction of the present edition.*

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