

## THE BIBLE AND THE ROSARY<sup>1</sup>

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### I—*Is it in the Dominican spirit to read the Holy Bible?*

Is a layman obliged to read the Bible? There is no doubt about the answer. No, he has no such obligation.

This is what scandalizes Protestants. The Bible is the word of God, it has been inspired by the Holy Ghost; Catholics have solemnly proclaimed at the Council of Trent that God is its author. How is it that all are not obliged to read it? But if they were, we should have to conclude that every Christian is obliged to know how to read, which no one maintains, however much education may be encouraged.

But what if one does know how to read? Why should the first care of a Protestant minister be to place a Bible in the hands of every convert, whereas the Catholic missionary is satisfied with a missal? That proves, at any rate, that the Church does not forbid reading the Bible, since the missal contains Epistles and Gospels taken from Scripture which the priest in most cases takes care to explain. But it is not the whole Bible.

Here we touch upon the fundamental difference between Catholics and Protestants. The originator of Protestantism, Luther, taught that each of the faithful should receive enlightenment on his faith from the Bible itself, by direct contact with the Holy Spirit, the author of the Bible, so much so that the sense he perceived was the lesson which God wished to give him by the Scriptures. Thus understood and practised, the reading of the Bible by all became a cause of division among Christians on points touching the faith, since each one understood it in his own way. And in fact division did take place into several sects, whose separation we may observe. It was partially halted solely by a remnant of Catholic sense. The Protestant layman understands Scripture as it is taught to him by his minister; each group maintains its unity by the principle of authority which assures for the Church the unity of the whole Christian body.

The Holy Spirit which inspired the Scriptures, has entrusted them to the Church which it assists infallibly in its interpretation. Certain of possessing the Spirit of the letter, the Church has the right

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the French.

and the duty to communicate the Spirit directly to the faithful by its teaching body. She concedes no privileges in this matter to the more learned; she guides those who cannot read, as well as the doctors who have grown old over the texts. Moreover she permits the reading of the Scripture to all those who can read, provided that, in case of translations, they be accompanied by notes from the Fathers or other authorized representatives of tradition. With this condition, one must recognize that the Church encourages and blesses the reading of Scripture.

In point of fact, this tradition has often been written. But when compared to the Bible, it represents teaching by the spoken word,—the most clear, which is directed to all, and which is adapted to all by the method of questions and answers. Plato long ago demonstrated the superiority of the living word over the written word which is incapable of adapting itself to various minds. Such is the case with all sciences. Even though the text be a formal code of laws, the only one with authority, which assigns his duty to the judge as to the subject, it is not left to its helplessness; a body of professors is constituted to teach it. That is true of our civil code, written for Frenchmen, and which is not yet a hundred and fifty years old. What student is going to have sufficient genius to be told: "Here, study this little volume and then you will plead cases in court"? Nevertheless, this is in theory, but in theory alone, what Protestants tell their faithful throughout the world, after so many centuries, concerning a book written for the Jews, or concerning the New Testament which nowhere professes to propose a complete rule of faith, but which supposes rather that this rule has been preached by the spoken word of the disciples of a Master Who Himself wrote nothing.

How much better inspired is the Church which maintains the method of the Apostles, and teaches the principles of faith and morals according to her tradition, which is moreover in conformity with Scripture, and with the New Testament above all.

The Order of St. Dominic does not do otherwise. What is proper to it—in origin at least, since its method has spread throughout the Church—is to make of this substance of faith and morals the theme of a prayer. The simple believer thus contemplates that which is the essence of his faith, and asks God to aid him to practice its precepts. The revealer of faith is Jesus, but to unite oneself to Him one has recourse to the intercession of His Most Holy Mother. It is plain that this is the whole idea of the Rosary.

You are told that the Rosary is an act of faith in the mysteries of redemption, that it teaches us the Goodness of God and also his

Justice, that it is a mirror of all the Christian virtues, charity, hope, humility, patience, and abandonment to God which contains them all. The sole thing I should like to note today is that none of these meditations is proposed in a didactic way, starting from the nature of God and deducing the acts of the Divinity, or from the excellence of the virtues in order to urge their practice. No, all here is in the order of fact; it is a story which is told, that of Jesus, so intimately linked with that of his Mother. It is in Jesus that the virtues appear admirable to us, that they appear desirable, even attainable by us according to our weakness and through His grace, with the motherly assistance of Mary.

The Rosary is a resumé of the Gospel, turning us toward the end which the Incarnation and the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ cause us to hope for.

Does the Rosary then take the place of reading the Scriptures, and render it unnecessary? We should say, rather, that it calls for it, that it even makes it necessary if we really wish to have before our eyes the mysteries that we are to meditate upon.

Then too, the Rosary, as a reflection of the life of Jesus, is incomplete. We perceive a great absence in it, since it says nothing of that which is properly the Gospel, that is to say, the teaching of the Savior. This absence is unavoidable since the Rosary is a prayer which passes through the hands of Mary. By the dispensation of His Wisdom, God has not wished that the Most Holy Virgin take part ordinarily in the ministry of her Son. She appears in the beginning to plead for the first miracle; she stands beside the Cross there to be constituted our Mother by her dying Son. Most often, nearly always during the preaching of Jesus, she is absent. She has no longer any need to be instructed in the truths of the Gospel in the way that Jesus proposed them to his hearers, with innumerable considerations for their weakness. It was enough that the Messiah should be called into question, misjudged by a stiff-necked people; the virginity of his Mother was not to be presented for discussion to malicious inquirers. During her absence, the Rosary was interrupted.

But the Rosary says enough to provoke a most legitimate curiosity. One cannot be attentive to the Mysteries of the Infancy and the Passion without being invincibly drawn to consider the work of the grown man, already forecast in the Infancy, and that will bring Him to His Passion. Consequently the Dominican soul moulded by the Rosary will be all the more inclined to seek the Gospel in order to know better what Jesus requires of us, and learn it in the facts of His life, in His attitude towards the men whom He is come to save, in

those words filled with light, and above all in the revelation that God is a Father and that He is love: *Deus caritas est.*

Once upon this path the Dominican soul, according to his capacity and his leisure, will be drawn to follow this revelation through the Epistles of the Apostles, and above all those of Saint Paul, through the Acts which carry the Church from Jerusalem to Rome where the See of Peter will be established, and even to the new Jerusalem, of whose splendor, as yet veiled from our eyes, Saint John gives us a glimpse in the Apocalypse.

Then, having perceived with what firmness Saint Paul affirms that the value of the Old Testament is to prepare souls for Christ, one who loves the Rosary will wish to know those prophecies to which the Evangelists and the Apostles allude, he will go back through the course of time to Jeremias, the image of the despised and suffering Messiah, to Isaias who wished to tear open the heavens that Emmanuel might descend, to David, the type of the King anointed with the divine anointing, to Moses, the lawgiver whose work is now no longer but a figure. He will go back to Abraham, whose tent planted in the desert contained all the Church, and at last to the first Adam whose fault, Christ, the second Adam from the point of view of history, but the first by His divine origin, has expiated and repaired. Then God the Creator will appear before him, Whose designs cannot fail and Who had announced to the guilty couple the coming of the Son of the woman, Who was to triumph over the serpent. All this the Church has taught him from his earliest years, but the contact with the inspired book, which is a contact with the Spirit of God, will make it for him more living, and thus more vital to himself. The Rosary will have borne all its fruits.

## II—*Reading the Gospel.* (St. Mark and St. Matthew)

There can be no doubt concerning the Church's intention on reading the Gospel, or Gospels. Now that education is so widespread, many editions of the Gospel in French have appeared, with notes, and they have been actively encouraged by ecclesiastical authority. The Gospel is, in fact, the good news. On the morrow of a victory people fight for the papers to learn the details. If the President of the Republic has inaugurated a building or an institution, abundantly illustrated newspapers report his words, show him receiving flowers, embracing children. Already in the time of Jesus the birthday of an emperor was announced as good news, and above all his

coming: on such an occasion he would distribute liberalities and favors.

It is not without an inspired boldness that the first Christians gave the Gospel its name (*Evangelium*: the good news; which word is retained by us in English in the name given the writers of the Gospel, *Evangelists*. Translator's note). It was indeed the good news par excellence, being those things which Jesus did for the salvation of the world, and the instructions He left them. He preached the good news and He was the center of the good news. The Gospel is a portrait of Jesus Christ, but a portrait whose lines are drawn with words and acts.

It has pleased the Holy Ghost, in His infinite condescension, to trace four sketches of this portrait, necessarily inferior to the reality of a Man-God, but proportioned to the needs of the infant Church. These are the Gospels. They were named, and are still, not the Gospel of St. Matthew, of St. Mark, of St. Luke, of St. John, but the Gospel *according to* St. Matthew, etc. This was in order to accentuate the unity of the Gospel, presented under new forms without ceasing to be the same.

Confronted with the four Evangelists what will the Dominican reader do? Shall he try to choose from all of them the elements of a single portrait? No artist would proceed in such a way, taking here the nose, there the ears, from one place the mouth, from another the hair. He will successively examine the four reproductions of the original and ask himself in what they are alike and in what they differ. These observations will soon convince him that the painter had for his model the same person, characterized by the same features, but with different expressions upon them. Thus one acquires a more complete knowledge of the model, without recourse to a forced combination which would only result in a sort of monstrous nightmare.

Each Evangelist has his own attraction, accentuating more one side of the physiognomy of Jesus and presenting Him before our eyes under a particular aspect, always adorable as God, always attractive as man, but with shades which arouse in us various sentiments. One must then study each Gospel in particular, without nevertheless losing to sight the others, since it is often by comparison that one perceives best the differences and that one can resolve them into unity.

Let us begin with St. Matthew. Jesus Christ appeared as the fulfillment of the prophecies. He should therefore have been received with joy by the chosen people, depository of the prophecies. The opposition, if there was to be any, had needs to arise on the score of the prophecies' fulfillment. And, in fact, it was the blindness of

the Jews on this point that brought Jesus to the Cross. The struggle once begun on this terrain of Messianism, it is there that it had to be continued. It was necessary to prove to the Jews that this Jesus Whom they had rejected was indeed the Messiah promised by God to their ancestors. It was to this task that St. Matthew applied himself. He sets forth in a few words the miracles that the people had witnessed and which made of Jesus the messenger of God, accredited by Him, and Whom it was necessary to believe. But His preaching did not sanction the national privilege of the Jews. Jesus, little preoccupied with formalism, had insisted on the necessity of an interior perfection, entirely animated by charity. The just man is not he who can offer to God the sum of his good works, all conformed to the Law, and demand his salary. The perfection of God Himself, infinitely good, is to be his model. Is there then a change in the eternal designs? To follow Jesus must the Jew deny the faith of his ancestors? No, not in that which is essential to it, since the word of the Messiah does not destroy the Law, but completes it, and the Scriptures themselves gave the hint that the practice of the Messiah would be all mercy.

It was upon the pages of the Sermon on the Mount, program of salvation—and therefore the very Gospel, and upon the parables, the most persuasive and popular teaching, that St. Dominic, as a preacher, liked most to meditate.

St. Matthew has as his symbol a man, a reasonable being. He speaks to the intelligence, he lays down the fundamental principles, definitive this time, of the ethics of Jesus Christ. No sooner freed by the grace of the Redeemer from the yoke of carnal observances, the little Christian group is confirmed in the certainty that it is fulfilling the eternal designs of God, or rather that it is united by faith and charity to Him Who has fulfilled them. He and they form a single society, a truth which St. Matthew also brings out by his teaching on the Church and on Peter who will be forever its head, conqueror of hell.

The intelligence once satisfied in its rights, memory's demands prevailed: a faithful remembrance proves and sustains love. Did not the Christians at Rome above all, where the land in which Jesus had lived, the human life that He led, were known only by a distant hearsay, often question those that converted them on the particular events of that story that was more than miraculous, even divine, yet strictly contained in a few years of an existence that was perfectly human in all but sin? By a precious privilege, the Romans had as their apostle the fervent friend of Jesus, he who already in the time of Jesus exer-

cised a sort of primacy over the other disciples, the man of all the initiatives, who foresaw everything, who felt himself responsible for the economic life of the little band and especially of his Leader absorbed in the things of the Kingdom of God,—Peter, who first recognized the Messiah. Companion of every hour, present on all the journeys, attentive witness of the miracles, accustomed by his manual labor to note those concrete details which the man taken up with pure ideas neglects, Peter poured himself out to the Romans, his sons in Christ. Whether he was asked or whether he himself returned in imagination to the shore of the lake of Galilee, he recounted with precision what he had seen. For him who loves, each detail which recalls the dear absent one has its worth. And for the Romans, and for ourselves as well, what an assurance of truth do we possess in these narrations stripped of all literary art, yet reflecting a direct vision, all the more moving as it was more closely associated with a reality not well known. It would be necessary to give some examples. You will appreciate this intuitive manner each time you compare a narrative of Matthew and a narrative of Mark. The first, a publican, accustomed to keep his accounts with precise forms, restricts himself to essentials, which necessarily gives his writing the character of a resumé. The second sets forth the actors of a little drama, with the life proper to them, even though they be beings not gifted with reason.

The shortest example, and notwithstanding, the most striking, is perhaps the miracle of the calming of the storm. Here are the terms of Matthew (8:23-27):

*And when he entered into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves, but he was asleep. And they came to him and awaked him, saying: Lord, save us, we perish. And Jesus saith to them: Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith? Then rising up he commanded the winds, and the sea, and there came a great calm.*

It is all clear, we know what has taken place. But we are not present. Here is Mark (4:35-39):

*And he saith to them that day, when evening was come: Let us pass over to the other side. And sending away the multitude, they take him even as he was in the ship: and there were other ships with him. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that the ship was filled. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, sleeping upon a (the<sup>2</sup>) pillow. And they awake him and say to him: Master, doth it not concern thee that we perish? And rising*

<sup>2</sup>The definite is not present in the Douay Version, but it is present in the Greek texts and the French version.

*up, he rebuked the wind, and said to the sea: Peace, be still. And the wind ceased: and there was made a great calm.*

In both texts, it is Jesus who gives the order. In Matthew the Master marches at the head, the disciples follow Him. It is the order of protocol. In Mark, once the order is given, it is the disciples who execute it. It is not the Master Who disentangled Himself from the crowd, Who held the tiller. The disciples take charge of the work, and since Jesus has said: "Let us pass over," it means that He does not wish to lose time changing His garments; they take Him as He is, in working clothes, not those of a boatman. They seat Him in the stern where there is more room, on "the" pillow. What pillow? The pillow which was always there, of course, because the pilot sat down to take the tiller, while the others stood, rowing. Mark says "the" pillow, just as a soldier says: "Pass me the knife,"—that of the squad. Matthew, who was not anxious to leave his custom house to make the crossing, has noted that during a storm the sea is stirred up, shaken; from time to time the waves hide the ship and those on the shore think that it is lost. Mark knows that the cause of the storm is a whirlwind,—which we may note even today, coming from the southwest along the cut of the Jordan. There were other ships there. One who was describing for effect would not have set them in relief unless they were to reappear,—to say for instance that they had been swallowed up. There is nothing like that. It is a fact that the ships always make the crossing together. Therefore Mark says so. What else could he do? It is like that on the lake. In the two narratives the disciples are afraid, and with good reason. Those of Matthew set forth the situation politely, in one word. Those of Mark are too moved not to reproach their Master. They well know that He could save them from the danger: He seems quite different about it! Jesus commands the elements, that is the miracle. What did he say to them? We know from Mark. Be still. Silence! And the wind, cause of the evil, is stilled, as though a hostile power had been reduced to silence and had laid itself down at the feet of its tamer.

Try the same method, you will always find the same contrast. The lawgiver on the mount was undoubtedly a man, but we see better in Mark the incidents of His human life among His own. We can better understand the latter; the figure of the Master is closer to us in a life more like our own.

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Note: The Gospel according to St. Luke and St. John, the Epistle of St. Paul, and the Old Testament will be treated in further translations of Father Lagrange's work, to appear in subsequent issues of DOMINICANA.