

## THE BIBLE AND THE ROSARY\*

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**P**AUL, sure of the support of the first disciples of Jesus after his interview, consecrates himself to the apostolate of the Gentiles. Entering Europe for the first time, he announces the good news first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. Driven from Philippi by an uprising of the Jews, and then from Thessalonica by their persecutions, he writes a loving and confident letter to the Thessalonians from Athens. Between Judaism and Christianity, many have preferred the faith of Christ. It was all or nothing; no question had been proposed to the Gentiles on the obligation of converts to practice the Law. Paul only reproaches them for their tendency towards laxity of morals, a sort of apathy, a false mysticism which awaited salvation open-mouthed, since Jesus was to appear in His glory. The Apostle recalls them to their duty to work, and, since they are still anxious about the inescapable approach of the great judgment by Christ, he reassures them in a second letter.

The judaizers could not foresee Paul's itinerary. Therefore they had not forestalled him in Macedonia. But not unacquainted with his success in Galatia, they had sent trusted emissaries from Jerusalem to destroy his work of freeing the Gentiles from Judaism, already doomed. The Galatians, who had come from Gaul, with that changeableness of which one has always accused those who have been reared on that soil, had passed from enthusiasm for their Apostle to a diffidence which put his doctrine in question. This was not merely despising his authority; it was destroying the work of Christ, placing it beneath the Law whose sole reason for being was in Him. Consequently Paul is deeply grieved; he grows angry, and to convince his Galatians of the inferiority of the Law, he invokes its own witness against itself and in favor of Jesus, the Messiah or Christ promised to the chosen people. But now the chosen people are not they who belong to Abraham by the flesh, but those who share the faith of Abraham. In order to set all this dialectic at naught, if Paul had borrowed anything from the mystery religions, it would have sufficed for his adversaries to remind him of this. If they did not do so it was because Paul had based himself, not on any suspect analogy, but

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\* Continued from the Summer issue.

on the most venerable titles, the promise made to Abraham even before the Law was given. As for the gods of paganism, they do not even enter into the question, since they do not even exist.<sup>1</sup> They are not gods because there is only one God. Never did the most daring calumniator among his contemporaries dare to impute another faith to the Apostle whose principle aim was to convert the Gentiles to the one true God, the God of Israel.

This outburst of indignation undoubtedly had its effect on the Galatians. St. Paul wrote to them from Corinth where his adversaries had not yet appeared. When he wrote the first Epistle to the Corinthians he had only to preoccupy himself with the disgraceful tendencies of the pagans. In Greece the great danger has always been the division of the cities, the hatred of the different parties, combined with a sort of special repugnance, already manifested at Athens,<sup>2</sup> against the resurrection of the body. The Jews were numerous at Corinth, and their synagogue has recently been rediscovered, but few were converted, where first they did so without reserve. The converted pagans had difficulty in giving up their lax habits and their internal divisions. The beauty of the first Epistle consists in the Christian ideal which Paul boldly proposes, along with the splendid hymn to charity. This admirable letter did not remain without effect. Several points of doctrine and discipline had been forever settled. But the Apostle's enemies, the judaizers, finally arrived, and spirits were so aroused against Paul that his authority suffered a serious affront. He was thus forced to come and justify himself in person, then by a vehement and moving letter, the second Epistle to the Corinthians. It is a task for modern criticism to explain this Epistle according to the facts, but it has not been able to agree on the nature of these facts. Should therefore one of the faithful give up hearing these words which issue from a great heart inflamed with the love of Christ which he pours out upon his dear children? Never was his motto, "in Christ Jesus," developed more persuasively. It is superfluous to add that no allusion to pagan connections lowers the truly divine tone of this letter. The relation of paternity that certain mystery religions established for form's sake between the initiator and the one initiated is here found as a living reality, an indestructible link between him who transmits the faith in charity and him who thus receives spiritual being, even though the spiritual father has not administered the sacrament of baptism. The authority of the pastors is not a mere image of that of the Father, it is founded

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 4: 8.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 17.

on the union of the faithful in Jesus Christ, Himself united to His Father, as one reads in St. John (chapter 17).

It is only after having read these Epistles, truly overflowing with that emotion which accompanies action, above all creative action in its first supernatural upward surge, that one is struck by the monumental aspect of the Epistle to the Romans. His building has been attacked, questioned, nearly shackled, as was the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemias. At last the cathedral is completed. Paul, at a moment when his churches were at peace, has made the synthesis of his ministry as Apostle of the Gentiles, nevertheless always confident in the promise which the Jews had received and which should, one day, be completely fulfilled in them. Jesus Christ, source of grace, of a grace which is henceforth poured into the soul of the believer, is the center of this Epistle. He appears, at a time when all seemed lost, as the solution of the problem of good and evil. Before Him, a weak will which most often succumbs, after Him, with Him, in Him, a divine life which will triumph over all by that love of which God is the object, but of which He is also the source by the gift of the Spirit.

Why should a son of St. Dominic, a disciple of St. Thomas instructed in spiritual values deprive himself of this reading? Judaism had been scandalized by this word of Jesus: *Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.*<sup>3</sup> And in fact it seemed to be demanding from the human will that which its weakness could never attain. St. Paul causes us to understand that our striving tends to perfection because it is less ours than the work of the Spirit, Who acts in us, Who prays in us. If certain difficulties present themselves—and they exist—and if you cannot solve them, nor even study them, they will be absorbed by a sort of evidence that a plan of the very good God for humanity cannot be otherwise conceived.

After that, there only remained to Paul to give its proper place to the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, Whom the Epistle to the Hebrews venerates as the only true priest and worthy of the office of mediator, the Epistle of the Ephesians as the most loving Spouse of the redeemed Church, a secret hidden from the men of the old covenant, but made known to Christians.

After this pause upon the summits, the old warrior was constrained to enter into controversy once more, or rather to repulse with authority the latest attempts of his obstinate enemies, the judaizers, among his dear Philippians, and the over-daring speculations of the Colossians who were glorifying the Angels to the detriment of Jesus

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5: 48.

Christ, Son of God, and Himself God. What a revelation it is of this great faithful heart to see him a prisoner at Rome, surrounded by traps, forced to prepare his defense before the tribunal of Caesar, yet having, it would seem, no other preoccupation than that of strengthening in the faith those who were the first fruits of his apostolate!

Scenting his approaching death, he writes to his most faithful disciples, Timothy and Titus, addressing instructions to them to prepare them to be after him the pastors of his churches.

The historical method, all of whose resources we must use, has therefore confirmed, as you will easily agree, the traditional opinion on St. Paul: he was able to conciliate his mission to the Gentiles with his respect for all the inspired Scriptures, without ever borrowing anything from paganism. The identity of human nature, whose faculties and their operations are limited, has as a natural consequence certain similarities in worship. Following Paul, there is the table of Christ, as there is the table of the idols. But the idols are an invention of the human spirit gone astray, Christ is the Son of God, promised to Israel and to the Gentiles, the supreme reality, founder of a Church whose members are all those who believe in Him, and Who invites them to His table where He is present as victim and priest. It was shortly after the death of Jesus of Nazareth that His word and His Passion brought light to souls. In the Gospel the effect is direct and immediate, all the light is directed upon the person of the Saviour. In Paul the light is reflected, like that dying brilliance of sunset, less bright, but more rich in shaded colors. It was not from Paul that the light came, any more than from St. John the Baptist. He would have shuddered at the thought. He thinks of salvation only from Jesus. His gospel is not even parallel; it is entirely dependent on the work of the Master, understood as the disciples associated with His life understood it. But while they undertook the interpretation of His intuitive vision, Paul mingled with it his dialectics and applied it to the new fact of the calling of the Gentiles.

These two readings supplement one another, the reading of Paul is indispensable to those who wish to follow in themselves the consequences of the Redemption, whereas the Gospel suffices for docile souls who are captivated and carried along directly by Jesus. Let us repeat, for the consolation of the more simple, that they can be satisfied with the oral teaching of their pastors who are instructed in Scripture and in tradition. It is for each to gauge his strength. For that the best way is to try.