

## THE BIBLE AND THE ROSARY\*

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T. Paul constantly refers us to the Old Testament. This is an invitation to us to read it. But it is difficult in a few pages to speak of reading it even when limiting ourselves to a strict minimum.

Therefore we shall only say a word on the question often agitated in our times outside the Church: for those who have treated the New Testament in such a free and easy way, what moral and religious interest can the Old Testament have? Catholics well know that this interest is exceeded by the Gospel. But, contrary to the opinion held by many unbelievers, it seems to us that the high worth of the Old Testament is more evident now than ever. What used to be said to depreciate the Bible of the Jews? It was said that if they held it to be a sacred book they were not the only ones to lay claim to such a thing, all peoples having had their holy books. The very idea that God revealed the truth to a single people whom He loved by preference as His own, is, say the theists, in contradiction with the modern notion of God as the Father of all peoples, whom He cherishes with an equal love, if indeed He does preoccupy Himself with them. If we could compare the Bible with other books of an equally remote antiquity perhaps we should discover that the Bible is no better than they. Do we not already know that the Hebrews, hidden away in their mountains, did not attain the same degree of civilization as their powerful neighbors of the Nile and the Euphrates?

But now the sacred writings of the Egyptians and the Assyrians have become as familiar to us as those of the Greeks and Romans. There are found therein many sentiments, thoughts, and rites analogous to those of the Israelites—human nature, we repeat, is the same always and everywhere—but absolutely nothing comparable to the pure monotheism of the Jews, to the spiritual and moral worship commanded by their God. This is so true that it is not surprising that God, preparing His rule over all nations, should have first withdrawn one people from the dangers of an environment everywhere violently hostile to the adoration of the one God. He moulded this people as the testimony to His works, and its resistance, its perpetual

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\* Continued from the Autumn issue.

relapses, the chastisement which followed them, the final message of salvation, to which all men would be admitted, are all the Bible. Its ending would have been the glorification of Israel, if Israel had finally consented to be made the instrument of salvation. Its final refusal marked in the Gospel the moment when God's pardon was extended directly to all men: the chosen people had given up its place to the Church.

The first page of the Bible lays down its principle. God is the creator; therefore it is to Him that men owe adoration and service, and not to those things everywhere adored, the sun, the moon, the stars which He has launched into the firmament.

In Egypt there is no consistent theme but the gods with heads of animals which stride along the walls of their grandiose temples testify to what point the mind of this people pushed the confusion of the divine, which they perceived in a confused way, and living creatures of all kinds, which were thought to manifest it. At Babylon we find a long poem on the origins of being: but the gods, who arise one knows not whence, are no more than material forces, formidable as they may be, like the abyss or the ocean. The birth of the world (Cosmogony) is at the same time the birth of the gods (theogony).

From the primordial principle, the consequences follow logically on both sides. The rest of humanity follows the paths of idolatry. Among the Hebrews, the one God is distinct from the world. It is sacrilegious to give Him a material form, even if only for symbolic purposes. He has no other name but Being. He is the supreme legislator: therefore He will dictate a law. The erudite may discuss the relations between the texts. The fact remains that God formed a people to Himself near the mountain of Sinai, and that in this desert, far from preoccupations of the material order and the refinements of city life, He dictated a religious and moral law as stable and clear as the blocks of rose-colored granite which sparkle in the sun of the Djebel-Mousa, the mountain of Moses.

The law goes back to the origins of humanity. We are touched, in Genesis, by the manifestations of God's Providence towards Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. His justice, even when He punishes, always allows the hope of a glorious future to pierce through. Then comes the departure from Egypt, where the God of the Hebrews shows that He is the master of the august Pharaoh. The rest of the Pentateuch completes the foundation which will be the basis of the faith of the people of God.

With the same care with which the Holy Spirit exalts the Omnipotence of the sovereign Master, He teaches us to take into account

the frightful power of resistance which has been conferred upon man. God has not wished to violate this power, even at the risk of appearing disillusioned by the prevarication of our first parents, clothed with the grace of innocence, and then by the prideful relapse of the men who escaped the deluge. Adam thought he was equal to God; the descendants of Noah built a tower to scale the heavens. Will the children of Abraham be any more docile? Will God be better served by His chosen people? No, for the remainder of the historic books is the narrative of its revolts compared by the gentle Osee to the infidelities of a woman passionately loved. The virgin of Israel takes for her lovers the gods of the country who shower her with gifts. Are they not always masters of their own territory? Their festivities under the verdant groves efface the remembrance of dusty and sterile Sinai. When the Lord combatted the attraction of the high places, sanctuaries of mad joy, by the erection of a single place of worship, the Temple of Jerusalem, ten tribes break into schism; they must have their golden calf, and in their own land. Having thus deserted their national sanctuary and perverted the notion of their god, the Israelites of the North are powerless against the seduction of the Baals of Tyre, the family gods of their queen Jezabel.

God must therefore consecrate among them a group of faithful servants. These are the prophets. But intruders assume their name to hinder their ministry. Only a few, Elias, Eliseus, Osee, and their disciples, keep up the fight, that of the men of God animated with His Spirit, against the evil inclinations of nature, favored by idolatry, and which bring the Israelites to apostasy.

The kingdom of Israel is punished by an irreparable fall. Juda remains. Isaias saves it by his miracles, and consoles the people more than any other, this poor strayed sheep,<sup>1</sup> loved by its Shepherd always. He announces salvation in triumphant terms, gathering to it all peoples and the far off islands. There is nothing more beautiful in any literature. The Greeks have analysed our nature with greater precision. But who among them has experienced the sorrowful emotion of a great soul because God is offended? The moving terms of Isaias stir in its very depths the conscience of man guilty towards his God, and better than anyone before the Gospel he sets him in contact with an infinite mercy. Jesus liked to cite Isaias. Will Christians be content to ignore him?

Jeremias by his life foreshadows the mission of the Man of sorrows. This unaccepted prophet is enveloped in the fall of Jerusalem,

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<sup>1</sup> Isaias 40:11.

but leaves it the promise of a new alliance, no longer written upon stone, but graven in the hearts. This hope is the possession of a faithful group among the exiles of Babylon. When they return, after this severe correction, they will show themselves docile. They obey the Persians without undergoing their religious ascendancy in a notable way. Hence the Bible is silent on their situation. The prophets are hushed. The more religious souls of Israel feed their piety with the singing of psalms, which will be handed down to the Christians.

But behold after the lion of Babylon and the bear of Persia there arises before the eyes of Daniel<sup>2</sup> a leopard with shining fur and rapid bounds, to which the rule is given. This was Alexander, the pupil of Aristotle, the messenger of Greek civilization which was to impose itself upon outer Asia and Egypt with an irresistible charm. All the shores of the Mediterranean, even conquering Rome, bent before this mentality which persuaded by its philosophy and enchanted by its masterpieces of art.

Judean peasants, even great landed lords, or the priest of a massive temple restored with great pains, were to be dazzled—and all the more so because they were not without intelligence—by that radiance which still casts itself upon our philosophers and our artists.

The taste for it was general.

But what did the Greeks think of religion? The uncertain ray of light that Plato and Aristotle had caused to shine upon Attica had been swallowed up in the shadows.

The prodigious intellectual superiority of the Greeks fell down lamentably on this one point. If they knew God, they had refused to pay Him homage. The pious Israelite, knowing what God was, Power, Providence, Wisdom, Goodness, Justice, suddenly drew himself up, proud of his superiority acquired through trial, when he compared his God to those whom Homer had so ingenuously brought on the scene, those handsome rogues, or even with those forces of nature with which the Stoic theories replaced them, not to mention Epicurus who paid no attention to this collection of gods.

And if he was proud, too proud, to be a member of the chosen people, the most superb Pharisee knew that he held this sublime knowledge not from his race but from God Who had revealed Himself.

At that time there were among the Jews—and it is to their eternal honor—heroes who gave their life for their religion. When the

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel 7:16.

hellenism which reigned in the gymnasiums, in the theatre, in the literary world, endeavored to take possession of the Temple in order to install there the statue of Bacchus or Zeus in the space occupied by the mysterious presence of God, the Macchabees preferred death to apostasy. The bulk of the nation followed them. These are the last pages of the Old Testament. It seems natural for its conclusion to be the homage rendered by the Jews to their Messiah, awaited with all the more fervor after the Romans had robbed them of their independence.

But there were certain pages of the Scriptures which they had not understood: the existence of Jeremias, a prophet-apostle by his suffering, the expiatory death of the seven Macchabees,<sup>3</sup> and above all the picture of the servant of the god of Israel,<sup>4</sup> suffering to obtain the pardon of his people. Nor had the most reputed scribes understood that in promising salvation God did not stop at the temporal happiness of His people, the abundance of the harvests, the brilliance of victories. Undoubtedly the prophets had spoken, like Moses of old, of these temporal blessings,<sup>5</sup> but their underlying thought was that God attached value only to humility of heart, to compassion for the miseries of others, to the love of God and neighbor. The rest was only symbolic. The Jews, with their religious chiefs in the lead dominated as they were by a narrow nationalism, expected of their Messiah only prosperity, victory, vengeance. Jesus came humble and suffering, He was crucified, they would have none of Him.

But why align shapeless sentences when Pascal has spoken: "The reason they have, and the only one to be found in their writings, in the Talmud and in the rabbis, is it not because Jesus Christ has not subdued the nations with an armed hand, *gladium tuum, potentissime*: Is that not all they have to say? Jesus Christ was killed, they say; he succumbed, he has not subdued the pagans by force; he has not given us their spoils, he gives no riches. Is that not all they have to say? It is by this that He is lovable to me. I would not wish him whom they picture to themselves."

Neither the gift of the grace of innocence, nor the chastisement of the deluge, nor the miracles of Exodus, nor the legislation of Sinai, nor the preaching of the prophets obtained what God wished for the

<sup>3</sup> II Macch. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Isaias 52:13; 53:12.

<sup>5</sup> The return of the ten tribes, the restoration of the throne of David, the glory of Jerusalem, etc. On this difficulty we ask leave to refer the reader to a previous article in which are found passages of Pascal of an incomparable spiritual beauty. (*Revue Biblique*, 1907, pp. 533-560, *Pascal et les prophètes messianiques*.)

salvation of men. All the instruments chosen by God either revolted or fainted or their mission was not efficacious: this is the whole story of the Old Testament. Then God came down in the person of the Son, called by the sighs of the prophets, drawn by the grace of Mary, like a good worker who himself does his work, and this is the New Testament.

It is always Jesus Christ acting in person, by the Church and by the sacraments until the end of time. The Church has the secret of the old book which the Synagogue clutches obstinately to its breast without understanding it. Its explanation is a call to Jesus Christ.