

and we shall not recover this tradition, which belonged to our faith when it was still an oriental religion, until we have been brought into vital contact with the eastern mind. The two halves of mankind, the male and the female, the rational and the intuitive, the practical and the contemplative, have to be united before the new man can be born, in whom there is neither male nor female, nor east nor west, but all are one in Christ.

Thus our consideration of *lectio divina* leads us to the conception of a new mode of thought, in which we can once again recover the depths of the biblical tradition and acquire a new insight into the mystery of faith, which may eventually lead to a new mode of life and a new form of Christian civilization.



## SCRIPTURE AND THE LITURGY<sup>1</sup>

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**W**HEN St Dominic's successor, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, a man remarkable for shrewd common sense, was asked which was better, studying the Scriptures or praying, he replied: You might as well ask me which is better, eating or drinking. A meticulous critic might argue that liquid nourishment is even more indispensable than solid, that no man can be saved without prayer, that prayer can save those ignorant of the Scriptures. In the concrete, however, for ourselves, Scripture and prayer, like eating and drinking, are indispensable.

Must they however be wholly separated? Can they not be, to a considerable extent at least, combined? They can, because they are.

The liturgy—Mass and Divine Office—is largely (the Office mostly) prayer in the words of Scripture, and both Mass and Office provide lessons from Scripture. The liturgical Gospels cover the greater part of the Fourth Gospel, and for a rough guess two-thirds of St Matthew and a half of St Luke. Only St Mark is little read. All the major

<sup>1</sup> The substance of a paper read to the Conference on 17 September, 1953.

events of our Lord's life, most of his parables and miracles, a considerable selection from his shorter sayings are read at Mass. Of the Acts, only a few outstanding episodes are read at Mass. Matins, however, provides a larger selection, though chiefly from the first half of the book. The excerpts from St Paul's Epistles are far too brief to present a continuous exposition of his thought. This, however, would be hardly suitable for the kind of Scripture reading the liturgy has in view; but most of the passages which contain the heart of Pauline religion are found in the liturgy. This is true of the other Apostolic Epistles. The Apocalypse moves on two planes: the heavenly plane of bliss and adoration, of humanity united to God, and the lower earthly plane where man's rebellious will and proud self-deification produce their catastrophic results. Since the liturgy is first and foremost adoration, it is not surprising that the liturgical excerpts are concerned mainly, though not exclusively, with the higher plane of Divine Reality.

The staple, the substance, of the Divine Office is the Psalter. Its weekly recitation is most commonly broken by a feast, taking Proper and Sunday Psalms. Nevertheless the entire Psalter is recited many times every year, so that every psalm becomes familiar to those who recite the Office, though rightly enough some psalms are used much more frequently than others.

Since the Divine Office is essentially the Psalter it is the concentrated essence of the Old Testament.

We might, however, wish that the regular course of Psalmody were less frequently interrupted, not at any rate for Octaves and minor feasts and least of all for the Little Hours, whose psalms are not proper to the feast. In particular the Easter Psalms are badly chosen. Even Psalm 117, so Paschal that it provides the Gradual for every day in Easter week, makes way for Psalm 53, because it is the first Psalm for Prime on feasts.<sup>2</sup> It is lamentable that the otherwise excellent arrangement of the Psalter given us by Pope Pius X omitted the three additional Psalms of Sunday and Festal Lauds—Psalms 66, 149, 150. These are often appro-

<sup>2</sup> I might suggest for Eastertide the following selection of Psalms: Prime 53, 117, 125; Terce 15, 20, 23; Sext 29, 65, 75; None 95, 97, 114.

priate to the feast that is being kept, for example Psalm 66, an invitation to the Gentiles, to Pentecost and the Epiphany, Psalm 149 the praise of the Saints to All Saints. And the three final Psalms of the Psalter, 148, 149 and 150, compose a magnificent outburst of praise. Is it even now too late for their restoration, at any rate on feasts which interrupt the regular sequence of Psalms?

The Sapiential books provide lessons for Matins during August, the sublime picture of Wisdom read at Mass on our Lady's Birthday, and her Immaculate Conception, many Epistles for Commons of Saints, little chapters for feasts of our Lady and most of the Commons.

From the Song of Songs there are a number of beautiful antiphons for our Lady's feasts, Lessons at Mass for the Visitation and St Mary Magdalen and a lovely Gradual and Alleluia for Our Lady of Lourdes; and there are beautiful texts for Our Lady's Sorrows.

Of the Prophets, Isaias is most read. The book provides Matins lessons for Advent, prophecies on Holy Saturday and a considerable number of isolated texts, Introits, Antiphons. A canticle at Friday Lauds and a lesson at the Mass for the Advent Ember Saturday give us the bulk of Chapter 45. Chapter 58 is read in two sections on the first Friday and Saturday in Lent, the prophecy of the Suffering Servant on Wednesday in Holy Week, another Servant passage for the birthday of St John the Baptist, and the picture of the blood-stained warrior returning from Edom, at Mass on the Wednesday of Holy Week. The Epiphany Mass gives us the prophecy of the glory of the Church, the Christian Jerusalem, Ember Saturday in Advent, the prophecy of the wilderness watered and made fertile.

The other prophets are less adequately represented. Jeremiah in particular is neglected. Lenten Masses, however, and a prophecy on Holy Saturday, give us some magnificent passages from Ezechiel. Joel's call for penitence and his prophecy of the outpouring of the Spirit are read respectively on Ash Wednesday and the Saturday after Pentecost, and on the Friday after Pentecost a third passage from his prophecy. Friday Lauds for fasting ferias gives us Habacuc's Canticle with its picture of God's advent in awful majesty. Candle-

mas reads Malachias's prophecy of God's visit to his temple.

Lamentations provides the haunting melodies of sorrow which are the first nocturn lessons at Tenebrae; Job, Matins lessons in September and the lessons for the Office of the Dead. The historical books of the Old Testament, including the law, are least read in the liturgy, in part because first nocturn lessons from the Old Testament are suspended from the beginning of Lent until the Monday after Trinity Sunday.

From this summary account it should be clear that, although the liturgy is very far from giving us the Bible or even the greater part of it, which would in fact be quite impracticable, it provides what I have termed the concentrated essence or spirit of Scripture. The man whose knowledge of Scripture is confined to the liturgical extracts could not claim to know his Bible. But he could claim to know the essential teaching and the religious truth of Scripture as understood by the Catholic Church well enough, indeed more than enough, to feed his mind and spirit with God's revelation.

We must however be clear what kind of Scriptural knowledge the liturgy conveys and is designed to convey. It is not scientific and historical exegesis. The liturgy does not attempt to inform us, as far as it is discoverable, what was the exact meaning of the human writer in the actual context of his words. Especially, of course, where the New Testament is concerned, this exegetical meaning is often in fact given—but only inasmuch as it coincides with the distinctive meaning the liturgy has in view. And sometimes the exegetical meaning is remote from the liturgical; for example, when Psalms and passages from Job without any reference to a life of communion with God beyond the grave are applied by the Office of the Dead to the holy souls in Purgatory, or when the Psalmist prays for victory over Edom or the Philistines, blesses those who dash Babylonian babies to pieces. Nor even is the liturgical meaning the abstract, conceptual and reasoned understanding of Scripture by a scientific, dogmatic theology. The liturgical understanding of Scripture, I need hardly say, is theological, thoroughly theological, profoundly theological. But its theology is a

concrete intuition of truth, a vital assimilation of truth at a deeper psychological level than abstract conceptual ratiocination. For a detailed study of the understanding of Scripture I have in mind and call the liturgical understanding of it, I would refer to two French publications. One is Jean Vilnet's *Bible et Mystique chez Saint Jean de la Croix*, a volume of the *Etudes Carmelitaines*; the other *Saint Bernard et la Bible*, by the late Père Dumontier. The latter in particular shows how the understanding and employment of Scripture by St Bernard and his Cistercian disciples was founded upon the liturgical use of Scripture and its prolongation, the quasi-liturgical *lectio divina* prescribed by the rule. 'His personal meditation of the Bible', Vilnet writes of St John of the Cross, 'explains the sense of God's presence in the sacred text and history which enabled St John to use it to express the presence of the same God in his own soul' (p. 159). And Dumontier speaks of St Bernard and his fellows finding Christ by a direct contact in the Scripture they read and meditated.

This use of Scripture is *praying* the Bible. That is what the liturgy does with the Bible: it prays it. The liturgical worshipper prays the Bible, directly when he prays in the words of Scripture, indirectly when he reads or hears a lesson in the same attitude of prayer. He thus combines Bible reading and prayer—as a milk diet combines eating and drinking. He who thus prays the Bible with the liturgy penetrates the letter of Scripture to its inner spirit to find there Christ, our Lady, the Communion of Saints, the Holy Souls—or again the particular mystery the liturgy on a particular day commemorates; and in and beyond all these the Godhead that can be loved but not conceived. This penetration, however, as Dumontier shows, does not take the shape of the elaborate allegories so dear to the primitive fathers, though the Epistles read on the First Sunday in Lent and Septuagesima are rare examples of this detailed allegorizing. It is effected rather by direct intuitions—flashes of illumination which see in and through the text in question a significance more profound or at any rate of wider application than its literal and contextual meaning.

The soul which in and with the liturgy is thus praying the

Scripture text makes personal, living contact with the spiritual and personal reality of which it is made aware. When the worshipper, for example, prays or prayerfully hears texts applied by the liturgy to our Lady, to saints or to holy souls, he makes contact with our Lady as she is presented by the text he is praying or hearing, with the saints or with the souls in Purgatory. In the same way he makes vital contact with the mysteries of the Incarnation, not simply as events of past history which he commemorates, but as permanent realities, as real today as when they first happened, sources, ever active, of spiritual power and light, continued, moreover, in all the members of the Total Christ, and therefore in himself. In all these contacts, he makes contact with God thus revealed and incarnate, yet transcending any possible revelation or incarnation. This is to pray Scripture, when the liturgy prays it and as the liturgy prays it; to know it with a concrete, vital, personal knowledge, as the liturgy knows it. For Scripture is the communication of a personal God and as a personal Christ, in and through a Church of persons to the person who studies it, as it is best studied, as the liturgy studies it, by praying it. The liturgical use of Scripture, in short, is in Jean Vilnet's pregnant language *la Bible expérimentée*—'the Bible experienced'. The Bible experienced is God experienced in all the length and breadth and height and depth of his revelation and communication to man. This experience is imparted to everyone who makes this liturgical use of Scripture his own liturgical prayer, as he progressively enters into that prayer and makes it his own. Scripture, thus prayed, is a dialogue between the spirit of the worshipper and the Spirit who inspired Scripture and who, as the soul of the Church, through her liturgy, unveils its profound, spiritual and liturgical sense.

This deep and manifold significance of Scripture is displayed chiefly by the liturgical selection of texts, such as the Introits which strike the note of the Proper at the Mass, or the Antiphons which are indicators pointing out the special reference of a Psalm or Canticle, as used on that particular occasion. When Psalm 129, for example, is used at Wednesday's Vespers, its antiphon, the first verse 'Out of the depths I have cried to thee, O Lord', tells us that the Psalm is man's

cry to God from the depths of his sin, folly, ignorance and weakness. When it is a Psalm for the Second Vespers of Christmas and throughout its Octave, the Antiphon 'With the Lord there is mercy and plentiful redemption' shows that we are to think of God's answer to that cry, the redeeming Incarnation. When it is a Psalm of Vespers for the Dead, the Antiphon 'If thou shouldest search out our sins, O Lord, Lord who shall endure it' indicates that the Psalm is placed on the lips of the Holy Souls agonizing beneath God's searching purification of the least trace of sinful or even imperfect disposition, eradicating the root of sin, the affirmation of self. How rich the wealth of meaning in the Psalm that emerges from this threefold understanding of it!

The same Psalms, lessons or texts may and should be said and prayed from several points of view, each of which supports and enriches what is visible, what is true from another. It may be prayed as the individual prayer of the worshipper, as the prayer of Christ, of the total Christ—the Church—of our Lady or the particular saint whose feast is kept, also in the Office of the Dead as the prayer of the Holy Souls. Or again, a Scriptural text may be understood on different levels, at each of which the principle it enunciates is true, the lower level reflecting the same truth as it is on a higher. For example, the history of Israel with its temporal, its national successes and failures reflects the history of the Church, her spiritual triumphs and defeats. The agricultural fertility for which Psalms 64 and 143 pray—and for which we can and should pray—reflects the spiritual harvest of souls which is the fertility of the Church's agriculture, a harvest which, when the Psalm is used in the Office of the Dead, is the harvest reaped when souls from Purgatory are gathered into heaven. Moreover, the individual and the social understanding of a Psalm or other suitable text may be, as it were, conflated, understood and prayed together.

One text, moreover, in the liturgical use of it, throws light on another text, reinforces it, brings it into a new context of meaning, so that the Scripture read in the liturgy and as so read acquires a compactness, a universal corroboration and harmony: in short, a unity which is indeed present in the Bible as God's unique revelation, but which is liable

to be concealed there by the sheer amount of superficial diversity.

Of this close-woven harmony of texts, Pater wrote enthusiastically in *Gaston de Latour*, 'All these various offices which in Pontifical, Missal and Breviary devout imagination had elaborated from age to age with such a range of spiritual colour and light and shade, with so much poetic tact in quotation, such a depth of insight into the Christian soul had joined themselves harmoniously together'.

Two features of the liturgical use of Scripture have contributed most to this contemplative penetration of Scripture, to the mutual indication and harmony of different insights, views of truth from different but complementary points of view. One of these is the frequent employment of isolated *texts*; the other is *repetition* of the same text or passage. The Protestants' love of texts is perfectly Catholic, though their methods of showing it are not always attractive. For the Liturgy is, to a great extent, a Liturgy of texts: Introit, Gradual, Tract, Alleluia, Offertory, Communion, Antiphon, Little Chapter, Response—all these when Scriptural, as they most often are, are isolated texts, on which the Liturgy dwells lovingly, and when fully carried out with the aid of music. As we have seen, these texts often indicate the particular sense of a Psalm the Church has in view. But more generally they isolate from their biblical context particular words of Scripture, place them in the light of their liturgical context and so expose them to the gaze of the liturgical worshipper who prays them. Brooding in this intensive contemplation upon the text, the Liturgy, and the worshipper in so far as he enters into his liturgical prayer, penetrates depths of meaning, evokes resonances, catches sight of relations which render the text an entrance, from a particular approach, into the spiritual and theological storehouse of Catholic truth, nay more, a point of contact with the Divine Personal Truth who is the substance of all religious and therefore of all Scriptural truth.

Liturgical repetition is not that of the Rosary, to repeat the same formula immediately and many times over. The Litany varies every petition. Only once does the Office prescribe a threefold repetition of the formula: *Deus in adju*



*torium meum intende: Domine ad adjuvandum me festina.* And the fact that the repetition is unique gives the cry for Divine help a peculiar force and poignancy. So careful, in fact, is the Liturgy to avoid immediate repetition, that when one hour is said following another, the final *Pater Noster* of the preceding hour is omitted, because the hour following begins with a *Pater Noster*.

Of less immediate repetition, on the other hand, the Liturgy has plenty. Apart from the scheme which repeats the Psalter weekly, even with interruptions, at least on an average a fortnightly recitation, a number of Psalms are recited with special frequency. The same texts—Little Chapters, Antiphons, Responds, and Psalm versicles chosen for Mass chants—recur constantly. This repetition has the psychological effect of the reiterated slogan or advertisement, and what is far more valuable, its effect as an aid to memory. Even a weak memory will soon acquire a store of valuable texts, as the years pass by and repetition treads them in. But beyond these effects the repetition favours, as nothing else could, that brooding contemplation of a text which at any time may, and often must, bring out meanings hitherto invisible. St Bernard and his Cistercian fellows call this contemplative and interior understanding of Scripture *gustus*—tasting Scripture. Indeed it is the spiritual counterpart of the gourmet's tasting the bouquet of a rare vintage, the flavour of a well-cooked dish. But just as such taste is incompatible with a hasty swallow, the spiritual taste of Scripture requires frequent return to the same text to dwell upon it.

Repetition, however, is double-edged. It may also produce satiety and perfunctory recitation. It must therefore be blended in due proportion with variety. That the texts of Missal and Breviary are such a blend scarcely needs pointing out. But is the proportion as well balanced as it might be? Is the variety sufficient? Could not a more extensive use be made of Scripture than is actually the case?

I am convinced that the variety could and should be greater than it is, and that a wider selection of Scripture passages, isolated texts and lessons, could be introduced without detriment to the character of the Liturgy, as being not study, but praise and prayer. I am convinced of the

possibility, because it has in fact been realized by the Gallican liturgies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the Roman Breviary has adopted an arrangement of the Psalter even better than the Gallican, though on the same lines, the Roman Liturgy is still poor in Scriptural texts as compared with the Gallican. Not only is there a wealth of texts, they are chosen with a marvellous felicity. Where the Roman Missal is content to repeat one or two alternative Commons, the Gallican provides frequently a Proper Mass whose texts are most happily chosen to illustrate the distinctive life, character or work of the individual saint. The Breviary in its Responsories carries out systematically throughout the year the combination employed by St Thomas for his Corpus Christi Office, of corresponding texts from the Old and the New Testaments.

Here then are a few suggestions for a biblical enrichment of the Liturgy, a greater variety of Scriptural lessons and texts. Where they have been already adopted by the Missal or Breviary of Paris, a typical Gallican use, I will call attention to the fact.

The number of Proper Masses and Offices should be greatly increased. Many outstanding saints, St Augustine for example, St Francis or St Benedict, already possess such Propers in the use or supplement of a religious order. These might well be extended to the Universal Church. Special lessons and Gospels for Wednesdays and Fridays, such as existed in the later Gallican uses and more or less in the local medieval uses, should be introduced. Indeed, the original system might well be restored of three lessons at every Mass, from the Old Testament, an Epistle and a Gospel. When the same event of the Gospel is read more than once, it should be taken, when possible, each time from a different Evangelist. For example, instead of reading three times yearly St Matthew's account of the Transfiguration, we might also read the accounts by St Mark and St Luke.

A few particularly obscure passages, for example the Epistle about the One Mediator or the parable of the Unjust Steward, might with advantage be replaced by clearer passages not at present read. As in the use of Paris, the number of Commons should be increased. There should be com-

pletely distinct Commons for Confessors, Bishops, Doctors, Abbots, Priests and Laymen. As in the use of Paris, every feast should have three distinct sets of Antiphons, for first Vespers, Lauds and Second Vespers; also distinct Little Chapters for both Vespers, Lauds, Terce, Sext and None—twice as many as at present. The Antiphons for the *Magnificat* and *Benedictus* should never, as quite often now, be the same. In this way a large number of new texts could be provided to be prayed and tasted, though every Antiphon would still be repeated twice. The Little Chapters for Vespers and Lauds might be extended into substantive lessons, though these should not be longer than the average Epistle or Gospel. Old Testament lessons at Matins should be provided throughout Lent and during the Octaves of Easter and Pentecost. Nor, as is now often the case, should the same passage of Scripture be read at Mass and at Matins. The Scriptural lessons at Matins might with advantage be lengthened, the additional length being compensated by cutting down the common form and often legendary lives of saints in the Second Nocturn. One could hardly wish all the texts in the Office not taken from Scripture suppressed, for some are very beautiful and rich in meaning. But all the new texts should be Scriptural.

There might be a larger selection of Canticles at Lauds. The Paris Breviary provides a special canticle for every feast. This however would restrict unduly the use of the superb *Benedicite*, creation's hymn composed so long before St Francis's Canticle of the Sun.

At present the responsories at Matins and the Little Chapters at Terce, Sext and None, often repeat texts used elsewhere, the versicles for Terce and Sext providing the responsories for Sext and None. Each responsory and versicle should have its distinctive text. The eight prophecies cut out of the new Easter vigil should in some way or other be restored to the Missal.

These enrichments would not, I submit, destroy the repetition indispensable for the liturgical praying of Scripture. But they would increase the counterbalancing factor, equally indispensable, variety. They would not substitute a volume of Scriptural extracts for a prayer-book, but would provide a

rich supply of Scriptural material for prayer, more Scripture to be prayed.

Even, however, if we believe such reforms feasible and desirable, we should not lose sight of the fact that in the present Missal and Office what I have called the concentrated essence of Scripture is already at our disposition as matter for prayer. If we will pray it, we shall penetrate to the heart of Scripture by a vital contact and, as I have said, shall find it to be the Communion of Saints and Souls, our Lady, Jesus Christ and, to sum up all, God.



## IMAGES OF THE BIBLE<sup>1</sup>

NICOLETTE GRAY

**I** NEED first of all to explain my title. The images which I want to think about are primarily images in the mind rather than actual pictures, statues, or such like; or rather I want to think about actual pictures from the point of view of the image which they evoke, and leave behind in the memory, which may live and grow there, and become part—a vital part—of that stock of symbols which in some sense or other exists in all our minds. Because it is in this way that images are part of the life of the Spirit. Or to put it in another way, the activity of the imagination is or should be part of religion—like every other human activity—and needs therefore to be trained and fed. The Church has, we all know, always believed in images; but it is so often thought today that the nature of the image does not matter, provided that it promotes devotion. But do we know how much harm a false image does?—one for instance of our Lord, always there in the memory, with no hint in it of the supernatural? Perhaps Providence protects us, but to put it at the least, are we not losing a wonderful enrichment and vivification of an essential part of our minds (always active, remembering, using therefore other images) by acquiescing in our

<sup>1</sup> The substance of the paper read at the LIFE OF THE SPIRIT Conference, 17 September, 1953.