

DON BOSCO AND THE BIBLE

Part V

Source:

La Bibbia con don Bosco, Una lectio divina salesiana, 1. L'Antico Testamento, Morand Wirth.

TOPICS:

- Devotion to the Word of God
- The Word of God is Nourishment, Guide and Light
- The Bible and the Word of God in the Wide Sense

DEVOTION TO THE WORD OF GOD

The Bible Contains the Word of God

In the Introduction to the devout life, St. Francis de Sales tells Filotea: "Be devoted to the Word of God" (Part 2, Ch. XVII) as if to say that the devotion to the Word of God ought to be the first of all the "devotions". We do not find this expression in the writings of Don Bosco, but we can presume that it reflects exactly his thought. In fact, words of the Bible are truly the words of God. For Don Bosco this is so true that he sometimes ignores almost completely or minimizes the part played by the human authors. When he cites passages from Sacred Scriptures, he generally mentions only the principal Author, declaring: "God says" or "The Holy Spirit has said".

God as Author

In the fifth topic of the "Instructed Catholic" on the "divine character of the books of the Old Testament", Don Bosco highlights "the excellence and the holiness of the doctrine of Sacred Scriptures, which is so pure and perfect that only God could have been the author."

It is necessary to accept as the word of God what is contained in those books. In fact, their writers having been inspired by God speak under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Those books contain facts which cannot be explained humanly speaking, in particular the prophecies which were fulfilled in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover how do you explain "the admirable efficacy it has on the heart of those who read it"? At the end of the topic the father, a faithful interpreter of Don Bosco, expresses himself in this way: "Meanwhile with a heart full of gratitude to God who deigned to teach us himself in the Sacred Books, let us read them with all respect, convinced that in them we encounter his word, his heavenly infallible doctrine".

Reading Versus Listening

Nevertheless the invitation to read the Bible is very rare in comparison with the exhortation to listen to the Word of God. And that is what we hear from the father in the "Instructed Catholic": "I have never found God commanding the people to read the Word of God.... On the contrary we find very clear expressions with which God commands to listen to his holy Word. ...Blessed are they who listen to God's word and keep it. I wish to point out, my Son, that here the Savior does not say: Blessed are they who read or who interprets the Word of God, but blessed are they who goes to listen to it."

Not to Joke with God's Word

Don Bosco did not like that the sacred words of the Bible be treated lightly. In the Life of Louie Comollo he remembers being reprimanded one day by this seminarian friend: *"It happened that I had used the words of Sacred Scripture in a joke. He severely reprimanded me about it, telling me that I should not use the words of the Lord in jest."*

Don Rua recounts that Don Bosco would not hesitate to *"reproach gently those who at times permitted themselves to joke with the words or sentences of the sacred books. Nolite miscere sacra profanis (do not mix the sacred with the profane), he would exclaim with a voice and countenance showing how he suffered at the irreverence shown to the Word of God"* (MB III, 619).

During a meal among priests where one of them made a parody of the words of Job, he reacted keenly: *"So tell me: if we were to find St. Francis de Sales in our midst, what would he say upon hearing such profanation of the words of Sacred Scriptures?"* (MB VI, 1004-1005).

THE WORD OF GOD IS NOURISHMENT, GUIDE AND LIGHT

The Word of God Nourishes the Soul

"Just as our body without food becomes sick and dies, the same happens to our soul if we do not give it food. The nourishment and food of our soul is the Word of God" (Companion of Youth).

The Word of God is a Guide

A sure guide, the Word of God leads a person on the right path. On the ninth day of his "Month of May" Don Bosco wrote that Jesus *"wishes to give me God as Father, the Church as mother and the Divine Word as guide"*.

Dominic Savio is an illustration of this truth. *"He firmly believed that the Word of God is man's guide on the way to heaven. Therefore, every maxim heard in preaching was for him a memento which he can never forget. From this was the beginning of that exemplary tenor of life, that continuous progress in virtue and that exact fulfillment of his duties beyond which one could not go."*

The Fruits of Listening to the Word of God

In *"Counsels to Christian Daughters"* of Msgr. Strambi which Don Bosco reprinted thousands of copies in 1856, one can read: *"...the Word of the Lord purifies the heart more and more and enkindles and inflames it with holy love."*

In the appendix on San Justine, martyr and apologist, placed after the "Life of the Supreme Pontiffs Saint Sixtus, Saint Telesforus, St. Iginio and St. Pius I, Don Bosco wrote that this philosopher *"turned to the study and continuous meditation of the Sacred Books"*, and showed *"full admiration and respect for the august majesty of Sacred Scriptures, which restrains the passions, and calms the anxiety of the human spirit, placing it in a state of unchanging tranquility."*

The Word of God Gives Light

In *"The Christian Guided...by the Spirit of St. Vincent"*, the author showed how this Saint allowed himself to be guided in every circumstance by the light of faith obtained from the Word of God: *"The man of God followed these sacred lights which were for him that burning lamp which guided the*

steps of the prophet-king: "Your Word is a lamp to my steps and a light to my paths (Ps 119:105)."

Commenting on this verse which evokes the light of God's commandments, Don Bosco in his "The Instructed Catholic" offers this explanation through the mouth of the father of the family: "The Word of God is said to be a light, because it illumines man and guides him in believing, working and loving. It is a light because when it is well explained and taught, it shows to man which road to take in order to reach the blessed life. It is a light because it calms the passions of man which shroud the soul in darkness, a darkness so thick and dangerous that it cannot be cast away except with the Word of God. It is light because if it is well-preached, it brings the light of divine grace into the heart of the hearers and makes them know the truth of the faith."

Jesus Christ is the True Light

But the true light is Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, is the light which illumines every person who comes into the world. Citing an ancient author, Don Bosco clarifies that "the word 'lamp' means the law of Moses and 'light' means Jesus Christ. Thus the lamp of Moses illumines only one nation while the light of the Sun of Justice, Jesus Christ, illumines the whole world.

At the end of the "Lives of the Supreme Pontiffs St. Sixtus, St. Telesforus, St. Igino and St. Pius I", Don Bosco wanted to publish an ode of the Poet Silvio Pellico in honor of St. Justin which carries the epigraph "Lux lex" (Prv 6:23 Vg) which means that the Word of God is truly a light (lux) for the journey of the believer who entrusts himself to its law (lex).

Who Are in Need of God's Word

Don Bosco in his book entitled, "Remembrance of a Solemnity in Honor of Mary Help of Christians" cites an "argument" of Msgr. Ferre', bishop of Casale Monferrato: "The faithful here on earth need the Word of God as life-giving bread, and this bread is distributed in abundance in the sacred Temple. Here the little ones come and they find wisdom which instructs them, enlightens them, and guides them. Here the adults come and they also find wisdom which with the milk and wine of truth and heavenly love nurtures and strengthens them. Those in doubt and those in need of counsel during the trying moments of life come here and they always find the Divine Master who reassures them in their good resolutions and points to them the life which they ought to live in order to avoid dangers and reach the homeland of the Saints. The troubles and oppressed come here and receive the purest consolation and the sweetest foretaste of heavenly bliss."

THE BIBLE AND THE WORD OF GOD IN THE WIDE SENSE

Channels of God's Word

The Bible is certainly the Word of God par excellence, but the faithful usually come in contact with it through many channels which also merit the same title (i.e., Word of God). Don Bosco explains in article 6 of the first part of the Companion of Youth that the Word of God are also "preaching, explanation of the Gospel, and catechism".

Talking about spiritual reading and the Word of God, Don Bosco suggests

Spiritual Reading

that they read "books about spiritual things, such as the Imitation of Christ, Filotea (Introduction to the Devout Life) by St. Francis de Sales, The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ by St. Alphonsus Liguori and other similar books."

In his pamphlet (*Porta teco cristiano*) Don Bosco makes his own this recommendation found in "General Reminders of St. Philip to the Youth": "Read often, my sons, the lives of Saints; listen to the Word of God, join in the prayers and other exercises of piety, because they are all pleasing to God."

Spiritual reading is part of the rule of Christian life proposed in the "Cattolico provveduto per le pratiche di pieta": "To these acts of the devout life, every Christian, when possible, should add a daily reading of some book of devotion, at least for a brief period, for the purpose of imprinting in the soul some Christian maxims and of keeping them in mind in the midst of the turmoil of his affairs. For example, the New Testament with the translations and notes approved by the Church, the golden book of the Imitation of Christ, the Spiritual Combat of Scupoli, Filotea (Introduction to the Devout Life) of St. Francis de Sales, The Exercise of Christian Perfection by Rodriguez, the Lives of the Saints, are books to which each one should lead his mind to pasture, because they are useful to enlighten the spirit, inflame the heart, to evoke good thoughts, keep, fortify and increase good sentiments."

The author adds some advice which might help make such reading a kind of *lectio divina*: "To make it profitable it is necessary to read them with attention and pleasure, and stop to make some reflection. Accompany and end the reading with some good resolutions."