

## The Sacrament of Scripture

The sacraments exist to make contact between men and the Word of God at the point when that Word is pronounced for our salvation: in the man Jesus and in his action redeeming us. Their name, "sacraments," means "mysteries," because by them the mystery of "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" is accessible to mankind.

Holy Scripture, too, is a kind of sacrament—not one of the seven, of course, yet comparable to them because intended like them to link us with the word of salvation in the redeeming Christ. That once-spoken word came from the Father, and with it have come many words to us, like circles spreading out from the Word falling into the sea of mankind, all round it in time, spreading to the beginnings of centuries and the ends; or the echoing and re-echoing of the word spoken in the redeeming Incarnation. These words are at work for God's designs of which Christ is the fullness; they are intended to lead men to the centre from which they grow and which by growing they extend—to the mystery of salvation which is in Christ. One may say that Scripture is also, in its own way, a sacrament to incorporate us into the redeeming Christ. Q

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In the Redeeming Christ:  
Toward a Theology of Spirituality

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### I. HOLY SCRIPTURE, THE PRESENCE OF THE REDEEMING CHRIST

From patristic times, theology has related the two mysteries of Scripture and the Incarnation. There exists a real analogy between them. As Bossuet said: "He [the Word] took a kind of second body, I mean, the word of his Gospel."<sup>1</sup> Through the action of the Holy Ghost in the Virgin Mary, God's own thought—his Word—was clothed in human nature, with its imperfections, and dwelt amongst us. Through another action of the Holy Ghost, in the sacred writers, in the womb of their intellect, God's thought was introduced into humanity, taking the form of human thought, and dwelt amongst us.

This divine thought, conceived from all eternity, eternally one, holy and infinite, God has conceived in time, in the imperfection of the things of time, fragmentary, complex and limited. He has conceived it through the minds of men, which are limited both in themselves and by the restrictions of the time and place in which they function. The Word has put off its glory, taken the form of a servant, and come to dwell amongst us.

In the office for the Blessed Sacrament, the Church sings her happiness at possessing the incarnate Word in her midst in the Eucharist: "Neither is there nor has there been any other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them, as our God is present to all our petitions." The words are taken from Deuteronomy (4.7), and were used by the Jews to express the pride they felt in having a God who spoke to them, and whose thought and will for them they possessed in the sacred scrolls they carried with them. "For what other nation is there so renowned that hath ceremonies, and just judgements, and all the law, which I will set forth this day before your eyes?" (4.8). This praise, which we now sing of the Incarna-

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, *Second sermon pour le deuxieme dimanche de carême: Sur la Parole de Dieu.*

tion and the Eucharist, was first uttered to glorify Scripture, which was a sort of first incarnation of God's thought.

Having sung at length the divine origins of Wisdom and its eternal prerogatives, "I came out of the mouth of the Most High . . . From the beginning, and before the world, I was created . . ." Ecclesiasticus concludes: "All these things are the book of life and the book of the covenant of the Most High . . . who filleth up wisdom as the waters of Phison, and as the Tigris in the days of the new fruits" (24.5,14,32,35). In Scripture God's wisdom is already incarnate, flowing in the sacred book like a river between its banks. Israel made that divine presence an object of worship. The tables of the Law were placed in the Ark; in the synagogues, the Bible, contained in a cupboard facing the people, was the only object of worship. No one touched it till he had washed his hands, and then with much reverence.

Similarly, there is an intense presence of God in the books of the New Testament, but closer and more evident. Before becoming human in the thoughts and words of men, God's wisdom, which wrote the New Testament, took human flesh, and it is that incarnate Wisdom, Christ in his glory, who dwells amongst us in the books of the New Testament. For it is he who is the author of the New Testament. "The members [the Apostles] wrote what the Head inspired them to. Christ dictated to them, as to his hands, which of his words and actions he wanted us to know about."<sup>2</sup>

One text in St. John shows us that the opened side of Christ in glory is the source whence the books of the New Testament flow:

If any man thirst, let him come to me, and let him that believeth in me drink. As the Scripture saith: *Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

From Christ's belly the rivers will flow—we should translate this Hebrew phrase by saying they will flow from Christ's heart. And

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine, *De consensu Evangeliorum*, bk. 1, cap. 35. *PL*,34(1070).

"this he said of the Spirit which they should receive who believed in him"; he said it of the Holy Spirit whose tremendous outpouring in the last days had been spoken of by the Prophets. From Christ's sacred body where the soldier's lance struck him, as from the rock of Sinai, would flow the rivers of the New Testament, all the graces of the Kingdom, and also those of Scripture—the graces by which Scripture would be inspired, by which it would be read and understood, by which it would give life to the world. All these rivers will flow from that open side on the day of his redeeming glory. Until that day, "the Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7.27-9). "O heart of my beloved," cried St. John Eudes, "I adore you as the source of all the holy words in this book." The Evangelists came, and each drank from that spring. "He drank the rivers of the gospel from the sacred fount of the Lord's heart," we say of the Apostle John in the office for his feast.

The New Testament is not Christ's book because it tells his story; it is his book because it is from him, born out of the wound in his heart, born like a child. Every word of Scripture is a grace of the Spirit of Jesus, a thought of everlasting life which flowed from his heart along with his blood: "And there came out blood and water," the water of the Spirit with the blood of immolation. With their sure instincts, the saints felt this redeeming presence in the New Testament. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote: "I take refuge in the Gospel as in the flesh of Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> Other saints were to love to hide in Christ's heart, but St. Ignatius sought his refuge in the Gospel, in the revelation of the Christian mystery, for that gospel was like a sacrament of the redeeming Christ, like a field in which, as St. Jerome said, the treasure was hidden, the treasure of Christ himself.

In Christian worship, Holy Scripture is forever linked with that supreme sacrament of Christ's body and the redemption, the Eucharist; the same name is used for both: "This chalice," Our Lord said, "is the New Testament"; this book also we call the New

<sup>3</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Philad.* 5.1.

Testament; chalice and book, each in its own way, contain the New Covenant, the mystery of our redemption in Christ. The analogy is tremendous: "I think myself that Christ's body is [also] his gospel," says St. Jerome, "the bread of Christ and his flesh is the divine word and heavenly doctrine."<sup>4</sup> The early Church, struck by the resemblance between these two sacraments of Christ's presence, placed together, as on "two tables"<sup>5</sup> side by side, the Bread of Christ and the Book, invited the faithful to sit equally at both, to feed upon their Saviour and upon the salvation that was in him.

## II. COMMUNION IN CHRIST THROUGH SACRED SCRIPTURE

For, in every form, Christ's presence among men has that same purpose. By his very being and in everything he does, Christ is always the Redeemer; his presence is there to create a communion of salvation with men. This Scripture does; it, too, establishes a communion, different from the Eucharist but real none the less, a communion of thought between two people who love each other and talk together, one of whom is Christ.

Whenever we read his Scriptures with faith, Christ speaks. It was long ago that he inspired his Apostles, and centuries have passed since. But though the human writing of the Book was something that happened in the past, the inspired words still live in the moment when they are spoken by Christ. "This was written for us, and preserved for us; it is recited for us and will also be recited for our descendants, right up to the end of time."<sup>6</sup> The redeeming action of Christ in glory knows no succession of time; he speaks to the heart of the Church in eternity. The thoughts formulated by the Apostles and put into writing at a given moment of history are

<sup>4</sup> *Tract. de Ps. cxlv.*, in *Anecdota Maredsolana*, III, II, pp. 301, 291.

<sup>5</sup> *Imitation of Christ*, bk. iv, ch. 11.

<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine, *In Jo.*, tract. 30; *PL.*, 35(1632).

addressed to the Church of all the ages in an eternal present. Men are coming into existence now, are now reading Christ's word with faith, are hearing Christ speaking to them now.

Because Scripture is an everlasting word, always being said, the epistle to the Hebrews introduces all its quotations from Scripture by saying, "The Holy Ghost saith," "The Holy Ghost doth testify" (Heb. 3.7; 10.15)—all in the present tense.

Christ speaks to us at this moment, but not like a friend far away communicating by letter; "God is not far from every one of us" (Acts 17.27) and "Christ dwells in our hearts" (Eph. 3.17). We sit at his feet and listen to him: "We must listen to the Gospel as to Christ amongst us,"<sup>7</sup> "the Gospel is the very mouth of Christ,"<sup>8</sup> a sacrament of his words to us. There is no human intermediary between his word and our mind; the sound we hear is actually his voice. According to St. Thomas, God has two far from equal ways of teaching us: he speaks through an intermediary in human books or religious instruction, but "he speaks directly to our minds in sacred Scripture."<sup>9</sup> Tired of hearing only a distant echo of Christ's voice from human lips, saints like St. Thérèse of Lisieux resolved to read nothing but Scripture.

This communion with Christ in thought is even closer than that between two people speaking together. When we look for the truth hidden in the text of Scripture, Christ can communicate the meaning of his words directly to our minds. I can read a given human book, and learn a philosophical truth from it. But what I get from its words depends on my perspicacity; I understand it only in proportion to my intelligence. The author may be dead, but even were he alive, he could not communicate to his reader the same understanding of the truth he is expressing that he has himself. The writer's thought comes to me not directly, but through signs, through words which I must interpret. But when we hear the words of Scripture, "the Master is in our hearts"<sup>10</sup> and communicates the

<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine, *In Jo., tract. 30*; *PL*, 35 (1632).

<sup>8</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermo LXXXV, 1*; *PL*, 38 (520).

<sup>9</sup> *In 2 Tim., c. 3. lectio 3.*

<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermo 85, 1. PL*, 38 (520).

same understanding of the truths they express that he himself has; he arouses in us his own sentiments: "Let the word of Christ dwell in our hearts in all its riches" (Col. 3.16). It is a wonderful communion of mind and heart—the communion of Mary of Bethany, of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

This communion, too, is effective, giving eternal life. Of Scripture as of the Eucharist it can be said, "Pinguis est panis"—it is a substantial bread. For Christ lives now only in his redemptive act, given to God for mankind, immortal in his death for them, and forever an instrument of God's action in raising up to eternal life. Every presence and every action of Christ works redemption. When he appeared in the evening of Easter Day, he sent the Apostles out to forgive sins. In the same way he made them write the pages of the New Testament for the remission of sins and the salvation of men.

By we know not what hidden influence, Scripture bestows a spirit of life on those who read it with faith. "Was our heart not burning within us, whilst he spoke?" (Luke 24.32); "The word of God is living and effectual" (Heb. 4.12), it is the "sword of the spirit" (Eph. 6.17). If ordinary human words, noble or degraded, can transform a man by their psychological dynamism, how much more must the word of God penetrate and pierce to the very depths of the soul, for it is "more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow" (Heb. 4.12).

It is not merely that God's word contains the thoughts of Christ, lofty and profound, which can stir up man's heart; but it is spoken for *me* and for *my* salvation; it is spoken by my saviour, in the grace of the Holy Spirit which flows from his pierced side. The Gospel is a message of redemption, a sacrament of salvation, in which "the Holy Ghost works in efficacious words."<sup>11</sup>

"Attend unto reading" (1 Tim. 4.13). For "the holy scriptures

<sup>11</sup> Paschasius Radbert, *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini*, 3, 2; *PL*, 120 (1276).

can instruct thee to salvation, by the faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work" (2 Tim. 3.15-17).

Scripture is the treasure of "the man of God"; it is that rich treasure from which the householder "bringeth forth new things and old" (Matt. 13.32) to accomplish "every good work." That good work is first of all accomplished actually in the heart of the man of God; the word is planted there, grows there and bears fruit there ("the word of truth . . . bringeth forth fruit and growth" [Col. 1.5-6]); it gives consolation there, too, that joy which glows where there is salvation, whereby we are born to the hope of the Last Day: "For what things soever were written were written for our learning: that through patience and the comfort of the Scriptures, we might have hope" (Rom. 15.4).

The Fathers seem to have been unable to find images strong enough to describe the banquet of redemption offered on the table of Scripture. The Gospel, according to St. Jerome, is true food and true drink;<sup>12</sup> Scripture is an ocean of fulness, says St. Ambrose, a cup from which we drink Christ, a cup that is a river whose waves delight the city of God.<sup>13</sup> It is the cure for all our ills: "Take and drink; all sickness of soul finds its remedy in Scripture."<sup>14</sup> The Eucharist, says St. John Chrysostom, makes us as fierce lions in face of the devil. Also, says St. Athanasius, Scripture puts our adversary to flight, for "in Scripture the Lord is present, and the demons, who cannot bear his presence, cry: I beg you, do not torment us before our time. They burn simply from seeing the Lord present."<sup>15</sup>

Thus the banquet of Scripture feeds and strengthens just as does the eucharistic banquet of Christ's immolated flesh; and like it, it has its joys, "the chaste delights of Scripture" spoken of by St.

<sup>12</sup> *In Eccle.*; *PL*, 23 (1039).

<sup>13</sup> St. Ambrose. *In Ps.* 1, 33; *PL*, 14 (940).

<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine, *In Ps.* 36, 1, 3; *PL*, 36 (357).

<sup>15</sup> *Ep. ad Marcellinum*, 33; *PG*, 27 (44ff).

Augustine,<sup>16</sup> "the comfort of the Scriptures" which gives us hope (Rom. 15.4), that great comfort which made the Maccabees say, "We needed none of these things, nor any one, having for our comfort the holy books that are in our hands" (1 Macc. 12.9).

Scripture and the Eucharist are the life-force and the joy of the Church, because they are for her a communion in the body given and blood shed for us. Other than that banquet, there exists only what this life can offer us: "We have in this world only this one good thing: to feed upon his flesh and drink his blood, not only in the [eucharistic] sacrament, but in the reading of Scripture."<sup>17</sup>

Despite its own efficaciousness, Scripture does not enter into any kind of competition in our souls with that other sacrament of presence and communion, the Eucharist; it does not supplant it, or make it unnecessary. The central point of Christian worship is the incarnate Word in his eternal sacrifice. Scripture comes to us from that centre, and must canalize our minds and hearts towards it. It is by the Eucharist that Christ is present to us in the reality of his body, in the reality of his immolation and his glory. So Scripture must collaborate with the Sacrament to unite believers with the redeeming Christ.

In the Mass, the splendour of Scripture comes to surround the sacred body of Christ on all sides, as the royal purple of the incarnate Word in his immolation, as the veil of the Holy of Holies in which the eternal sacrifice is offered—a veil which is not there to hide but to reveal the way into the sanctuary. It was in this way, through the veil of the Scriptures, that the world of the Old Testament was brought to Christ.

Many non-Catholic Christians read Scripture more assiduously than many Catholics, but do not feed on the Eucharist. Among a lot of them there is a profound tendency not to accept the incarnation of the Word in its ultimate reality, but to prefer what seems to be a worship of God's transcendence—to prefer, at least in prac-

<sup>16</sup> *Conf.*, 11, 2; *PL*, 32 (810).

<sup>17</sup> St. Jerome, *op. cit.*

tice, the spoken Word to the personal Word, to remain in the Old Testament, on the threshold of the fulness of the Incarnation. Many Catholics have a tremendous devotion to the Eucharist, but neglect Scripture. Many of them, perhaps, do not therefore know the personal Word as well as they might, and are not in the best possible dispositions to receive him in the Eucharist. For the secret of opening one's heart to that one Word is contained most fully in Scripture.

### III. NECESSARY DISPOSITIONS FOR A FRUITFUL READING OF SCRIPTURE

God allows us to "taste his good word" (Heb. 6.5), but we do not always appreciate its savour. This bread is no more acceptable every day to all tastes than was the manna in the desert, or is the Eucharist. Our soul must be disposed to receive God's word.

#### *To read in faith*

We must have ears to hear the Word of God which are not the ears of the body: "Let him that hath ears, hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (Apoc. 2.7). The ears to hear are the ears of faith. It is faith which opens the word of God to us. "The word of God worketh in you who have believed" (1 Thess. 2.13).

Like every heavenly reality offered to us during our life on earth, Scripture has two facets—one accessible to the senses, the other visible to faith alone. It was so with Christ, whom his enemies saw with their eyes and nailed to the Cross, but whom his believers adored. It is thus with the Church, whose human face can be seen by all, but whose mystery is hidden for many. It is thus also with the Eucharist which to some is simply bread, and to others the body of the glorified Christ.

There are various ways of approaching Scripture, and not all of them lead to an encounter with Christ. Scholars without faith can make Scripture an object of investigation; but there is no critical

apparatus that can bring them to the heart of Scripture, to the point of meeting with Christ. It has been said that Scripture is a locked house with the key inside. To enter it one must live in it, one must be in Christ, in his house which is the Church. One must be inside faith. This is yet one more sphere in which it is true that "who-soever hath, to him shall be given" (Luke 13.18).

"My sheep hear my voice," said our Lord (John 10.16). Those outside may hear the words, but only the flock hear the voice, the voice which reveals the person. Thus it was on Easter morning that one of Christ's sheep recognized the Lord by the sound of his voice. There are the words, there is the voice; the first express ideas, the second a person. The words of Scripture can be compared with ordinary human words, but the voice is incomparable because the person it reveals is unique. While the believer listens to the succession of words, behind the closed doors of his soul he hears the voice, and the word reveals himself. Only faith has ears to hear the voice; it alone establishes contact with Christ. When he hears the voice, and feels that contact with our Lord, the believer knows that the words are addressed to him. Each sheep is called by his name, the encounter is personal, and becomes a dialogue. "Mary," said Christ, and Mary answered, "Rabboni!"

By the light of faith Scripture is seen to have a dimension that no other book has. It is not invariably the finest of all literature. Not all its lines contain profound ideas, and even the most striking may have had their edges blunted by long use. One can hardly deny that there are human books superior to some parts of Scripture. But to the believer, these words offer a dimension of mystery, a stirring resonance: for it is the Lord who speaks them. One may recall how Mozart once played the clavichord in the house of a rich burgher of Prague. At the end his host, greatly impressed, said, "Would that I were the Emperor! I should give you a pat on the shoulder, and say, 'You really have played well, Mozart!' That would be enough for you. But who am I to be able to reward you?" Similarly, the word which of itself would be but a pebble on the roadway, is a diamond when spoken by the Lord.

*To read in the light of Easter*

The Christ whose voice Scripture makes us hear is the Lord of Easter, the Christ of faith. He became the author of that book in the light and fire of the glory of his raising by the Father. The rivers of the Spirit, of all the charismata of the New Testament, the gift of scriptural inspiration, all flow from his pierced side after his return to his Father. The Apostles and Evangelists understood this, and wrote "in that day," in the light of Easter. Even Christ's life on earth was told from the point of view of his resurrection, in faith in the glorified Christ. The thought of his death and resurrection is the golden thread which binds together the separate pages of the Gospel and makes it a book.

Again, it was the risen Christ, source of the Spirit, who opened the minds of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, and interpreted the Scriptures to them.

Just as Magdalen could no longer catch hold of the glorified Lord with her bodily hands, so scholars cannot hear him with their human minds. He is accessible only to faith. He can only be seen, touched and heard by his disciples, those who eat and drink with him after the Resurrection (Acts 10.40).

To him who believes, our Lord's face appears even in the pages of the Old Testament. It is Christ, dead and risen again, who gives the whole Bible its unity and meaning. If it is divorced from the glorified Christ it is a dead letter, a story written in sand, a set of laws which cannot give life. "The letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth" (2 Cor. 3.6). "The letter" here is the realities of the Old Testament considered in themselves, and all the things of this world. "The spirit" means reality in its fullness, the reality of heaven, of which all other realities are but fleeting shadows. The reality of heaven comes at the end, according to the promise given in the Old Testament; it is none other than the very Spirit of God, in whom all will be consummated, all be made one and living.

Now the risen Christ "is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3.17). He is the solid body whose shadow was cast right back to the beginning of the world (Col. 2.17). The reality of all things is in him, and without him all is shadow and death. In him all becomes spirit and life. For he has been "enlivened in the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3.18), in the total outpouring of the Holy Ghost. He has been so completely transformed in the spirit, that he himself has become a "quickening spirit" (1 Cor. 15.45), and that we may speak of the body of the glorified Christ as in a sense the body of the Holy Ghost.<sup>18</sup> In his redeeming glory, he has become the centre of creation (Col. 1.16). "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all things to myself" (John 12.32); he draws to himself not only all men, but all things, making himself the centre of nature and history, of the Old Testament and the New, lord of the past and the future; Elijah and Moses, prophecy and the Law, the whole of the Old Covenant, all turn their faces towards the transfigured Christ. He is God's "Amen" (2 Cor. 1.20) to the promise of the Old Testament, and to all the promises contained in the first creation, "because in him it hath well pleased the Father that all the fullness [of the universe] should dwell" (Col. 1.19).

The unbeliever looking at the Bible sees only the dead letter, the disparate elements; his eyes are bound. The believer reads with uncovered eyes, and has only to open the Old Testament to find himself face to face with Our Lord in glory; he feels himself "transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the action of the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3.14-18).

*A simple and living faith*

The believer opens the sacred book with respect, just as in the synagogue at Nazareth, Christ stood up to read the prophecy of Isaiah (Luke 4.16), filled with veneration for the Word of his God and Father. Faith reads with a simple and sincere heart. "How should one read the sacred Scriptures?", someone asked Padre

<sup>18</sup> St. Ambrose, *De Mysteriis*, 9.58; *PL*, 16(409).

Nadal, one of the first Jesuits. "Like a good old grandmother," he replied. Timothy had read Scripture at the knees of his grandmother and his mother, with these women's faith: "I call to mind that faith which is in thee which also dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois and in thy mother Eunice . . . From thy infancy thou hast known the holy scriptures, which can instruct thee to salvation, by the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1.5; 3.15).

It is an obedient faith: "And they shall all be taught of God" (John 6.45), God's pupils, desiring to "do truth" (John 3.21). We must read Scripture with the hope of finding there our marching orders: "Good master, what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?" (Mark 10.17). For it is Christ's essence to redeem, and no-one enters into communion with him unless he wants to be saved by him. The Fathers used to say that Scripture was a letter sent by God from his kingdom far away, to draw us to him.

#### *A loving faith*

A letter from God must be read with loving faith. Kierkegaard said people should read the Bible not so much as critics and scholars, but "before God," as a man would read a letter from his fiancée. For to understand one must love. St. Paul asks that the eyes of our heart be enlightened (Eph. 1.18). It is the heart that sees, it is love that knows; in the biblical sense of the word, knowledge is mutual possession: "Blessed are they who know by the delight they have experienced, with what gentleness, what allurements, the Lord deigns to explain the Scriptures to us in prayer and meditation . . . He does it when he lights-up our hearts with the beams of charity."<sup>19</sup>

#### *To read prayerfully*

If Christ is to come and eat with his own, he must find in them "a large dining-room furnished" (Mark 14.15). It is the work of

<sup>19</sup> St. Bernard, *Sermo in feria secunda Pasch.* 20; *PL*,184(976).

prayer to prepare hearts for his coming, by the longing it expresses. Every parousia of Christ comes as an answer to longing: "Come, Lord Jesus!"

"In truth," said St. Augustine to the *studiosi venerabilium litterarum*, "to understand Scripture, what is essential is to pray."<sup>20</sup> He gave an example of this himself:

Let your Scripture be my chaste delight . . . Give me freely the time need to meditate on the secrets of your law; close not to them that knock. It was not for nothing that you willed so many mysterious pages written. Have not these forests too their stags who take refuge and comfort there, come and go in them, feed, sleep and ruminate here?—O Lord, perfect your work in me! Reveal those pages to me! Behold, your word is my joy; indeed your word is a joy higher than all pleasures.<sup>21</sup>

In a letter to Gregory the wonderworker, his "most dear Lord," Origen wrote:

Well then, my son and lord, give yourself above all to the study of Holy Scripture, but you must give yourself. It requires great attention to read of the things of God, to say or think nothing unfitting.

And, giving yourself to read the things of God with the dispositions of faith pleasing to him, knock that the things contained in them may be opened, that that door may be opened of which Christ said, "The doorkeeper will open to him." Giving yourself to that reading, seek with sincerity and with an unshakable faith in God what is hidden from so many: the meaning of the sacred books.

Do not be content with seeking and knocking, for it is prayer above all that is needed for the understanding of the things of God. Our Lord urges us to it, saying not only, "Knock and it shall be opened; seek and you shall find," but also, "Ask and you shall receive."<sup>22</sup> It is my paternal love, that I dare say this to you.<sup>22</sup>

We address that prayer to Christ, whose heart is the source of all the words in Scripture. We address it to our Lady representing

<sup>20</sup> *De Doctrina Christiana*, 3,37; *PL*,34(80).

<sup>21</sup> *Conf.* 11,2; *PL*,32(810).

<sup>22</sup> *Ep. ad Gregorium*; *PG*,11(92).

## IN THE REDEEMING CHRIST

the whole of the believing Church for which the sacred books are written, that Church which weighs and compares together the words of God. Her own heart was the most fertile field in which the seed of redemption is sown. Of the Gospel of St. John, Origen declares: "No one can understand it who has not leant on the breast of Christ and received Mary as his Mother."<sup>23</sup>

*The Scripture as the source of prayer*

Prayer prepares a place for the Lord in the reader, makes ready for an intimate communion. But reading Scripture, in its turn, rouses a desire for his coming and invites to prayer. "Sacred Scripture is a calling towards our heavenly home, it transports the reader from the desires of this world to the love of higher things. The more one meditates upon it the more one loves it."<sup>24</sup>

Every sacrament of the Church is a pasch celebrated with Christ, and a paraseve (preparation for the Pasch), an actual parousia (presence) and a preparation for the Coming. Thus the Eucharist is now the true banquet of the end of time, the pasch in the Kingdom, and it is also still the manna of the Exodus, which supports and helps us on in our journey to the Promised Land. So it is with the mystery of Scripture. Christ comes and talks to the faithful, but only in the inn at Emmaus, in the half-light of the upper room, under the veil of the letter. He celebrates the pasch in darkness. But the night is past midnight, the dim light of the coming day (Rom. 13.12) fills the Church with longing and hope. The faithful bear within them the word of God "as a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1.19), "... the root and stock of David, the bright and morning star" (Apoc. 22.16). In this world every communion in the pasch is a mystery of hope as well as a beginning of possession, a banquet which satisfies yet gives rise to hunger. As

<sup>23</sup> *In Ev. Joh. 1; PG.14(32).*

<sup>24</sup> St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, 20,1; *PL*,76(135).

## THE SACRAMENT OF SCRIPTURE

she folds up the letter her Saviour has sent, the betrothed girl sighs, "Come, Lord Jesus!" It is upon this longing that Scripture finishes on the last page of the Apocalypse (Apoc. 22.20), upon this that our reading of Scripture concludes.

