

A Commentary on the Gospel of John by Maximus of Turin ¹\

The Son of God went to the wedding so that marriage, which had been instituted by his own authority, might be sanctified by his blessed presence. He went to a wedding of the old order when he was about to take a new bride for himself through the conversion of the Gentiles, a bride who would for ever remain a virgin. He went to a wedding even though he himself was not born of human wedlock. He went to a wedding not, certainly, to enjoy a banquet, but rather to make himself known by miracles. He went to the wedding not to drink wine, but to give it, for when there was none left for the wedding guests, the most blessed Mary said to him: *They have no wine.*

Jesus answered as though he were displeased. *Woman, he said, is that my concern, or yours? It can hardly be doubted that these were words of displeasure.* However, this I think was only because his mother mentioned to him so casually the lack of earthly wine, when he had come to offer the peoples of the whole world the new chalice of eternal salvation. By his reply, *My hour has not yet come,* he was foretelling the most glorious hour of his passion, and the wine of our redemption which would obtain life for all. Mary was asking for a temporal favor, but Christ was preparing joys that would be eternal. Nevertheless, the Lord in his goodness did not refuse this small grace while great graces were awaited.

Holy Mary, therefore, since she was in very truth Mother of the Lord, and in her spirit knew in advance what would happen and foresaw the Lord's will, took care to advise the servants to do whatever he told them. Of course this holy Mother knew that the rebuke of her Son and Lord was not an insult born of anger, but that it contained a mysterious compassion.

Then, to save his Mother from embarrassment because of his reproach, the Lord revealed his sovereign power. Addressing the expectant servants he said: *Fill the jars with water.* The servants promptly obeyed, and suddenly in a marvelous way the water began to acquire potency, take on color, emit fragrance, and gain flavor – all at once it changed its nature completely!

Now this transformation of the water from its own substance into another testified to the powerful presence of the Creator. Only he who has made it out of nothing could change water into something whose use was quite different. Dearly beloved, have no doubt that he who changed water into wine is the same as he who from the beginning has thickened it into snow and hardened it into ice. It is he who changed it into blood for the Egyptians and bade it flow from the dry rock for the thirsty Hebrews – the rock which, newly transformed into a

¹ Journey with the Fathers – Year C – New City Press – 1994 – pg 72

spring, was like a mother's breast refreshing with its gentle flow a countless multitude of people.

Scripture says that *this sign at Cana in Galilee was the first that Jesus performed. He manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.* It was not what they saw happening that the disciples believed, but what could not be seen by bodily eyes. They did not believe that Jesus Christ was son of the Virgin – that was something they knew. Rather they believed that he was the only Son of the Most High, as this miracle proved/

And so let us too believe wholeheartedly that he whom we confess to be the Son of Man is also the Son of God. Let us believe not only that he shared our nature, but also that he is consubstantial with the Father, for as a man he was present at the wedding, and as God he changed water into wine. If such is our faith, the Lord will give us also to drink of the sobering wine of his grace.

MON

1.21.2019

A reading about Christian asceticism and the religious life, from a book by Louis Bouyer. ¹

Baptism is our union with Christ's cross, our union with his death, so that we may also be united with him in his risen life of glory. Baptism therefore implies, and has always implied, in some way the abandonment, the renunciation of everything in human life as this is lived in a "natural", that is, a fallen and sinful way. This fact was made clear to the first Christians by the very conditions in which God's providence allowed them to live; they knew that if they wanted to be members of Christ by faith and baptism, they had to be prepared for martyrdom. They had to be ready at any moment to witness to the reality of their attachment Christ. They had to be ready to give a witness which might imply the abandonment, not only of all the pleasures of human life, but of life itself.

And thus from the very beginning it was understood that a someone could not be a Christian without in some way struggling with the world, without accepting a permanent and lifelong struggle with their own "flesh", with their own sinful self. Christians understood, of course, that they were called to take part in Christ's work of saving the world, but they knew that they could not take this part unless in some way they escaped from the world. Christ saved the world because he engaged in the struggle to death with the powers of evil, rulers of the world, because he was willing to abandon the life of this world for the sake of the salvation of humanity. A struggle with the evil in oneself and the world, and abandonment and escape from the world, is a necessary preliminary to taking part with Christ in his work of redeeming the world.

From the very beginning of Christianity, therefore, a virgin life, all life consecrated to Christ to the exclusion of all human attachment, even the most legitimate, has been proposed as the ideal realization of will of God. It has always been considered better that Christians, in order to fight most effectively against the powers of this world, should abandon their hopes of realizing the fullness of life in this world, so as to be free and ready to meet Christ with his cross and to follow him through death to the world of eternal life

¹ *Liturgy and Religious Life*, St. Louis, 1959, pp. 20-22.

This virgin life, this life of freedom from the claims and attachments of this world, was thought of first as the ideal preparation for the possibility of martyrdom -- a possibility which faced every Christian in the first Christian generations. But when the persecutions of the first centuries ended, it came to be understood that this free and spontaneous offering of one's own life to Christ in virginity, this consecration to him which implies the abandonment of the hope of realizing human love and love in this world -- that this consecration was not only the ideal preparation for martyrdom, for full union with Christ and his cross, but that it was itself a spiritual martyrdom. For it is a spiritual witnessing by our whole lives to the love of God revealed and given to us in Christ, and to our desire to respond fully to that love.

TUE 01.22.2019

A Reading from *The Conscience of Israel*, by Bruce Vawter.²

The "Confessions" of Jeremiah will always have a special interest for the reader. These passages do not come from any single moment in the prophet's long and varied career, but we should probably not be wrong in dating most of them to the hard days of Jehoiakim's persecution. The first of them was the issue of an attempt on Jeremiah's life by his own brethren at Anathoth who were trying to stifle his prophecy.

In these passages Jeremiah bares his soul quite frankly as do so many of the psalmists in the Book of Psalms. It seems more likely that they were not originally intended for publication, but were in the nature of private meditations in which the prophet discoursed intimately with his God. They are, we need hardly remind ourselves, the meditations of a holy man of the Old Testament, not of a Christian saint. When Jeremiah prays with respect to his enemies,

Pick them out like sheep for the slaughter,
set them aside for the day of slaughter

he is not seeking a mean and selfish vengeance, rather he is asking the Lord to punish wickedness. Nevertheless, a Christian saint would be somewhat less inclined to identify himself so personally with the right which God is petitioned to vindicate.

Here was no man who enjoyed standing against the crowd, one of those needed in every age and civilization, who gain in strength from swimming against the current. Jeremiah did not at all relish the role in which he had been cast, a pariah from the society which God's command forced him to contradict. His concluding words, the fruit of a bitter brooding, would be blasphemous on the lips of anyone less assured than he of the right to talk back to God. Even Jeremiah realizes that they have gone too far and that he has spoken rashly, for in the following lines (vv. 19-21) God has him recognize his danger of becoming like one of the rebellious people against whom he has been set. Once again, he must walk in faith, trusting in the Lord to hold him up in the inevitable struggles that lie ahead.

1. *The Conscience of Israel* – Bruce Vawter, C.M. – Shed & Ward – 1961 – p. 241-2

²*The Conscience of Israel* Bruce Vawter C.M. Sheed & Ward 1961 p.241-2

WED 01.23.2019

**THE WORD OF GOD THAT BURNED IN THE HEART OF JEREMIAH, from
Pathways in Scripture by Dom Damasus Winzen³**

The Chalice of Jeremiah was filled to the brim. According to a very probable tradition, his countrymen stoned him to death. It was the death of a true martyr, an unflinching witness to the Word of God. Shortly after, the last of Jeremiah's prophecies was fulfilled: Egypt fell into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. The heart-rending tragedy of Jewish national pride, fighting in vain against the word of God--which was so clearly the word of the cross--had drawn to its close:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! murdering the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you, how often have I longed to gather your children around me, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused! Behold, now your house is left desolate! (Mt 23:37-38)

If we ask what the book of Jeremiah means to us today, we hear very often the answer that Jeremiah initiates a new period in Old Testament piety which frees the individual from the bonds of community life, that he is the first to record faithfully his innermost religious feelings, and that he is one of the great fighters who fought the battle for liberty of the spirit against tyranny of dead ceremonials. Looked at in this light Jeremiah would automatically become one of the "great liberals," and that would mean one of us. In reality he was wholly God's. God took possession of him before he was born(1:5). During his life the word of God was his one and overwhelming passion.

Abraham received the promise; Jacob, the blessing; Moses, the staff. David was anointed. Isaiah had his lips cleansed with burning coal. Ezekiel had to eat the scroll. As for Jeremiah, the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched his mouth saying: "I am with you, I put my words into your mouth. This day I give you authority over the nations and kingdoms, to root and pull down, to wreck and to ruin, to build and to plant". It was the Emmanuel (God with us), the God of the Word made flesh, who took possession of Jeremiah. In no other prophet was the union between the prophet's heart and the word of God as intimate and as deep as in Jeremiah. The word was his strength and his cross. It made him, a youth of twenty years and by nature a timid man, a "fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall against the whole land". "The word of the Lord," he exclaimed, "is in

³PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE, by Dom Damasus Winzen (Word of Life, Ann Arbor MI, 1976) pp. 210-211.

my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I weary myself to hold it in, but cannot"(20:9). "As for me," he cried out, "your word is my joy and my delight, for I bear your name, Lord, Lord of hosts!" He never mixed the word of God with purely human dreams and desires, as the false prophets did. The word of God in his mouth was "like a hammer that smashes the rock into pieces". The words of the letter to the Hebrews must be applied to Jeremiah's preaching: "For the message of God is a living and active force, sharper than any double-edged sword, piercing through soul and spirit, and joints and marrow, and keen in judging the thoughts and purposes of the mind"(4:12).

THUR 01.24.2019

How Charity Produces Love of Neighbor by St. Francis de Sales. ⁴

Just as God has created us in his image and likeness, so also has he ordained for us a love in the image and likeness of the love due to his divinity. He says: You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind. This the greatest and the first commandment. and the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Theotimus, why do we love God? The reason for which we love God is God himself says St. Bernard, as if to say that we love God because he is the most supreme and most infinite goodness. Why do we love ourselves in charity? Surely, it is because we re God=s image and likeness. Since all persons have this same dignity, we also love them as ourselves, that is, in their character is most holy and living images of the divinity. It is in this character, Theotimus, that we are related to God by such close alliance and such loving dependence that nothing prevents him from saying that he is our Father and from calling us his children. It is in this character that we are capable of being united to his divine essence by enjoyment of his supreme goodness and bliss. It is in this character that we receive his grace and our spirits are associated with his most holy Spirit, and as it were are made partakers of his divine nature, as St. Leo says. Hence, the same charity that produces acts of love of God produces at the same time those of love of neighbor. Just as Jacob saw that one and the same ladder touched heaven and earth and equally served the angels both to descend and to ascend, so also we know that one and the same dilection reaches out to cherish both God and neighbor. Thus it raises us up to unite our spirit with God and it brings us back again to loving association with our neighbors. However, this is always on condition that we love our neighbors in as much as they are God=s image and likeness, created to communicate with the divine goodness, to participate in his grace, and to enjoy his glory.

Theotimus, to love our neighbor in charity is to love God in the human being or the human being in God. It is to cherish God alone for love of himself and creatures for love of him. When we see our neighbor created in the likeness and image of God, should we not say to one another, Stop, do you see this created being, do you see how it resembles the Creator? Should we not cast ourselves upon him, caress him, and weep over him with love? Should we not give him a thousand, thousand blessings? Why so? O Theotimus, it is for love of God who made us in his own image and likeness and therefore capable of sharing in his goodness in grace and glory.

⁴ *On the Love of God*, Tan Books & Pub. Inc., 1975, pp. 170-171.

FRI

01.25.2019

A Reading about the Vocation of St. Paul, from a book by Lucien Cerfaux.⁵

In terms of today, Paul passed from the Jewish religion to Christianity. He is the first of the great "converts" who distinguish the pages of Christian history and provide the apologists with proof of the supremacy of our religion. Yet he himself would not have used the term "conversion" if this implied abandoning one religion for another. For him Christianity was not a new religion, distinct from Judaism. If it had been suggested to Paul that he was no longer a Jew, he would not have understood what was meant. The many protests in the epistles do not apply to the past: Paul is and continues to be Hebrew and Jew, in race and religion....

We can state definitely that St Paul interprets the event which took place on the road to Damascus as a call from God, a vocation to a mission which ranks him with the prophets of the Old Testament. Like the prophets, he has been granted a vision; like them, he has been given a mission, and like them too, he is constrained to answer the calls: his human resolve is endowed by grace to such an extent that it is God himself who carries out the work with which the Apostle is entrusted.

The book of Acts confirms these conclusions. Paul is the chosen instrument to "carry" the name of Christ, that is, to bear witness, in the midst of persecution, before kings, nations and Israel (Acts 9:15). The three accounts of the vision at Damascus agree with the Epistle to the Galatians; Paul changed abruptly from being an active persecutor of the church and submitted himself to the orders transmitted by Christ. The last account describes the mission which was entrusted to him: "I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the gentiles - to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:16-18). Christ's words in the third account, "It hurts you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14), compare the Apostle to an ox which its owner leads when and where he will. Paul intimates, a few verses later, that he has been given a divine command. Thus Luke, too, thought that the vision of Damascus was not the kind of vision manifested to converts but that it was similar to those by which God

⁵Lucien Cerfaux, The Christian in the Theology of St Paul. Herder and Herder, NY 1967. p81f.

transmitted his orders to the prophets. The idea of conversion is, in any case, excluded by Luke when he classes Christianity among the Jewish "sects". The sects are branches of "orthodox" Judaism.

There are two distinct aspects of his vocation. The first concerns salvation only: the chosen are destined for the messianic era; they are called children of God, they receive the messianic graces. The summons to the messianic feast was known to the rabbis from the first century and was used by Jesus. A second series of texts reserves the call to outstanding leaders in the Old Testament such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the prophets, who were predestined before their birth and "called" at the chosen moment by God. When he calls someone by name it is to entrust that one with a mission.

St Paul is called as the bearer of a mission. He is ranked on the same level as the spiritual leaders of Israel and shares their privileges. His mission is addressed to the gentiles, to whom he will transmit the call to the messianic graces.

SAT 01.26.2019

The beginnings of the Cistercian Order: a reading from the *Exordium Parvum*.⁶

We Cistercians, the first founders of this Church, in this document hereby relate to our successors how this Monastery and its way of life took its beginning according to the Laws of Holy Mother the Church; by what authority it began, and also by what persons and at what times; so that by the telling of the plain and unadulterated truth, they may be moved to a deep love for this Monastery and for the observance of the Holy Rule of St. Benedict which was begun in it by us through the Grace of God; and that they might pray for us who have borne the heat and the burden of the day without losing courage; that they might labor with great fervor in the straight and narrow way which the Rule describes, even unto complete union with God, when, having shed the garments of this flesh, they might happily rest in eternal peace.

In the year 1098, Robert of blessed memory, the first Abbot of the Church of Molesme founded in the Diocese of Langre, together with some of the brethren from the same Monastery, came to the venerable Hugh, who was at that time the Legate of the Holy See and the Archbishop of the Church of Lyons, stating that they desired to live their life under the guidance of the Holy Rule of Father Benedict, and that in order that they might follow out these designs with greater freedom and security, they earnestly entreated him that he would bless and endorse their project with his Apostolic Authority. The Legate was happily pleased with their desire, and he laid the foundation of their beginnings by his Letter.

After these affairs, the Abbot (Robert) and those who sided with him returned to Molesme and chose from that community of brethren those who wished to associate with themselves, brothers who had made their vows according to the Rule; so that between those who had spoken to the Legate at Lyons and those who had been chosen from the Monastery, there were twenty-one monks. Accompanied by such a troop, they made their way in all haste to the desert which was called Citeaux. This place was situated in the Diocese of Chalons-sur-Saone. Because of the thickness of the woods and undergrowth, it was very rarely visited by people and it was inhabited by nothing but wild animals. When they arrived there, the men of God immediately conceived a great and holy reverence for the place, for the more contemptible and inaccessible it was to the

⁶ translation by a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani.

people of the world, the more they considered it fit for their life. This was the very reason for which they had come there. Far away and hidden by the density of trees and undergrowth, they began to construct a monastery there with the help of the Bishop of Chalons-sur-Saone and the consent of the one who owned the property. For these men, while they were still at Molesme, inspired by the grace of God, had frequently spoken among themselves about the transgressions of the Rule of Blessed Benedict, Father of Monks. They had lamented and grown sad in spirit, seeing that both they and the rest of the monks who had promised by their Solemn Profession that they would observe this Rule, kept that promise to a very small degree. On account of this, by the authority of the Holy See, they came to this solitude in order that they might fulfill their profession by the observance of the Holy Rule. Then Lord Odo, the Duke of Burgandy, having been delighted by their holy fervor, and having been approached by the letters of the Legate (Hugh) of the Holy Roman Church, completed with his own resources the wooden monastery which they had begun, and he daily provided for them in all their needs and assisted them abundantly with grants of land and cattle.