

4. SCRIPTURE AND THE WORD OF GOD

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“This is what the LORD says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.” So they obeyed the word of the LORD and went home again, as the LORD had ordered. (1 Kings 12:24)

“Therefore this is what the Lord, the LORD God Almighty, says: “There will be wailing in all the streets and cries of anguish in every public square. The farmers will be summoned to weep and the mourners to wail”. (Amos 5:16)

1. Over 2500 times in Scripture we find sentences which are attributed directly to God, which are supposed to be ‘words of God’, to report exactly what God says.
2. Does this mean that Scripture is the “Word of God”?
3. We also have this declaration at the beginning of the Gospel of John
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1.1)
 - 3.1. “Beginning” here means “from all eternity” and “before the creation of the world” – that is before there was any human being God could talk to, before any Scripture was written.
 - 3.2. More importantly we are told that “the Word *was* God”.
 - 3.3. Christian theological tradition has understood this statement as meaning that when God speaks
 - i. he does not only conveys an idea, a notion, a content
 - ii. but he *communicates, gives himself*.
4. This invites us to make a distinction between *Scripture* and the *Word of God*
 - 4.1. Scripture is a book which says things about God and attributes sayings to God.
 - 4.2. The Word of God is ‘God himself talking’, not just a long time ago, but *now*
 - 4.3. Theologians say that the Word of God is *Dei loquentis persona*, the “Person of God speaking” now.
 - 4.4. Communicating, giving himself is not just something that God says or does, but who God is – “The Word *was* God”, says John.
5. Making a distinction between Scripture and the Word of God
 - 5.1. is not a way of diminishing the importance or the authority of Scripture
 - 5.2. but of stating that “Revelation”, that is the way God makes himself known and gives himself to us, although involving Scripture, is something much greater.
6. The Prologue of John adds that
“The Word was made flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14)

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- 6.1. God had spoken through the prophets for a long time before the birth of Christ: if words, spoken or written, had been enough to make him known, there would have been no need for God 'to become flesh'.
- 6.2. The reality is that words written or spoken are not enough. For God to make himself known a greater range of "channels" is necessary, so to speak. As we read in the letter to the Hebrews:

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son [...]. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word". (Hebrews 1:1)
7. This is what is meant by this sentence at the beginning of the 1 John:

"That which was from the beginning, which **we have heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have **looked at** and our hands have **touched**—this we **proclaim** concerning the Word of life [...]. We **proclaim** to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have **fellowship** with us. And our **fellowship** is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete". (1 John 1:1-4)

 - 7.1. The disciples know that what they have to hand over is not just Jesus' words or teaching, but *fellowship* with him – it is a way of living with God.
8. Jesus never wrote anything. Even if words are not the whole of God's revelation, it would not have hurt if he left us some of his own writings. Instead, what he did was
 - 8.1. Gather a group of disciples whom he called friends so that they would *live* with him.
 - 8.2. Start a 'fellowship' with them.
 - 8.3. Then he sent them to the whole world to communicate his teaching *by* extending his fellowship.
9. Indeed, his instructions to the disciples before his Ascension were

"Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19)

"Go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19f).

 - 9.1. We have access to the way God communicates himself to us (the 'word' of God, or his 'revelation') by
 - i. Becoming members of a community (baptism)
 - ii. Eating together in remembrance of Jesus (Eucharist)
 - iii. Being taught – that is through Scripture read and proclaimed.
10. In Matthew's sentence however there is another element which is often overlooked and is the key to understanding revelation, namely the final sentence:

"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19f).

 - 10.1. The fellowship, the teaching, the eating together are ways through which we are invited to repeat the same experience the disciples had when they lived with Jesus
 - 10.2. That is meeting Jesus himself, listening to him speaking to us now, let him touch us now.

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11. Let us take another viewpoint and ask ourselves on our end
 - 11.1. How do we know who God is?
 - 11.2. How do we make sure we know what his will is?
 - 11.3. How do we communicate with him?
 12. Some of the ways in which Christians have answered to these questions:
 - 12.1. “*Sola Scriptura*”: we only need Scripture, taken as literally as possible.
 - 12.2. We need Scripture interpreted by *tradition* that is those who are authorized to speak in God’s name and authorized to give the right interpretation of the Bible.
 - 12.3. We need a special inner *experience* of God.
 13. These options have some truth in them but are incomplete.
 - 13.1. Those who say that *the only authority is Scripture* are not aware or refuse to acknowledge that they use ways of interpreting it like everyone else (even only by choosing which passage to us to interpret others).
 - 13.2. Those who claim to have authority to interpret Scripture for others in the name of *tradition* often change the living revelation of God into a series of statements or propositions – they are not aware or do not acknowledge that in this way they claim to ‘control’ the revelation of God.
 - 13.3. Those who think that some inner experience is the way God makes himself known risk mistaking ‘revelation’ with ‘feelings’. Feelings too need to be interpreted – they can be induced by many factors – they can be real but also deceive us.
 14. When we talk about ‘revelation’ or ‘the Word of God’ we refer to the whole of God’s activity to make himself known to us, share his life with us, give us a new destiny, transform the whole of history and of our lives.
 15. How do we come to faith? How is our faith strengthened? How do we grow in our knowledge and love for God? There are many ways:
 - 15.1. The celebration of the Eucharist (liturgy) where we experience *fellowship*, hear Scripture, interpret it (homily), and ‘remember’ Jesus by eating together at his table.
 - 15.2. The lives of other people, especially those we call ‘saints’. Many people meet God through other people in whose lives, example, words they see lives transformed by faith and love.
 - 15.3. The beauty of nature, when we realize that it is ‘creation’ that is a gift from God, or better, one of the ways in which God gives himself to us.
 16. Of course, the reading and the meditation of Scripture give us the key to recognize God in everything else. It is through Scripture that
 - 16.1. Jesus tells us “Do this in memory of me”
 - 16.2. We hear what Jesus teaches and does.
 - 16.3. Are taught the “the heavens tell the glory of God” and that God created the world.
 17. But the way God speaks to us now, gives himself to us now – the way we meet him is through all these different “channels” together: liturgy, church, saints, nature, Scripture.
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18. But there is yet another reason why it is essential to keep the distinction between the written word of Scripture and the Living Word of God.

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19. In Christianity nothing works ‘automatically’
 - 19.1. It is not enough to read Scripture to know God or his will
 - 19.2. Going to church does not make me a Christian *per se*
 - 19.3. Baptism and the eucharist do not work magically
 - 19.4. Nobody can say with certainty “this is the will of God”
 - 19.5. In other words, nothing give us a ‘control’ over the action of God in the world.
 - 19.6. God is *free*.

20. ‘Free’ does not mean ‘capricious’. On the contrary, one thing we know about God is that he is faithful.

21. The only way Scripture, the Church, sacraments, prayer work is through *faith and love* – that is through trust in God, adhesion of the heart.
 - 21.1. Which does not mean that if we love God and the others we know God but on the contrary that
 - 21.2. We can be sure that God has made himself known to us because we discover that somehow, however imperfectly, we have become capable of love.
 - 1If I speak in the tongues a of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, b but do not have love, I gain nothing.
 - 4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
 - 5It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
 - 8Love never fails.
 - Where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13)