

Biblical Commentaries with text

Jerome's Biblical Commentary

Haydock's Catholic Bible Commentary, 1859 Ed.

Barclay's Daily Study Bible Series (not Catholic)

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I

Neh 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10

Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly,
which consisted of men, women,
and those children old enough to understand.

Standing at one end of the open place that was before the Water Gate,
he read out of the book from daybreak till midday,
in the presence of the men, the women,
and those children old enough to understand;
and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform
that had been made for the occasion.

He opened the scroll
so that all the people might see it
— for he was standing higher up than any of the people —;
and, as he opened it, all the people rose.

Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God,
and all the people, their hands raised high, answered,
“Amen, amen!”

Then they bowed down and prostrated themselves before the LORD,
their faces to the ground.

Ezra read plainly from the book of the law of God,
interpreting it so that all could understand what was read.

Then Nehemiah, that is, His Excellency, and Ezra the priest-scribe
and the Levites who were instructing the people

said to all the people:

“Today is holy to the LORD your God.

Do not be sad, and do not weep”—

for all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law.

He said further: “Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks,

and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared;

for today is holy to our LORD.

Do not be saddened this day,

for rejoicing in the LORD must be your strength!”

Jerome’s Biblical Commentary

108 (IV) Promulgation of Ezra’s Torah (Neh 8:1-9:38). Ezra’s assembly (a continuation from Ezr 8:35? or 10:44?) is here inserted as if his first ministry had been abruptly broken off and then his second begun after Nehemiah’s first. Even in this assumption, there is no reason to think that he returned to Babylon because Nehemiah did. A. Fernández (*Bib* 2 [1961] 431) leaves unexplained why Ezra is not mentioned, although he accompanied Nehemiah back from Babylon. In any case, the apparent continuity assured in such hypotheses is troubled by so many loose ends that most experts think Neh 8:1 is a continuation of Ezr 10:44, and that it is equally compatible with a first arrival after Nehemiah, even 40 years later. But if we once admit that Neh 8-9 is notoriously displaced, there is no reason why its original situation must have been after Ezr 10:44 (as in *1 Esdras* 9:37). Thus we consider it to fit better after Ezr 8:35, as there explained (maintained also by Torrey, *Ezra Studies*, 253; Ahleman, ZAW 59, 85). Not indeed impossible, but less plausible, is the supposition that when confronted with abuses, Ezra would have adopted *ad hoc* measures while pocketing his sweeping new codification of Mosaic Law. Doubtless the abuses were attacked after his law was promulgated, and possibly long after the violent measures of Neh 13:23 to cope with similar abuses.

Many experts regard 7:73 or its last half, as the preface of 8:1. There is just as good reason for regarding the whole of ch. 7 as a parenthesis between the “assembly of the few Jerusalemites in their towns” of vv. 4-5, and the summoning of “all the children of Israel in their towns” in vv. 73-74. But the “seventh month” is in a sequence totally unknown to us; it is certainly not envisioned as the next after Elul of 6:15, which was, in fact, a sixth month by the Nisan-based calendar, but twelfth on the basis of the New Year beginning in the seventh month, Tishri (October). There is a similar Jerusalem assembly in a “seventh month” immediately after the identical list of Ezra 2:70; therefore, we must conclude that it is a colophon to the list. Doubtless, the rearrangement of the text resulted in part from overhasty identification among various seventh-month assemblies.

109 **8:9.** The pairing of the two otherwise unrelated leaders affords the chief ground for Albright to date Ezra's ministry in 428 by altering the text of Ezr 7:7. But without such alteration, the present verse too can be upheld on the supposition that Nehemiah, in his twenties in 445, had become during Ezra's ministry in 398 an elder statesman in his seventies. "Governor" is here *tirš t'*, not *pe ḥ* as in Nehemiah's own memoirs; we hold both to be prestige titles of popular acclaim, outlasting the occasion on which they were originally conferred.

10. The clergy make a rather heavy-handed effort to cheer up a mob dismayed by the severity of Ezra's Pentateuch.**14.** (= Lv 23:42.)**15.** The general sense of Lv 23:40 is quoted loosely here.**16.** Galling's claim that we have here one of the Chronicler's famed "theological conclusion" insertions is no less plausible than the view that Hezekiah's passover is an imitation of Josiah's in 2 Chr 30:13; 35:1. This Feast of Booths (Feast of Tabernacles, really; Jn 7:2) has the reading of the Law as one of its characteristics, properly for the seventh year as prescribed in Dt 7:10, but suitably in any year after long desuetude. This Ezra activity of Neh 8-10 is, in fact, dated to the Sabbath year 430 by F. Mezzacasa (*Revista Bíblica* 23 [1961] 94).

110 **9:1.** The Yom Kippur rite of Lv 16:29, or at least a ceremony in its spirit, may well be seen here as transferred from the 10th to the 24th day of the seventh month, because in Neh 8:9 either there had not yet been time to promulgate the Torah, or excessive melancholy had endangered its acceptance. Thus, there is no reason for insertion of Ezr 9-10 here between Neh 8 and 9 (Torrey; Rudolph). Also unlikely is the linking of Neh 9 with Nehemiah's own reforms by Sellin, and M. Rehm (*BZ* 1 [1957] 59).**2.** It is not really separatist to exclude others from our acknowledgment of faults whose guilt we do not wish to imply extends to them. Ahlemann (ZAW 59, 88) puts Neh 9:1-5 after Ezr 10:15 "upon this 'fast.'" **6.** Ezra's long rhythmic prayer is intensely deuteronomistic, as the Chronicler generally is, according to Von Rad (*Das Geschichtsbild des chronistischen Werkes* (Stuttgart, 1930). This does not exclude that the prayer originated as a litany composed for a day of fasting and prayer during the subsistence of the northern kingdom, as set forth by A. Welch (ZAW 47 [1929] 136). It is also like Pss 78, 105, and 106 and may be taken as a summary of the Torah in the minds of the listeners to whom it had been read aloud during these days. The summary shows a typical preacher's unconcern for adapting sacrosanct formulas to current situations: the menace and slavery of Assyria (v. 32) and Egypt seem to be more present realities than the freedom and revival fostered by the Persian regime. This prayer, although not preserved as such in the post-Ezra synagogue, influenced strongly the structure of its liturgy (cf. L. Liebreich, *HUCA* 32 [1961] 228; *HUCA* 20 [1947] 21n.).**17.** *in their stubbornness:* The MT reads *b̄mīry m*, but the LXX has *b̄mi rayim*, "in Egypt."

BZ *Biblische Zeitschrift*

ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual*

MT *Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)*

LXX *Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)*

Haydock's Catholic Bible Commentary, 1859 Ed.

Ver. 1. *Were in*, or had been at home, (Haydock) after the dedication of the walls, (Calmet) till they assembled (Haydock) at the beginning of the civil year, on the feast of trumpets, which was a day of rejoicing, (ver. 9., and Numbers xxix. 1.) the festival of the new moon. (Riberia) (Menochius) --- *Gate*, near the temple, chap. iii. 26. (Calmet) --- *Moses*; the pentateuch. (Menochius) --- He is not desired to restore what was lost. (Tirinus) --- As many copies had been preserved by the prophets, which Esdras revised. (Worthington)

Ver. 2. *Women*, who were in a separate place. --- *Understand*, being come to the use of reason. (Calmet)

Ver. 3. *In plainly*. Protestants, "therein, before the street." (Haydock) --- Esdras probably read select pieces from Leviticus, &c., but principally from Deuteronomy. (Menochius)

Ver. 4. *Step*. Hebrew, "wooden tower." (Calmet) --- Protestants, "pulpit," (Haydock) made in the form of a cup," (Calmet) like the *cior*, or tribune of Solomon, 2 Paralipomenon vi. 13. --- *Mosollam*. We should imagine that this was not the person who had given his daughter in marriage to the son of Tobias, chap. vi. 18. (Haydock)

Ver. 5. *Stood*, out of respect, as we do while the gospel is read. See Numbers xxiii. 18. (Calmet)

Ver. 8. *Understood*, by those who were near enough, and were skilled in Hebrew, (Haydock) though many began to forget that language; (chap. xiii. 24.) and for their benefit, an explanation was given in Chaldean, (ver. 9.; Calmet) or Syriac, the vulgar tongue after the captivity. Pure Hebrew was still retained in the public liturgy. (Tirinus) --- Thus the Catholic Church retains the use of the language first used in the conversion of the respective people, whether Greek, Latin, &c., while she takes care to explain to the people what is necessary, in their own language. Any change might be attended with more serious inconveniences than benefit. Our Saviour never blamed this practice, which subsisted among the Jews in his time, no more than that which obliged the people to keep *without*, while the priest offered incense, &c., Luke i. 10, 21. --- *And plainly*. Protestants, "and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading," as much as they were able, though many would, no doubt, still find difficulties, as we at present. (Haydock)

Ver. 9. *Interpreted*. St. Jerome renders the same term, *made silence*, (ver. 7.) as it was the office of the Levites to keep the people in awe, ver. 11. (Calmet) --- Protestants, "taught." They had also (Haydock) to instruct, 1 Esdras viii. 16. (Menochius) --- *Weep*. The Jews had only one feast for mourning, the day of expiation. On all the rest, a holy joy was commended. For the same reason, the Church does not fast on such days. (Calmet) --- *Law*, reflecting on the threats denounced against transgressors, which they had so lately witnessed. (Tirinus)

Ver. 10. *Wine*. Hebrew and Septuagint, "things." Syriac and Arabic have simply, "drink." --- *Portions*. The Greeks styled them, *Greek: merides*; and the Latins, *sportulae*. The custom prevailed not only among the Jews, (Esther ix. 19.) but also among Christians and pagans. Moses frequently exhorts the people to invite the poor; (Deuteronomy xvi. 14.) and St. Paul blames the

rich Corinthians, for giving no part of their feast to them, 1 Corinthians xi. 21. --- *Strength*. By this holy joy, we shall be encouraged to perform all our duties. (Calmet) --- Septuagint, "Be not downcast, because he (the Lord) is our strength." (Haydock)

Ver. 13. *Law*, concerning some difficulties, particularly the manner of keeping the ensuing festival. (Tirinus) --- Thus Christ explained to his disciples what he had spoken to the people. (Haydock)

Ver. 15. *And that*. This is not expressed in the law, though it was probably practised. (Calmet) --- Some translate, "And they proclaimed," &c. (Vatable) --- *Beautiful*. Literally, "very or most beautiful." (Haydock) --- Hebrew, "of oily wood." Septuagint, "cypress." Syriac, "nut-tree." Others understand the pine, (Pagnin) balm, (Mariana) citron, (Haydock) or any other species of branches, which might then be used. (Calmet) (Tirinus)

Ver. 16. *House*, which was flat. (Haydock) --- The tents might be erected in any place; in the open air. (Tirinus)

Ver. 17. *Done so*, with such alacrity, though they had displayed more magnificence. See the meaning of similar expressions, 4 Kings xxiii. 22. (Calmet)

Ver. 18. *Assembly*. Literally, "the collect." (Haydock) --- Hebrew, "the day of retention;" the people being kept at the temple. (Calmet) --- Septuagint, "the dismission;" as they were afterwards permitted to depart. (Haydock) --- See Leviticus xxiii. 26. --- It was probably on this occasion, that the sacred fire was found again; (2 Machabees i. 18.; Calmet) and also the ark, the tabernacle, and the altar of incense, which had been hidden by Jeremias, 2 Machabees ii. 4. (Torniel, the year of the world 3610.) (Cano, &c.) --- But this is not so certain. (Haydock) (Calmet, Diss.)

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The chapter is most important, however, for its picture of Israel at worship. The buzz of excitement at finishing the walls has hardly had time to settle by the first day of the seventh month (since the twenty-fifth of Elul—the sixth month—was only four or five days earlier, cf. 6:15). We might expect a *natural* readiness to praise God on this occasion, therefore. It is interesting to find, then, that behind the thanksgiving lies, not the mere fact of the new walls, but a reading of the law (vv. 1ff.). Israel rejoices in response to the word of God. The building of the walls is set in its context. The enemies of Israel have been thwarted not because of an isolated, once-for-all action of God—that could always be interpreted as a fluke—but because the God of Israel is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

A number of points can be made here. We confine ourselves initially to observing what this relationship between the word and thanksgiving says about *worship*. We have in these verses one of the most graphic portrayals of Israel at worship in the Old Testament. There is in the first place a tremendous solemnity about it. Ezra stands on a wooden *pulpit*. (The word actually

means “tower”. It looks as if there was no ready-made word for pulpit.) We are close here to the beginnings of the Jewish synagogue, which may have originated in the Babylonian exile, where the law was regularly read from a raised platform, and where places were reserved for the most eminent synagogue members close to the spot where the law was read (cf. v. 4b). The effect was to show that those who wielded authority in the community were themselves under the authority of God, and that therefore it was the word of God that regulated the whole life of the community. We can almost hear the hush as Ezra opens the book and the people stand (v. 5). Something of this has been preserved in those church traditions where the Bible is carried solemnly to the pulpit before the minister arrives, so that the whole congregation places itself symbolically under the authority of the word.

Ezra’s congregation showed no reluctance, it seems, to listen to the long sermon (v. 3)! Rather, there is great concern that as many as possible should hear and understand. “All who could hear with understanding” (v. 2) probably refers to children who are old enough to “stay with the grown-ups for the sermon”, as we might put it. But even among those who were mature enough to understand, Ezra did not take understanding for granted. The activity of the Levites in verses 7–8 could either be translation—on the supposition that the people’s language had been influenced by the Aramaic of Babylon and perhaps other dialects—or simply, and most probably, elucidation of things which may have been difficult to grasp. The law-reading thus entirely corresponds to what is laid down in Deut. 31:9–13, where provision is made for reading the law every seven years at the Feast of Booths. There, as here, we find a concern that those who hear may really understand and not just pay lip-service. For on their understanding depends the reality of their experience of God, and the likelihood of its being transmitted to the next generation. Ezra may have been stepping into the seven-year cycle. The tone of the chapter makes it more likely, however, that he is re-initiating something that had lapsed.

This need for understanding the word of God, and the fact that it cannot be taken for granted, has been recognized by the Church in its most active periods. Creeds and hymns, passion plays and the lowly jingle have all played their part. In the 20th century a whole world of communications aids lies at our feet. We may not know how the Levites “gave the sense” (v. 8—they may have done it in an *ad hoc* way as questions arose); but if it is our real concern to pass on a *knowledge* of the Christian faith that goes beyond a meagre minimum, we will refuse to make a “sacred cow” of any inherited method and tap all the expertise of the day in order that we might know more of our God.

(iii)

The setting was solemn, but it was evidently not inhibiting. The people cried “Amen”, raised their hands in prayer and prostrated themselves in adoration. Certain modern church movements have sought to recapture something of this self-expression. For others it seems to be, well, overdoing it a bit! Of course, the preferences of ancient Israel cannot be made the measure of acceptable style in modern worship. Our spiritual forefathers were informed by their culture, as we are. For the Hebrew, emotion inevitably expressed itself in physical attitude. This was because the self was conceived as a unity to a far greater extent than in most modern western culture, where there has been, in many reaches of the Church, a reaction against externalism in religion and a concentration upon inwardness. This is well and good apart from the constant

danger that, when outward expression of emotion has been abolished, the vaunted inner passion can be well gone before anyone—including the person concerned—has noticed! The point that is enduring here is that the reading of the word produced a response which was *heartfelt* and which was *evident to and shared by the congregation*. Whatever our cultural or temperamental prejudices, we must find ways, as congregations of God’s people, not only of hearing, but of knowing that we have heard *together*. For the experience of togetherness is *part* of hearing, and that way lies increased faith.

A TIME TO DANCE

Nehemiah 8:9–18

⁹And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” ¹¹So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” ¹²And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

¹³On the second day the heads of fathers’ houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the law. ¹⁴And they found it written in the law that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, ¹⁵and that they should publish and proclaim in all their towns and in Jerusalem, “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.” ¹⁶So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths; for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. ¹⁸And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the book of the law of God. They kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.

(i)

The reading of the law, as we have seen (vv. 1–8), produced a profound emotional response. There was clearly a strong element of penitence in this, for we are told that “the people wept” (v. 9). Ezra and Nehemiah, however, believe that the appropriate first response to the rebuilding of the walls is joy. They therefore send the people off to feast and make merry, drawing the underprivileged into their festivities (vv. 10–12). If there is to be a time of rigorous self-examination (chs. 9, 10) let it first be remembered that God is good, and means it well with Israel.

The people’s initial tearful response, followed by the command to rejoice and to share with the poor, raises the question of what was read to the people that produced such reactions. The

words of Ezra and Nehemiah, backed up by the Levites, in verses 9–12, suggest that there were two elements which made an impression. (This is apart from the law's many commands, which had evidently produced a sense of sin and therefore weeping. Since Ezra and Nehemiah postpone consideration of these we shall do likewise!)

The first element in the law-reading was evidently God's desire to bless Israel. This might have stemmed from Gen. 1, with its declaration of God's intent to bless the world he has made (vv. 28–31). With respect to Israel in particular, it will have emerged most strongly from Deuteronomy, with its descriptions of the wealth of the promised land (8:7–10). Perhaps it was because they had squandered all this that the people first wept. Now, however, they are directed to go and eat the fat of the land (v. 10). (There is some confirmation here that the famine of 5:3, as we noted there, did not occur at the time of the construction of the walls.) This is in close conformity to the pattern in Deuteronomy where worship is conceived as a joyful participation in the plenty which God has provided (Deut. 12:7; 14:24–26).

This note of joy is sustained for a considerable period. The study to which the people give themselves on the second day (v. 13) issues in the Feast of Booths, which begins some weeks later and which is also characterized by rejoicing (v. 17b). The dwelling in booths was symbolic on more than one level. We have noticed already that it could be a sobering reminder of impermanence against a *false* trust in the walls. Yet it is also appropriate as a celebration of the wall-building because the success of this has marked a final stage of the “new exodus” similar to that first exodus which gave the feast its original meaning (Lev. 23:42–43). Rejoicing like this in response to God's goodness shows that the people of the Old Testament did not fall into the trap, which has not been universally avoided, of making all worship uniformly sombre. Such would be an insult to the God who desires above all joy in his creatures. The joy of Israel in her feast will have had more of that uninhibitedness we have noticed already (cf. David's abandon after bringing the ark to Jerusalem; 2 Sam. 6:12b–15). And it cannot be overstressed that this is *not* self-indulgence. Rather, like the more solemn response of verse 6, it has a function for faith, expressed in the assurance that “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (v. 10). It is vital for Israel to experience and affirm *together* the goodness of God. Thanksgiving to God for what he has done for a *people* cannot be dissipated into a thousand separate and unrelated responses. It is when the voice of thanksgiving is unanimous that it takes on an authentic ring and becomes *strength*, the strength of a sure faith.

Let it be stressed, however, that it is *joy in God*. What we witness here is not the tacking on of vacuous festivity to an act of worship which is itself kept drab. The rejoicing *is* worship. What must be cultivated is a rejoicing together *in the goodness of God*.

(ii)

The second element in the law-reading which has conditioned the worship of the people is the call to neighbour-love. The good things of the land belong *as of right* to the poor, and their interest in it is guarded by the command to those who have to share with those who have not. It is no coincidence that the call to rejoice is accompanied by such a command. Exactly the same association of ideas occurs in those passages in Deuteronomy which we have already found to have exerted an influence on the present chapter (Deut. 12:12; 14:29). The right of the poor is an

implication of the brotherhood of Israel, an idea which we saw to underlie chapter 5. Indeed there *should* be no poor at all (Deut. 15:4). The point is plain. There can be no conscientious exultation in the plenty of God's world while brothers and sisters go needy. It is hard to put limits to the radicalness of this principle for a western world that is shielded from want but knows all too well that much of the world is dying from it. "Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5).

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 19:8, 9, 10, 15

(cf John 6:63c)

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The law of the LORD is perfect,

refreshing the soul;

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;

The command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye.

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;

The ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

Let the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart
find favor before you,

O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

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Ps 19. A hymn of praise, which unites two themes (perhaps originally separate Pss): 2-7, God's glory in the heavens; 8-15, the wonder of his Law. One may conveniently explain the connection in that the Law reveals God's will, while his glory is spoken throughout nature (cf. Pss 1, 8, 119).**2.** The beauty of the "heavens" is itself a hymn in praise of God.**3-5.** A development of how the "heavens declare." The CCD means that the praise is continuous, "day" and "night," and everywhere. But others (RSV, etc.) understand 3 to mean that no sound is audible. Then, paradoxically, the message is heard everywhere (v. 4), even though it is not voiced.**5-7.** The marvel of the "sun," which is merely God's handiwork. It is compared to a "groom" (coming forth from the "chamber" where the sun rests for the night) and to a soldier-giant, in its course.**8-10.** Praise of the Law: Each verse relates a characteristic, followed by a good effect. The Torah, as embodied in the Pentateuch, is the expression of God's will for Israel; the synonyms are "decree," "precepts," etc.**9.** *enlightening the eye:* Giving health and well-being.**12-15.** The conclusion is the author's personal reaction: loyalty to the Law, even if there are "unknown faults" (e.g., Lv 5:2-4; Ps 90:8). The Bible frequently refers to God's role in keeping man from sin (cf. Is 63:17; Jer 10:13; and the NT "Our Father" prayer).**15.** His very Ps is to be accepted as a sacrifice, obtaining God's "favor" (cf. Pss 104:34; 119:108). It is worth emphasizing that the attitude to the Law in this Ps is characterized by joy and appreciation (cf. Pss 1, 119).

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None

Barclay's Daily Study Bible Series (not Catholic)

THE WORD OF CREATION

Psalm 19:1–6

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

¹The heavens are telling the glory of God;

and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

²Day to day pours forth speech,

and night to night declares knowledge.

CCD Contraternity of Christian Doctrine translation of the Bible

RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible

NT New Testament

³There is no speech, nor are there words;

their voice is not heard;

⁴yet their voice goes out through all the earth,

and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,

and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens,

and its circuit to the end of them;

and there is nothing hid from its heat.

Poem I

The poem begins, as does Psalm 8, with the poet gazing at the heavens and wondering at the mystery of creation. Yet man does not see God by looking at the sky; what he sees is the *glory* of God. “No man can see God and live.” *Glory*, for OT man, was the outward “clothing” of God. It did not hide or cover his “being”, rather it *revealed* his actions. As the living God, he is always *doing*, creating, recreating, producing order out of the original chaos (Gen. 1:2), bringing light at each dawn out of the darkness of night, ever creating new species of animals, birds, insects, and so on. In fact the word *rakia* that we find at Gen. 1:6, and which is there translated by *firmament*, is found only twice again, here and at Dan. 12:3. Its use makes us wonder if the psalmist was writing a commentary on Gen. 1.

But to say that we *see* the glory of God in this poem is a reading into it by a modern, scientifically-minded person. The poem talks of *hearing* the glory of God. It declares that behind the whole majesty of nature there is *sound*, the sound of the Word of God. The whole creation, even without the use of *words*, sounds forth the divine Word; when put into Greek, this is the word *Logos* that we meet at John 1:1.

The RSV *ftn.* to verse 4 reminds us of the old translation we used to know in the AV, “Their line is gone out...” But the Hebrew word seems to employ a pun which we can perhaps convey

OT Old Testament.

RSV Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

ftn. Footnote to a verse in the RSV.

by saying that “cord” can also be spelt as “chord”. So we might even put it this way: “Their tune has gone out...”

But *Logos* can mean more than *word*. It can also mean *reason, meaning*. And so this poem is proclaiming that the heavenly bodies are not mere matter, to be understood merely as scientific phenomena. They shout to all who have ears to hear that behind them and their movements lies the *meaning* of the universe.

Joseph Addison’s well-known hymn, “The spacious firmament on high” expresses this well:

What though no real voice nor sound

Amidst their radiant orbs be found?

In reason’s ear they all rejoice,

And utter forth a glorious voice,

For ever singing, as they shine,

“The hand that made us is divine.”

The word *knowledge* in verse 2 may be translated, ponderously, by “observable scientific data”. It is in poetic parallelism with the word *speech* in the previous line. Thus the poet is saying that natural phenomena are means through which the *meaning* of the universe is expressed. And the *fn.* to verse 4, in saying that “their line goes out”, is declaring that each heavenly body must follow the prescribed route laid down by the Creator.

Then he pin-points the sun. In the Egypt of his day the Sun was the supreme god, and each Pharaoh was his incarnation on earth. But here the sun is no god. As G.K. Chesterton puts it, each morning God tells it: “Come on, get up”, and it does! Yet even in “Christendom” there are people who cannot believe this, and as part of their Yoga exercises, they turn and face the sun as the source of all life. But here, as our poet says, for the sun *God* sets a tent.

From the Akkadian period in Mesopotamia (2350–2150 B.C.) we possess cylinder seals showing the sun, all dressed up and gloriously appareled as a young hero, entering the earthly regions with a powerful leap from a gate between two mountains. Here our poet has liberated himself from such myths, and simply uses their imagery to display poetically the greatness of God.

THE WORD OF REDEMPTION

Psalm 19:7–14

AV Authorized, or King James, Version of the Bible.

⁷The law of the Lord is perfect,

reviving the soul;

the testimony of the Lord is sure,

making wise the simple;

⁸the precepts of the Lord are right,

rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is pure,

enlightening the eyes;

⁹the fear of the Lord is clean,

enduring for ever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true,

and righteous altogether.

¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold,

even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey

and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹Moreover by them is thy servant warned;

in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²But who can discern his errors?

Clear thou me from hidden faults.

¹³Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;

let them not have dominion over me!

Then I shall be blameless,

and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

be acceptable in thy sight,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Poem II

Poem I deals with what we today call *General Revelation*. God has revealed himself through the wonders of creation as he speaks the *Word* to all men everywhere. But Israel, as the Covenant People of God, is privileged to possess a *Special Word* that has been delivered to her alone. It is the *Torah*, the Law of Moses, as much of it as was available and complete by the poet's day. So now the poet adds a whole new psalm to the one he has inherited, to sing the praise of God's *Special Revelation*. The first poem is in praise of the Word of Creation. The second is in praise of the Word of Redemption.

The two poems that comprise Psalm 19 are perfectly paralleled. The Word that comes to Israel through the Law means nothing, its voice is not even heard, until faith opens it up to our human understanding. The sun has a path to travel daily; the Law, however, is my path, says the poet, one that has been given me by God. As Kant the philosopher put it: "The sky above us and the moral law within us witness to the same God." See how Paul, quoting this psalm, puts the two together at Rom. 10:17–18.

(1) The Law is *perfect*—of course, because it is the Word of God.

(2) It *revives the soul*, the *nephesh*, the whole of one's person, or better, "gives life" to it. The Word that we meet in Christ also declares, "I came that people might have life and have it more abundantly."

(3) *Testimony* means "meeting-place"; and so it refers to divine guidance or instruction within the Covenant. In his grace the all-wise God speaks at the level of the ordinary person.

(4) The *precepts* or proclamations of the Lord, those things he has charged us to do, are of course, right. Thus they are the kind of things that we rejoice to obey. Even the "Thou shalt nots" we are glad that God *said* as his Word, for we all need a bridle like a horse.

(5) The one basic commandment, which we find at Deut. 6:5 is *pure*, that is, unalloyed by containing impurities in the gold: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God..." Jesus confirmed this for us at Mark 12:29–30. *Enlightening the eyes* is another way of saying *reviving the soul*. Just give the lost wanderer even a little food and drink and the light will come back into his eyes. Such cannot be said about any of man's ethical systems in a secular society. None of them is *pure*, because none of them depends upon the fear of God. This is not understood by those educationalists who wish to put "ethics" into the school curriculum in place of "religious studies".

(6) As we have noted before, the OT has no word for "religion". Our poet's definition of true religion is this, then: it is living before God in a proper sense of *awe, reverence* and *obedience*—

and now he claims that that attitude belongs actually in eternity. Such honest *fear* is *clean*; that is to say, it is completely uncontaminated by our dirty human minds.

(7) The *ordinances*, of which there are many in the Torah, and these include the Ten Commandments, are the most desirable things in life—not the pursuit of wisdom, not heaping up riches, not owning the expensive gewgaws that money can buy. They do three things for him or her who is God's servant. (a) They *warn* us of the dangers of the way, or rather, as the word means, they *lighten it up* for us. (b) A servant expects payment. Just *doing* God's revealed will, however, is all the payment we need. As God had said so long ago to Abraham: "I am your exceeding great reward." (c) Being God's servant is your and my *personal response* to both types of revelation described in this double psalm, i.e. response to God's Order in Creation, and to his Order in Revelation.

THE BARRIER TO FAITH

Psalm 19:7–14 (*cont'd*)

The plain man, who has thought deeply about the mysteries of God's universe, that is to say, about the whole issue raised in Poem I, can say to himself—Yes, but what about earthquakes, and diseases, and death itself? How do these proclaim God's handiwork? Is his creation then not yet complete? And where do I fit into it all?

It is when we come, by grace, to ruminate on what Poem II deals with that we make the one discovery necessary to help us understand the Word of God. Till now our worshipper has not noticed that, as a sinner, he has erected a barrier between himself and the Word, so that he does not even possess the ears necessary to hear. It is the Word of Redemption, therefore, which alone can help him to faith. He himself cannot *discern his own errors*, because his *faults* are *hidden* even from his own eyes. As Robert Burns the poet puts it:

O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us To see oursels as others see us!

—not to speak of how God sees us!

The two classifications of sin mentioned here come from the Law of Moses. (a) *Hidden faults* are those "sins of inadvertence" that could be dealt with by the sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus. (b) But *presumptuous sins*, what are called in Hebrew *sins with a high hand*, could not be. You can see the aggressor with his knife in the air ready to strike! And you can see the lustful voluptuary pursuing his prey in order to rape her or to "uncover the nakedness" (as Leviticus puts it) of his own little daughter! Murder and adultery were the two particular sins that excluded a person from obtaining forgiveness through sacrifice—the very two sins that David committed, as Nathan his court chaplain had to point out to him. But here both kinds of sin are covered by the mercy and grace of God!

Since it is our sin that prevents us from hearing both the music of the spheres and the *honey-sweet* words of God's commandments, it is only God himself who can help us out of our

impasse. He does so by taking us as we are, and forgiving our sin. Only *then*, says the psalmist, *shall I be blameless* and, by implication, able to hear the Word of life.

A great preacher came to the end of his days. When asked, supposing he could have his time over again, would he preach any differently from what he had done, he replied: "I would keep coming back much more often to the forgiveness of sins."

Chorus. The words at verse 14 are often made part of our liturgy today, for they are the response of each individual *me* and *my heart* to the profound revelation made in this double psalm. For surely, all speculation about the nature and revelation of God's love ends here! C.S. Lewis, the great critic of English poetry and style, once wrote: "This is the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world."

Reading II

[1 Cor 12:12-30 or 12:12-14, 27](#)

Brothers and sisters:

As a body is one though it has many parts,
and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body,
so also Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,
whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons,
and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many.

If a foot should say,

"Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,"
it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

Or if an ear should say,

"Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,"

it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

But as it is, God placed the parts,
each one of them, in the body as he intended.

If they were all one part, where would the body be?

But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you, “
nor again the head to the feet, “I do not need you.”
Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker
are all the more necessary,
and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable
we surround with greater honor,
and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety,
whereas our more presentable parts do not need this.
But God has so constructed the body
as to give greater honor to a part that is without it,
so that there may be no division in the body,
but that the parts may have the same concern for one another.
If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it;
if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.
Some people God has designated in the church
to be, first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers;
then, mighty deeds;
then gifts of healing, assistance, administration,
and varieties of tongues.
Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?
Do all work mighty deeds? Do all have gifts of healing?
Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

or

Brothers and sisters:
As a body is one though it has many parts,
and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body,
so also Christ.
For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,
whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons,
and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.
Now the body is not a single part, but many.
You are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.

Jerome’s Biblical Commentary

73 (c) ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS (12:1-14:40). Their test, value, and exercise. Genuine spiritual gifts are distinguished by their conformity to Christian faith (12:1-3). Diverse as they are in operation and manifestation, all the gifts come from the one divine source and are directed to the one aim of promoting the well-being of the Church (12:4-30). The relative value of the various gifts is to be estimated by their usefulness to the Church. Better, however, than all such gifts is

charity (ch. 13). The relative value of the gifts is illustrated by a comparison of prophecy and the gift of tongues. Practical rules are given for regulating the exercise of the gifts (ch. 14). See L. Cerfaux, *L'église des Corinthiens* 81-95.

74 (i) *The test of the gifts* (12:1-3). **1. spiritual:** This adjective is probably neuter (14:1), “the spiritual gifts.” **2.** A reference to the unbridled religious enthusiasm and emotionalism so highly esteemed by pagans, such as the prophetic trance of the Pythia of Delphi and of the priestesses of Dodona, and the orgiastic frenzies of the devotees of Dionysos (see K. Prümm, *Religionsgeschichtliches Handbuch für den Raum der altchristlichen Umwelt* [Rome, 1954] 230f., 248f.). **3.** Conformity to the faith is the test of a genuine charismatic. No one can confess the divinity and sovereignty of Jesus unless he is enlightened and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

75 (ii) *Many gifts but one giver* (12:4-31). **4. gifts:** Paul’s use of the term **charismata** is wider than the technical theological use of it today. It embraced for him all graces given primarily for the benefit of the Church: the gifts of administration and of assistance to the neighbor, as well as the extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit in miracles, tongues, etc. **5.** There are many spiritual gifts, but all come from the one divine source, the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father. The terms “gifts,” “ministries,” and “operations” designate the spiritual gifts according to different aspects that permit their appropriation to the Spirit, Lord, and Father. As *gratiae gratis datae*, the “gifts” are attributed by appropriation to the Holy Spirit, who is himself *the Gift* sent by the Lord Jesus and the Father. As “ministries” or “services,” the gifts are attributed to the Lord Jesus, who was sent as the Son in the Incarnation to minister and serve. As “activities” or “operations,” the gifts are attributed to God the Father (**ho theos**), the source of all being and activity.

76 **7. the common goo:d** One in source, all the gifts manifesting the Spirit’s presence have one purpose, the “common good.” The Gk word for this concept is **to sympheron**, which denotes what is advantageous; it connotes the “utility” these gifts have for the building up or “edification” of the Church, as the context shows. Paul now lists nine charisms, which may be arranged in three groups: (1) a discourse of wisdom, a discourse of knowledge, and faith (i.e., the confidence in God that moves mountains); (2) the gift of healing, miraculous powers, and prophecy; (3) the discernment of spirits, the gift of tongues, and the gift of interpreting tongues. All of these are directed to the welfare of the Church, just as the members of the human body exist for the good of the whole.

77 **12.** Christ is one, just as the human body is one, in spite of the diversity and number of its members. **13. baptized into one body:** Baptism incorporates the Christian into the risen, glorified body of Christ, so that the Church, the assembly of the baptized, is the manifestation and extension of the Lord’s body in this world. The Church is the body of Christ because it is composed of members who share in the life of the Risen Lord.

(See Ahern, B., *CBQ* 23 [1961] 199-209. Benoit, P., *RB* 63 [1956] 5-44. Cerfaux, L., *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul* [N.Y., 1959] 350-56. Robinson, J. A. T., *The Body* [SBT 5; London,

Gk Greek

CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly

1957].) **27-30.** The application of the analogy of the human body, just set forth in vv. 14-26. All the gifts, like the members of the human body, were given for the good of the whole Church. The “higher” gifts are those that contribute more to the Church’s welfare. Better than all the gifts is charity.

Haydock's Catholic Bible Commentary, 1859 Ed.

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1. *Concerning spiritual things.* In the apostle's time, the Christians in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, many times received those graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost, by which some of them *prophesied*, others wrought *miracles*, and cured diseases, others spoke *tongues*, and different languages: now some among the Corinthians made not a right use of these gifts, especially they who had the *gift of tongues*, and made use of it through vanity, rather than for the profit of others. (Witham)

Ver. 2. *You went to dumb idols.* He speaks to the Gentiles before their conversion, to put them in mind, how much happier they are by receiving the faith of Christ, and such graces and favours from God. (Witham)

Ver. 3. *No man, speaking by the Spirit of God, &c.* He tells them, if they see a person moved in an extraordinary manner, and say *anathema*, curse, or speak ill of Jesus, such an one cannot be moved by a good spirit. And *no man can say, the Lord Jesus*, that is, praise Christ as he ought, but by a good spirit. (Witham)

Ver. 4-7. *There are diversities of graces.* Literally, *divisions of graces*; but all from the *same spirit*, from the *same Lord*, from the *same God*: and all these gifts are designed, and to be made use of for the *profit* of the faithful. (Witham) --- St. Justin Martyr, St. Irenaeus, and Origen bear testimony, that these special gifts of the Holy Ghost were not unusual in their time. St. Paul, in order to curb the vanity of such as seemed to be a little puffed up with the gifts they had received, and likewise to comfort those who had received no such spiritual and extraordinary favours, wishes to teach both parties, that the same Holy Spirit distributes these graces according as they are more conducive to the welfare of his Church, and the glory of God. (Calmet)

Ver. 8, &c. *Word of wisdom*, which differs from that of *knowledge*, inasmuch as *wisdom* is a more eminent and sublime knowledge. These are numbered among the gifts of the Holy Ghost. (Isaias, chap. xi.) --- *To another faith*, by which, says St. Chrysostom,[1] is not here meant a belief of revealed truths, but an humble confidence of working miracles, grounded on faith, and on the power and goodness of God. --- *The same Spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as he will*; by which words, they that valued themselves on the gifts of *prophesying*, and

speaking tongues, are put in mind, that all these were purely the gifts of God, to whom alone the honour is due. (Witham)

Ver. 12. &c. *As the body is one*, &c. From this comparison of the mystical body of Christ, that is, of his Church, to a man's natural body, he brings excellent instructions. 1. That as all members and parts, make up the same body, *so also is Christ*; that is, so it is in the Church of Christ, which is his mystical body. 2. As all the parts of man's body are enlivened by the same soul, so all in the Church have their life from the same Spirit of God in baptism, and in the sacraments instituted by our Saviour, Christ; in which we *are made to drink of the same spirit*. 3. As all the members, that have such different offices and functions, do but constitute one complete body, so is it in the Church of Christ. 4. As those that seem the less considerable parts of the human body, are no less necessary for the subsistence and harmony of the whole, and stand in need of one another, (for example, the head stands in need of the feet) so in the Church, &c. 5. He takes notice, that in a natural body, the less *honourable*, the baser, and as they are called, the *uncomely parts*, are clothed with greater care and decency, Literally, *have a more abundant honour bestowed upon them*, so in the mystical body, no less, but even a greater care is to be taken of the weaker, and more infirm members, of the poor, the weak, the ignorant; and in the spirit of charity and love, that there may be no divisions or *schisms*, but a brotherly union: that if *one suffer*, another compassionate and assist him, &c. (Witham)

Ver. 15. *If the foot*, &c. By this comparison St. Paul teaches the Corinthians, that as all cannot exercise the same functions in the Church, so no one should be envious of his brother; but that by their mutual charity, co-operation, union of hearts, and faith, they should compose one body, of which Christ is the head. (Calmet)

Ver. 24. Cicero, in his 1st liber de Off. speaking of the human body, says, *Natura quæ formam nostram atque figuram, in qua esset species honesta, eam posuit in promptu; quæ partes autem corporis ad naturæ necessitatem datae, aspectum essent deformem habituræ atque turpem, eas contextit atque abdidit.* (Calmet)

Ver. 27. *Members of member.* [2] The sense seems to be, you are members of the particular Church of Corinth, which is only a part or member of the whole body of the Christian Catholic Church. This is agreeable to the common reading in the Greek, where it is said, *you are members of a part.* See St. Chrysostom, hom. xxxii. (Witham)

Ver. 28. *First apostles*, &c. Here he sets down these gifts or graces in their order of dignity. 1. *The apostles*, blessed above others with all kinds of graces. 2. *Prophets*, who had the gift of interpreting of prophecies, and of knowing things to come. 3. *Doctors*, or teachers of the gospel, preferred before those who had the gift of *miracles*, or of *healing* the infirm, and before the *gifts of tongues*, which they valued and esteemed so much, which he reckons in a manner in the last place, except that of *interpreting*, which is wanting in the present Greek copies. But as *interpreting* is found in all the Greek manuscripts (ver. 30.) we have reason to prefer the reading of the Latin Vulgate. (Witham)

Ver. 31. *Be zealous for the better gifts:* which are to be more or less esteemed, as they are accompanied with charity, as he is going to *shew* in the next chapter. (Witham)

[1] Ver. 9. Fides, *pistis*, upon which word St. Chrysostom, *om. kth.* p. 433. *pistin ou tauten legon, ten ton dogmaton, alla ten semeion.*

[2] Ver. 27. Et membra de membro. Some Greek copies, *kai mele ek melous*, but in most Greek manuscripts, *kai mele ek merous*. St. Chrysostom, *om. kb.* p. 448. *e ekklesia e par emin, meros esti tes pantachou keimenes ekklesias.*

Barclay's Daily Study Bible Series (not Catholic)

1 Corinthians 12:1–3

Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant about manifestations of the Spirit. You know that when you were heathens you were led away to dumb idols, just as any impulse moved you. I want you therefore to know that no one, speaking through the Spirit of God, can say, “Accursed be Jesus,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” unless through the Holy Spirit.

IN the Church of Corinth the most amazing things were happening through the action of the Holy Spirit, but in an age of ecstasy and of enthusiasm there can be hysterical excitement and self-delusion as well as the real thing, and in this and the next two chapters Paul deals with true manifestations of the Spirit.

This is a very interesting passage because it gives us two phrases which were battle cries.

(i) There is the phrase *Accursed be Jesus*. There could be four ways in which this terrible phrase might arise.

(a) It would be used by the Jews. The synagogue prayers included regularly a cursing of all apostates; and Jesus would come under that. Further, as Paul knew so well (Galatians 3:13), the Jewish law laid it down, “Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.” And Jesus had been crucified. It would be no uncommon thing to hear the Jews pronouncing their anathemas on this heretic and criminal whom the Christians worshipped.

(b) It is by no means unlikely that the Jews would make proselytes attracted by Christianity either pronounce this curse or suffer excommunication from all Jewish worship. When Paul was telling Agrippa about his persecuting days, he said, “I often punished them in every synagogue and *I forced them to blaspheme*.” (Acts 26:11). It must often have been a condition of remaining within the synagogue that a man should pronounce a curse on Jesus Christ.

(c) Whatever was true when Paul was writing, it is certainly true that later on, in the sore days of persecution, Christians were compelled either to curse Christ or to die. In the time of Trajan, it was the test of Pliny, governor of Bithynia, to demand that a person accused of being a Christian should curse Christ. When Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was arrested, the demand of

the proconsul Statius Quadratus was, “Say, ‘Away with the atheists,’ swear by the godhead of Caesar, and blaspheme Christ.” And it was the great answer of the aged bishop, “Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” There certainly came a time when a man was confronted with the choice of cursing Christ or facing death.

(d) There was the possibility that, even in the Church, someone in a semi-mad frenzy might cry out, “Accursed be Jesus.” In that hysterical atmosphere anything might happen and be claimed to be the work of the Spirit. Paul lays it down that no man can say a word against Christ and attribute it to the influence of the Spirit.

(ii) Beside this there is the Christian battle cry, *Jesus is Lord*. In so far as the early Church had a creed at all, that simple phrase was it. (cp. Philippians 2:11). The word for Lord was kurios and it was a tremendous word. It was the official title of the Roman Emperor. The demand of the persecutors always was, “Say, ‘Caesar is Lord (kurios).’” It was the word by which the sacred name Jehovah was rendered in the Greek translation of the Old Testament scriptures. When a man could say, “Jesus is Lord,” it meant that he gave to Jesus the supreme loyalty of his life and the supreme worship of his heart.

It is to be noted that Paul believed that a man could say, “Jesus is Lord,” only when the Spirit enabled him to say it. The Lordship of Jesus was not so much something which he discovered for himself as something which God, in his grace, revealed to him.

GOD’S DIFFERING GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:4–11

There are distinctions between different kinds of special gifts, but there is one and the same Spirit. There are distinctions between different kinds of service, but there is one and the same Lord. There are distinctions between different kinds of effects, but it is one and the same God who causes them all in every man. To each man there is given his own manifestation of the Spirit, and always towards some beneficial end. To one man there is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit; to still another, faith, by the same Spirit; to another, the special gifts of healing through one and the same Spirit; to another, the ability to produce wonderful deeds of power; to another, prophecy; to another, the ability to distinguish between different kinds of spirits; to another, different kinds of tongues; to another, the power to interpret tongues. One and the same Spirit produces all these effects, sharing them out individually to each man, as the Spirit wishes.

PAUL’S idea in this section is to stress the essential unity of the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ and the characteristic of a healthy body is that every part in it performs its own function for the good of the whole; but unity does not mean uniformity, and therefore within the Church there are differing gifts and differing functions. But every one of them is a gift of the same Spirit and designed, not for the glory of the individual member of the Church, but for the good of the whole.

Paul begins by saying that all special gifts (*charismata*) come from God and it is his belief that they must, therefore, be used in God's service. The fault of the Church, in modern times at least, is that it has interpreted the idea of special gifts far too narrowly. It has too often acted on the apparent assumption that the special gifts which it can use consist of things like speaking, praying, teaching, writing—the more or less intellectual gifts. It would be well if the Church would realize that the gifts of the man who can work with his hands, are just as special gifts from God. The mason, the carpenter, the electrician, the painter, the engineer, the plumber all have their special gifts, which are from God and can be used for him.

It is of the greatest interest to examine the list of special gifts which Paul gives, because from it we learn much about the character and work of the early Church.

He begins with two things which sound very like each other—*the word of wisdom* and *the word of knowledge*. The Greek word we have translated *wisdom* is *sophia*. It is defined by Clement of Alexandria as “the knowledge of things human and divine and of their causes.” Aristotle described it as “striving after the best ends and using the best means.” This is the highest kind of wisdom; it comes not so much from thought as from communion with God. It is the wisdom which knows God. *Knowledge*—the Greek word is *gnosis*—is a much more practical thing. It is the knowledge which knows what to do in any given situation. It is the practical application to human life and affairs of *sophia*. The two things are necessary—the *wisdom* which knows by communion with God the deep things of God, and the *knowledge* which, in the daily life of the world and the Church, can put that wisdom into practice.

Next on the list comes *faith*. Paul means more than what we might call ordinary faith. It is the faith which really produces results. It is not just the intellectual conviction that a thing is true; it is the passionate belief in a thing which makes a man spend all that he is and has on it. It is the faith which steels the will and nerves the sinew of a man into action.

O God, when the heart is warmest,
And the head is clearest,
Give me to act;
To turn the purposes Thou formest
Into fact!

It is the faith which turns the vision into deeds.

Next Paul speaks of *special gifts of healings*. The early Church lived in a world where healing miracles were a common-place. If a Jew was ill he was much more likely to go to the Rabbi than to the doctor; and he would most likely be healed. Aesculapius was the Greek God of healing. People went to his temples, usually spending whole nights there, to be healed, and often they were. To this day we find among the ruins of these temples votive tables and inscriptions commemorating healings; and no one goes to the trouble and expense of erecting an inscription

for nothing. In the Temple at Epidaurus there is an inscription which tells how a certain Alketas, "although blind saw the dream vision. The god seemed to come to him and to open his eyes with his fingers, and he first saw the trees that were in the temple. At day-break he went away cured." In the temple at Rome there is an inscription, "To Valerius Aper, a blind soldier, the god gave an oracle to come and take blood of a white cock with honey and to mix them into a salve and anoint his eyes for three days, and he received his sight and came and gave thanks publicly to the god." It was an age of cures.

There is not the slightest doubt that gifts of healing did exist in the early Church; Paul would never have cited them unless they were real. In the letter of James (5:14) there is an instruction that if a man is ill he must come to the elders and they will anoint him with oil. It is the simple historical fact that until the ninth century the Sacrament of Unction was for healing; and only then did it become the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, and a preparation for death. The Church never altogether lost this gift of healing; and in recent times it has been somewhat rediscovered. Montaigne, one of the wisest writers who ever wrote, said about a boy's education, "I would have his limbs trained no less than his brains. It is not a mind we are educating nor a body; it is a man. And we must not split him in two." For too long the Church split man into a soul and a body, and accepted responsibility for his soul but not for his body. It is good that in our time we have once again learned to treat man as a whole.

Next Paul lists *wonderful deeds of power*. Almost certainly he refers to *exorcisms*. In those days many illnesses, often all illnesses, and especially mental illnesses, were attributed to the work of demons; and it was one of the functions of the Church to exorcise these demons. Whether or not they were in fact real, the person so possessed was convinced that they were, and the Church could and did help him. Exorcism is still very much a reality in the mission field; and at all times it is the function of the Church to minister to a mind diseased and disturbed.

Paul goes on to mention *prophecy*. It would give a better idea of the meaning of this world if we translated it *preaching*. We have too much associated *prophecy* with the foretelling of what was to happen. But at all times *prophecy* has been far more *forthtelling* than *foretelling*. The prophet is a man who lives so close to God that he knows his mind and heart and will, and so can make them known to men. Because of that his function is twofold. (a) He brings rebuke and warning, telling men that their way of action is not in accordance with the will of God. (b) He brings advice and guidance, seeking to direct men into the ways God wishes them to go.

Paul then mentions *the ability to distinguish between different kinds of spirits*. In a society where the atmosphere was tense and where all kinds of manifestations were normal, it was necessary to distinguish between what was real and what was merely hysterical, between what came from God and what came from the devil. To this day, when a thing is outside our ordinary orbit, it is supremely difficult to tell whether it is from God or not. The one principle to observe is that we must always try to understand before we condemn.

Lastly Paul lists *the gift of tongues* and *the ability to interpret them*. This matter of *tongues* was causing a great deal of perplexity in the Church at Corinth. What happened was this—at a church service someone would fall into an ecstasy and pour out a torrent of unintelligible sounds in no known language. This was a highly-coveted gift because it was supposed to be due to the

direct influence of the Spirit of God. To the congregation it was of course completely meaningless. Sometimes the person so moved could interpret his own outpourings, but usually it required someone else who had the gift of interpretation. Paul never questioned the reality of the gift of tongues, but he was well aware that it had its dangers, for ecstasy and a kind of self-hypnotism are very difficult to distinguish.

The picture we get is of a Church vividly alive. Things happened; in fact astonishing things happened. Life was heightened and intensified. There was nothing dull and ordinary about the early Church. Paul knew that all this vivid, powerful activity was the work of the Spirit who gave to each man his gift to use for all.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

1 Corinthians 12:12–31

Just as the body is one, although it has many members, and just as all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by the one Spirit we have all been baptized in such a way as to become one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be slaves or free men; and we have all been watered by the one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, “Because I am not the hand I am not of the body,” it is not because of that not part of the body. And if the ear were to say, “Because I am not the eye, I am not part of the body,” it is not because of that not part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body consisted only of the sense of hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But, as it is, God has arranged the members, each individual one of them, as he willed. If everything were one member where would the body be? But, as it is, there are many members but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you.” Or again, the head cannot say to the feet, “I do not need you.” Rather indeed those parts of the body which seem to be weaker are all the more essential; and to those parts of the body which seem to be rather without honour we apportion a very special honour; and the uncomely parts of the body have a special comeliness, while the comely parts need no special consideration. God has so compounded the body, giving a special honour to that part of it which seemed to lack all honour, so that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should all have the same care for each other. So, if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; and if one member is glorified all the members share its joy. You are the body of Christ and each of you is a member of it. So God appointed in the Church some, in the first place, as apostles; in the second place, prophets; in the third place, teachers; then the power to work wonders; then special gifts of healings; the ability to help; the ability to administer; different kinds of tongues. Surely all are not apostles? Surely all are not prophets? Surely all are not teachers? Surely all have not the power to do wonderful things? Surely all do not possess the gifts of healings? Surely all do not speak with tongues? Surely all cannot interpret? Long for the yet greater gifts. I show you a still more excellent way.

HERE is one of the most famous pictures of the unity of the Church ever written. Men have always been fascinated by the way in which the different parts of the body co-operate. Long ago Plato had drawn a famous picture in which he had said that the head was the citadel; the neck, the isthmus between the head and the body; the heart, the fountain of the body; the pores, the lanes of the body; the veins, the canals of the body. So Paul drew his picture of the Church as a body. A body consists of many parts but there is in it an essential unity. Plato had pointed out that we do not say, “My finger has a pain,” we say, “I have a pain.” There is an *I*, a personality,

which gives unity to the many and varying parts of the body. What the *I* is to the body, Christ is to the Church. It is in him that all the diverse parts find their unity.

Paul goes on to look at this in another way. "You," he says, "are the body of Christ." There is a tremendous thought here. Christ is no longer in this world in the body; therefore if he wants a task done within the world he has to find a man to do it. If he wants a child taught, he has to find a teacher to teach him; if he wants a sick person cured, he has to find a physician or surgeon to do his work; if he wants his story told, he has to find a man to tell it. Literally, we have to be the body of Christ, hands to do his work, feet to run upon his errands, a voice to speak for him.

"He has no hands but our hands

To do his work today;

He has no feet but our feet

To lead men in his way;

He has no voice but our voice

To tell men how he died;

He has no help but our help

To lead them to his side."

Here is the supreme glory of the Christian man—he is part of the body of Christ upon earth.

So Paul draws a picture of the unity which should exist inside the Church if it is to fulfil its proper function. A body is healthy and efficient only when each part is functioning perfectly. The parts of the body are not jealous of each other and do not covet each other's functions. From Paul's picture we see certain things which ought to exist in the Church, the body of Christ.

(i) We ought to realize that *we need each other*. There can be no such thing as isolation in the Church. Far too often people in the Church become so engrossed in the bit of the work that they are doing and so convinced of its supreme importance that they neglect or even criticize others who have chosen to do other work. If the Church is to be a healthy body, we need the work that everyone can do.

(ii) We ought to *respect each other*. In the body there is no question of relative importances. If any limb or any organ ceases to function, the whole body is thrown out of gear. It is so with the Church. "All service ranks the same with God." Whenever we begin to think about our own importance in the Christian Church, the possibility of really Christian work is gone.

(iii) We ought to *sympathize with each other*. If any one part of the body is affected, all the others suffer in sympathy because they cannot help it. The Church is a whole. The person who cannot see beyond his or her own organization, the person who cannot see beyond his or her

congregation, worse still, the person who cannot see beyond his or her own family circle, has not even begun to grasp the real unity of the Church.

At the end of the passage Paul speaks of various forms of service in the Church. Some he has already mentioned, but some are new.

(i) At the head of everything he puts the *apostles*. They were beyond question the greatest figures in the Church. Their authority was not confined to one place; they had no settled and localized ministry; their writ ran through the whole Church. Why should that be? The essential qualification of an apostle was that he must have companied with Jesus during his earthly life and been a witness of the Resurrection (Acts 1:22). The apostles were those who had the closest contact with Jesus in the days of his flesh and in the days of his risen power. Jesus never wrote a word on paper; instead he wrote his message upon men, and these men were the apostles. No human ceremony can ever give a man real authority; that must always come from the fact that he has companied with Christ. Once someone said to Alexander Whyte after a service, "Dr. Whyte, you preached today as if you had come straight from the presence." "Perhaps I did," answered Whyte softly. The man who comes from the presence of Christ has apostolic authority no matter what may be his Church denomination.

(ii) We have already spoken about the prophets, but now Paul adds *teachers*. It is impossible to exaggerate their importance. These were the men who had to build up the converts won by the preaching of the evangelists and the apostles. They had to instruct men and women who knew literally nothing about Christianity. Their supreme importance lies in this—the first gospel, Mark's, was not written until about A. D. 60, that is to say, not until about thirty years after the crucifixion of Jesus. We have to think ourselves back to a time when printing did not exist, when books had to be hand-written and were scarce, when a volume the size of the New Testament would cost pounds to buy, when ordinary folk could never hope to possess a book. As a result the story of Jesus had to be handed down in the beginning by word of mouth. That was the teacher's task; and we must remember this—a scholar will learn more from a good teacher than from any book. We have books in plenty nowadays, but it is still true that it is through people that a man really learns of Christ.

(iii) Paul speaks of *helpers*. These were people whose duty it was to succour the poor, the orphan, the widow and the stranger. From the very beginning Christianity was an intensely practical thing. A man may be a poor speaker and have no gift of teaching; but it is open to everyone to help.

(iv) Paul speaks of what the Revised Standard Version calls administrators (*kuberneseis*). The Greek is very interesting; it literally refers to the work of a pilot who steers the ship through the rocks and shoals to harbour. Paul is referring to the people who carry out the administration of the Church. It is a supremely essential work. In the foreground the preacher and the teacher hold the limelight; but they could never do their work at all unless in the background there were those who shouldered the routine day to day administration. There are parts of the body which are never seen but whose function is more important than any other; there are those who serve the Church in ways that win no publicity, but without whose service the Church could not go on.

But in the end Paul is going on to speak of a greater gift than all the others. The danger always is that those who have different gifts will be at variance with each other, and so the effective working of the body will be hindered. Love is the only thing which can bind the Church into a perfect unity; and Paul goes on to sing his hymn to love.

Gospel

Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who were eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us, I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day.

He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring glad tidings to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down,

and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.

He said to them,

“Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 1: 1-4

Jerome's Biblical Commentary

20 (I) Prologue (1:1-4). Luke introduces his Gospel in the style of Gk classics; similar introductions are found in Dioscurides, *Concerning Medical Matters* (1. 1); Josephus, *AgAp* (1.1, 1 § 1-3) and *JW* (1.1, 1 § 1-3); and *Aristeas* (1). Luke is thus claiming to write a work of literary importance, and critical judgment will agree that he has admirably succeeded in this goal. The grammar and diction of vv. 1-4 carefully and majestically obey the classical norms; they form one sentence, closely interlocked with subordinate clauses and participial constructions, and bound with a protasis and apodosis.**1.** *inasmuch as many...I also:* Each of these two major parts contains three cola, or sections; these can be lined up in parallel columns with corresponding phrases. Finally, this prologue introduces both of Luke's books, the Gospel and Acts; classical style permitted a second preface (Acts 1:1) at the beginning of the second half of a major work (cf. Josephus, *AgAp* 2.1, 1 § 1; Diodorus Siculus, *History*, 2.1). The stately compound conj. *epeid -per*, common enough in classical Greek, occurs nowhere else in the NT (or the LXX); it has the meaning, "with reference to a fact already well-known" (see Bl-Deb-F § 456, 1). *draw up:* The Gk vb. *ana-taxasthai* implies a repetition by which facts have been memorized. *an account:* Luke avoids Mk's introductory word *euaggelion* (gospel or good news). Instead of that more theological term, he prefers one that lays more stress on the historical genre of his composition. Later on in the prologue, he insists that what he is writing about has really happened. *fulfilled among us:* Luke does not pretend in any way to be an eyewitness. The pf. form of the Gk participle indicates that what happened in the life of Jesus was perfectly completed and that its effects are now being felt "among us" in the Church.**2.** *eye witnesses:* Avoiding the Gk word *martyis*, ordinarily reserved for the apostles who lived with Jesus, Luke has in mind a much wider group of witnesses, like the deacon Philip (Acts 8:5; 21:8), Symeon Niger (Acts 13:1); Manaen (Acts 13:1); various women (Lk 8:1-3; → 13 above). *ministers of the word:* "Word" (*logos*),

Gk Greek

AgAp Josephus, *Against Apion*

JW Josephus, *Jewish War*

Aristeas (*Letter of*) Aristeas to Philocrates (→ 68:32-33)

NT New Testament

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

Bl-Deb-F F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, tr. R. W. Funk (Chicago, 1961)

with its biblical background in Hebr **d b r**, refers to events as well as to statements. We find a vague indication here of what form criticism has propounded with scientific learning. Luke is drawing not only upon strictly eyewitness records but also upon the instructions, prayers, and popular stories, through which the eyewitness accounts were “ministered” in the Church.**3. after following up all things carefully:** The Gk pf. tense of the verb indicates Luke’s competence; he has made a thorough investigation. *from the beginning:* The apostolic kerygma ordinarily began with John the Baptist (Mk 1:2-8; Acts 13:24f.); Luke actually goes beyond that and prefixes an Infancy Narrative. *Most Excellent Theophilus:* The title honors a high-ranking government official (Acts 23:26; 24:3; 26:25). H. J. Cadbury claims that Theophilus was probably not a Christian; Luke was writing a defense of Christianity for the Roman government (*Beginnings* 2, 510). It seems unlikely, however, that Luke would compose such a theological gospel as his actually is for an apologetical purpose. *Theophilus:* The name means “beloved by God,” very similar to the Hebr **y^edīd h**, found under various forms in the OT (2 Kgs 22:r; 2 Sm 12:25 [y^edīdy h]). The Gk name has appeared on Jewish inscriptions and papyri from the 3rd cent. BC, and there is good reason to think that Theophilus was a prominent Christian to whom Luke dedicated his work because the former may have defrayed the cost of the parchment or performed other services for the Church. The Gospel, in this case, would actually be intended for the entire Church. *an orderly account:* This need not be chronological; it could be geographical or follow a more theological plan according to the successive stages of salvation history.**4. the certainty of the word:** The Greek can also mean “that you may be more solidly and certainly grounded in the mysteries of salvation.”

1

Haydock’s Catholic Bible Commentary, 1859 Ed.

Notes & Commentary:

Ver. 1. That have been accomplished.[1] In the Protestant translation, *of things most surely believed.* They have followed Beza, and Erasmus: but other learned critics have shewn that the same Greek word often signifies to fulfil; and it is clearly proved by St. Chrysostom.

Ver. 3. Having diligently obtained. Here we see, that although the Holy Ghost regulated the pen of the holy writers, that they might not err; they still employed human means to search and find out the truth of things they mentioned. Even so do general councils, and the president thereof, the holy pontiff, discuss and examine all causes by human means, although they have the promise from Jesus Christ of the aid, assistance, and direction of his holy Spirit; (St. John xvi. 13,) as is

Hebr Hebrew

Beginnings F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake, eds., *Beginnings of Christianity* (5 vols.; London, 1920-33)

OT Old Testament

¹Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

manifest from the very first council of the apostles, held at Jerusalem. (Acts xv. 7. and 28.) --- *Most excellent Theophilus*. This word, *Theophilus*, by its etymology, signifies a *lover of God*: but here we may rather understand some particular person, by the title given him of *most excellent*, or *best*: which, at that time, was given to persons in dignity; as to Felix, Acts xxiii. 26. and to Festus, Acts xxvi. 25. (Witham) --- *Kratiste*, may signify most powerful from *Kratos*, strength, or *Kratein*, to conquer; or, as most generally given, from *Kreitton*. --- *Theophilos*, may be interpreted either a lover of God, or one beloved of God. Whoever, therefore, loves God, and desires to be beloved by Him, should consider this gospel as penned for himself, and should preserve it as a pledge deposited in his hands. (Ven. Bede)

Barclay's Daily Study Bible Series (not Catholic)

Luke 1:1–4

Since many have set their hands to the task of drawing up an account of the events which were completed amongst us, telling the story just as those who were the original eye-witnesses and who became the servants of the word handed it down to us, I too made up my mind to carry out a careful investigation of all things from the beginning, and to write to you, Theophilus, your excellency, an orderly account of them, so that you might have in your mind a full and reliable account of the things in which you have been instructed.

LUKE'S introduction is unique in the first three gospels because it is the only place where the author steps out upon the stage and uses the pronoun "I." There are three things to note in this passage.

(i) It is the best bit of Greek in the New Testament. Luke uses here the very form of introduction which the great Greek historians all used. Herodotus begins, "These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus." A much later historian, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, tells us at the beginning of his history, "Before beginning to write I gathered information, partly from the lips of the most learned men with whom I came into contact, and partly from histories written by Romans of whom they spoke with praise." So Luke, as he began his story in the most sonorous Greek, followed the highest models he could find.

It is as if Luke said to himself, "I am writing the greatest story in the world and nothing but the best is good enough for it." Some of the ancient manuscripts are very beautiful productions, written in silver ink on purple vellum; and often the scribe, when he came to the name of God or of Jesus, wrote it in gold. Dr. Boreham tells of an old workman who, every Friday night, took the newest and shiniest coins out of his pay packet for Sunday's offering in church. The historian, the scribe and the workman were all filled with the same idea—only the best is good enough for Jesus. They always gave their utmost for the highest.

(ii) It is most significant that Luke was not satisfied with anyone else's story of Christ. He must have his own. Real religion is never a second-hand thing. It is a personal discovery. Professor Arthur Gossip of Trinity College, Glasgow used to say that the four gospels were

important, but beyond them all came the gospel of personal experience. Luke had to rediscover Jesus Christ for himself.

(iii) There is no passage of the Bible which sheds such a floodlight on the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture. No one would deny that the gospel of *Luke* is an inspired document; and yet Luke begins by affirming that it is the product of the most careful historical research. God's inspiration does not come to the man who sits with folded hands and lazy mind and only waits, but to the man who thinks and seeks and searches. True inspiration comes when the seeking mind of man joins with the revealing Spirit of God. The word of God is given, but it is given to the man who is seeking for it. "Seek and you shall find" (Matthew 7:7).

Lk 4:14-21

Jerome's Biblical Commentary

(IV) The Galilean Ministry (4:14-9:50). The Syn, like the early apostolic preaching, omit any Judean ministry at the beginning of Jesus' public life (cf. Acts 10:37f.), which is so prominent in Jn. If one uses Johannine data, Jesus, before inaugurating an extensive effort in Galilee, would have been in Jerusalem for a Passover (Jn 2:13, 23), at which time he swept the Temple clean of money enterprises (Jn 2:13-22) and met secretly with the Pharisee Nicodemus (Jn 3:1ff.). His extraordinary deeds attracted the attention of Galilean visitors (Jn 4:45). Then he traveled N through inhospitable Samaria (Jn 4). While Luke, theologically minded, states that Jesus returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (4:14), Mt explains that Jesus "withdrew," fleeing before the hostility of the priests and Pharisees (Mt 4:12; Jn 4:1).

Lk presents an orderly account of the public ministry; it does not bring Jesus to Jerusalem till the very end, for the climax of rejection by the Jews and the beginning of a world-wide apostolate to the Gentiles. The universal extent of the kingdom begins with Pentecost (Acts 2). Here is one of the clues for Luke's select use of Mk's Gospel. Although Lk 4:14-9:50 reproduces Mk 1:14-9:39, it deliberately omits Mk 6:45-8:26; it therefore says nothing of Jesus' journey into the Gentile area of Tyre and Sidon. At Lk 9:18 (Mk 8:27; Mt 16:13 par.) nothing is said about Jesus' presence among the villages of Caesarea Philippi. Luke wants an uninterrupted Galilean ministry so that the full force of the Jerusalem rejection can be understood.

Haydock's Catholic Bible Commentary, 1859 Ed.

Ver. 17. As he unfolded the book: and again, (ver. 20) when he had folded the book. Books at that time were not like our now-a-days, but were skins or parchments, rolled or folded up. (Witham) --- Some are of opinion that the Jews of Nazareth, having heard of the miracles and

Syn Synoptic Gospels or Synoptic writers

par. Parallel passage(s) in the Synoptic Gospels

fame of Jesus, and that he was accustomed to teach in the synagogues, though he had never been instructed in any learning, when he rose to speak, purposely gave him the book of Isaias, which was esteemed the most difficult to be explained, in order to try his learning; though it is probable that it was done by the all-directing interposition of Divine Providence. (Maldonatus)

Ver. 18. By the poor are to be understood the Gentiles; who might truly be called poor, since they possessed neither the knowledge of the true God, nor of the law, nor of the prophets. (Origen) --- Isaias in this place speaks of himself, as a figure of the Messias. The captivity of Babylon, which is the literal object of this prophecy, was a figure of the then state of mankind; the return from this captivity announced by the prophet, and effected by Cyrus, represented the redemption of man, effected by Jesus Christ. (Bible de Vence)

Ver. 19. *To set at liberty them that are bruised*, or oppressed. These words are not in the prophet; but are added by St. Luke, to explain the others. --- *To preach the acceptable year*, as it were the jubilee year, when slaves used to be set at liberty. (Witham)

Ver. 20. To observe and admire a person that had never learned letters, and who stood up amongst them an experienced teacher. (Menochius) See John vii. 15. and Maldonatus.

Ver. 21. By this Christ wished to shew that he was the Messias foretold by the prophet Isaias, whom they so anxiously expected: he declares himself to be the person pointed out by the prophet. There seems also to be a secret reprehension in these words of Christ; as if he were to say: Why are you so desirous to behold the Messias, whom, when he is before your eyes, you will not receive? Why do you seek him in the prophets, when you neither understand the prophets, nor perceive the truth of their predictions, when they are fulfilled before your eyes? (Maldonatus)

Ver. 23. I see you will object to me this similitude, (*parabolen*) or trite saying, applied to such as attended to the concerns of others, and neglected their own. (Menochius)

Barclay's Daily Study Bible Series (not Catholic)

Luke 4:14, 15

So Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee; and the story of him spread throughout the whole countryside. He kept on teaching in their synagogues; and he was held in high reputation by all.

No sooner had Jesus left the wilderness than he was faced with another decision. He knew that for him the hour had struck; he had settled once and for all the method he was going to take. Now he had to decide where he would start.

(i) He began in *Galilee*. Galilee was an area in the north of Palestine about fifty miles from north to south and twenty-five miles from east to west. The name itself means a circle and comes from the Hebrew word *Galil*. It was so called because it was encircled by non-Jewish nations. Because of that, new influences had always played upon Galilee and it was the most forward-looking and least conservative part of Palestine. It was extraordinarily densely populated. Josephus, who was himself at one time governor of the area, says that it had 204 villages or towns, none with a population less than 15,000. It seems incredible that there could be some 3,000,000 people congregated in Galilee.

It was a land of extraordinary fertility. There was a proverb which said that, "It is easier to raise a legion of olive trees in Galilee than to bring up one child in Judaea." The wonderful climate and the superb water supply made it the garden of Palestine. The very list of trees which grew there shows how amazingly fertile it was—the vine, the olive, the fig, the oak, the walnut, the terebinth, the palm, the cedar, the cypress, the balsam, the firtree, the pine, the sycamore, the baytree, the myrtle, the almond, the pomegranate, the citron and the oleander.

The Galilaeans themselves were the Highlanders of Palestine. Josephus says of them, "They were ever fond of innovations and by nature disposed to changes, and delighted in seditions. They were ever ready to follow a leader who would begin an insurrection. They were quick in temper and given to quarrelling." "The Galilaeans," it was said, "have never been destitute of courage." "They were ever more anxious for honour than for gain."

That is the land in which Jesus began. It was his own land; and it would give him, at least at the beginning, an audience who would listen and kindle at his message.

(ii) *He began in the synagogue*. The synagogue was the real centre of religious life in Palestine. There was only one Temple; but the law said that wherever there were ten Jewish families there must be a synagogue; and so in every town and village it was in the synagogue that the people met to worship. There were no sacrifices in the synagogue. The Temple was designed for sacrifice; the synagogue for teaching. But how could Jesus gain an entry into the synagogue and how could he, a layman, the carpenter from Nazareth, deliver his message there?

In the synagogue service there were three parts.

(a) The worship part in which prayer was offered.

(b) The reading of the scriptures. Seven people from the congregation read. As they read, the ancient Hebrew, which was no longer widely understood, was translated by the Targumist into Aramaic or Greek, in the case of the Law, one verse at a time, in the case of the prophets, three verses at a time.

(c) The teaching part. In the synagogue there was no professional ministry nor any one person to give the address; the president would invite any distinguished person present to speak and discussion and talk would follow. That is how Jesus got his chance. The synagogue and its platform were open to him at this stage.

(iii) The passage ends by saying that he was held in high reputation by all. This period of Jesus' ministry has been called the Galilean springtime. He had come like a breath of the very wind of God. The opposition had not yet crystallized. Men's hearts were hungry for the word of life, and they had not yet realized what a blow he was to strike at the orthodoxy of his time. A man with a message will always command an audience.