

II  
STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST PART OF THE  
SECOND LETTER OF ST. JEROME MIANI  
(July 21, 1535) (1)

1. PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

The second letter of St. Jerome deserves particular attention because it is the only one that, among those arrived at us, is explicitly addressed to all the “Company.”(2) Its importance for a right comprehension of the spirituality of the Saint cannot be ever exaggerated enough, because it does not only contain a message undoubtedly rich, but this same message has been written in a moment extremely critical for the Company (3), even though today it is not possible for us to know in all the details the difficulties which troubled it. Now, as it is manifested by the anthropological sciences, it is just in the hour of crisis, in the moment of the limit-situation, that man manifests himself in the most immediate and full way. When the sword penetrates the soul, the thoughts of the heart are revealed! For this reason our letter can introduce us in the heart of St. Jerome, allowing us to catch a glimpse of the richness of his spirituality.

If we want to scientifically obtain a sure result fundamental for the knowledge of St. Jerome’s spirituality, it is necessary to ward a danger that always creeps in the journey of those who approach a text, especially if this tends to involve one directly. We allude to the preoccupation to immediately trace great themes, spiritual topics, and existential questions. As we know, such a preoccupation brings to inadvertently introduce into the text our mentality, our perspectives, with the result that – in the best of the hypotheses – one can elaborate theories that are perhaps suggestive, but that present poor or even no connection with the text itself, and therefore, they do not constitute a good exegesis. In order to reduce such a risk as much as possible, today it used the structural analysis. As much as possible, it aims at “let the text speak”, by clarifying its content through the exam of terms or sentences which recur with a certain periodicity in the text itself, and which allow to better individualize its structure and highlight its message in a more adequate manner.

By using this method, we examine the first part of the second letter of St. Jerome (5,1-7, 7). Obviously, it is not a question of highlighting the external structure which present itself with sufficient clarity in the same disposition of the manuscript (5), but mostly a question of pinpointing the supporting elements that allow us to discover the internal structure of the discourse, the one that support the development of the thought and, therefore, pries open the heart itself of the message.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

From the reading of the text, some sentences emerge and strike immediately for their frequency. Usually they are sentences very similar among themselves. For this reason, despite the differences of terms or construction, there is no doubt that they are among them substantially synonyms. These sentences, because of their decisive importance in knowing the supporting structure of our writing, can be gathered in three groups.

## 1st Group

First of all, we list the similar sentences which have as a subject God:

- a. *the Lord glorified Himself in you through me* (5,5);
- b. *perform many miracles Christ* (6,3);
- c. *He wants also to use you poor things* (6,4s);
- d. *He wants to put you in the number of his beloved children* (6,11);
- e. *as He did with all his friends and at the end He made them holy* (6,11s);
- f. *God does not works his things in those who do not...*(6,15s);
- g. *He fulfilled them of love* (6,18);
- h. *He made great things in them* (6,18);
- i. *He will make of you great things by exalting the humble...* (6,19);
- j. *He took me away from you* (6,20);
- k. *He will put you to test* (6,23);
- l. *He did the same with all the saints* (7,1s);
- m. *He did the same with the people of Israel* (7,2)
- n. *(similarly) God will do with you* (7,7).

From a formal point of view, it immediately appears the prevalence of the verbs “do/make” (*e bis, h, i, l, m, n;* to these case we need to add also the sentence *b*, that has Christ as a subject). Also *f* has the same value not only because there is a similar verb, but also because of the literal context. In fact, by analyzing 6,15-18, we encounter a concentric structure:

A God does not *perform the things...*  
B in those who have not put all their *faith and hope* in Him alone  
B' and in those who have great *faith and hope*  
A' filled them with love and *made great things in them.*

From the correlation between A and A' it is evident the similarity between the sentences “God... performs his things” and “made great things.”

We can also add that the sentences “He wants also to use you poor things” © and “He wants to put you in the number of his beloved children” (d) show ha concretely God “perform his things” in the brothers of the Company, making great things of them. At last, also the first sentence of this series acquires a clear comprehension. In fact, the syntagma “the Lord glorified Himself in you through me” at the same time indicates that through Jerome, God *has done* great things in his companions, *has performed* His things and, in doing that, *has manifested them*, has made them visible and present as His own work (6). Evidently, similar statements suppose that God has performed and performs “*his things*” in Jerome himself.

The analysis of this group leads us to discover a highly biblical concept in the text. God appears as the one who acts par excellence. Jerome, his companions, their works... everything exists because is at work and glorifies Himself in performing great things in them. The essence itself of Jerome and the trials themselves are led to God's sovereign and mysterious action.

## 2 Group

The sentences which put in the foreground God's action parallel a second group of sentences which highlight the answers we need to give to that action. We list them:

- a. *to trust in Him alone and not in others* (5,7-6,1);
- b. *to make faith grow in you, without such a faith...* (6,2);
- c. *if you persevere in His ways* (6,11-12);
- d. *to grow your faith in Him alone and not in others* (6,14-15);
- e. *who has not put all his faith and hope in Him alone* (6,16-17);
- f. *and those who has great faith and hope...*(6,17);
- g. *since you do not lack in faith and hope* (6,18-19);
- h. *or you will lack in faith... or you will be firm in faith* (6,21-22);
- i. *the good servant of God who hope in Him* (6,26-27);
- j. *if you will be firm in faith* (7,7).

With the exception of the sentences in *a*, *c*, *i*, we always encounter the term faith. In the central part (6,15-19), endowed also of a special unity, the couple "faith and hope" appears three times (*e*, *f*, *g*). In this letter, the two words enlighten each other. In developing a general observation, Jerome maintains that God performs his work only in those who put faith and hope in Him alone (cf. *e*, *f*) and at the same time, he speaks of the "good servant of God who hope in Him" (*i*). By applying this reflection to his companions directly, Jerome can assure that God will do great things in them, at the condition, however, that they will not lack "in faith and hope" (*g*), or he can also declares that "in similar way God will do of you, if you will remain firm in faith (*j*). Actually, this last sentence is intimately connected with the one registered in *i* and it is its direct application to "brothers and children of the Company." What lies between these two sentences serves to prepare such an application because it reminds us (and this is really significant) of the constant way of the divine action with all the saints and the people of Israel.

These literary comparisons, which are developed from the text, allow us to see the reciprocal connection existing in Jerome's thought between faith and hope. It derives as a logical consequence, that in our passage faith means – first of all and fundamentally – a complete devotion and trustful abandon to God: "in Him alone and not in others." (*d*; cfr. *e*). In this context it acquires more importance the fact that the letter starts by recalling the prayers of the members of the Company, where they ask God to "confide in Him alone and not in others" (*a*).

Also the sentence "if you persevere in His ways" © carries out the same function of the expressions "either you will be firm in faith" (*h*) and "if you will be firm in faith" (*j*). This means that if on one hand to persevere in the ways of God supposes faith, on the other hand the expression "to be firm in faith" does not only indicate a grasping to a truth of faith present in us (static conception), on the contrary it connotes the existence of those who walk with the God of Exodus, follow His guide which leads to the goal of brotherhood in freedom and peace, and therefore, persevere in His ways (7).

Faith indeed is the unique response God expects from man so that He may accomplish in him great things (8): a faith that is not static but dynamic, that develops

and progresses, that takes the believer to journeying in the ways of God and overcoming all the obstacles that hinder his “exodus.” It appears here in all its semantic richness the explicit reminder of God’s interacting with Israel. This reminder synthesizes, in an essential way in tune with theological message of the Scriptures, the events of the liberation from Egypt, of the guidance in the desert, and the gift of the land. Faith for St. Jerome opens man to a relationship with God that is characterized by absolute, exclusive, and perennial confidence.

In this context it is interesting noting that also the verb “grow” has a structural function. It appears at the beginning, at the center and at the end of our text:

- 6,2 : *to make faith grow in you*
- 6,14 : *to make faith grow*
- 6,25-26 : *the good gold is preserved and grow in value. In this way the good servant of God does...*

If man opens up to the divine action through faith, this must grow so that the saving power of God, which operates constantly in history, manifests itself in a greater and greater measure. Even here the vision of St. Jerome appears in deep and interior tune with the theological perspective of all the Scriptures. The growth of faith constitutes the great value that the believer develops during trials (9). To this value Miani recalls all his so that the difficult moment the Company is crossing may not flow into the hour of confusion and unfaithfulness, but it may constitute the time in which the “good gold” of faith grows.

### 3 Group

Only adverbs or conjunctions that introduce into the discourse a comparison, belong to this group:

- a. *as He did with all his friends, and at the end He made them saints* (6,12s);
- b. *In the same way...He will make of you great things* (6,18s);
- c. *as gold is tested in the furnace* (6,24);
- d. *In the same way the good servant of God does* (6,26);
- e. *In the same way He did with all the saints* (7,1s);
- f. *In the same way He did with the people of Israel* (7,2);
- g. *In the same way God will do with you* (7,7).

Only the sentence *c* is formally a comparison between the “purification” of gold and of the believer’s (cf. *d*). The other sentences establish a relationship between the action God performs with the brothers of the Company and the action God carries out with “all His friends” (*a*). The adjective “all” (*a*, *e*) opens the horizon to a universal dimension. Jerome sees his brothers inserted in the picture of the marvelous action of God who “glorified Himself,” who “has done great things” for those who, in the course of history, opened up to Him in faith. The meaningful recall to the biblical paradigm of Israel confirms the theological importance of this perspective that directly enlightens the life and mission of the Company with the category of the saving exodus of God (10).

### 3. THE TEXT'S MESSAGE

The previous analysis allows us to catch a glimpse of an experience and spiritual theology, which rouses in us amazement because of its depth and richness.

The structure of the text examined, first of all highlights the *theocentric dimension* of the spirituality of St. Jerome. God is the great protagonist of all the text, the subject that acts in absolute sense (11). He manifests His saving power (“glorified Himself”) and fulfils his work of salvation (“His things”). For this reason, the confession that God has done great things becomes sure hope that He will renew his prodigies and he again He will do great things in His servants in order to fulfils His plan of salvation which climaxes in the participation of the believers in the fullness of life and glory of the kingdom of God (“ and at the end He made them saints” 6,12s).

The text analyzed presents a *historical-theological conception* in a clear and essential way. For Jerome history is the ambiance where man is reached by God who reveals himself as love in the wonders of his design and of his work of salvation. The divine action, in fact, though addressed to everybody personally, is not exclusively individual: in those who welcome it, the divine action pursues a unifying plan, which has its visible manifestation in the “Israel of God” (12). In this way, it takes shape a conception of history as ambiance where men are called to participate in salvation, to discover the “standard features” of God’s acting, according to the living richness of Scripture and to the pneumatic experience of the Church (“in whom there is great faith and hope”). Therefore, its right –and Jerome does it – to look at the past where God’s acting has become history in order to understand the present (cfr 6,11-13) and to walk confident toward the future (6,18b-19).

The answer of man to divine action is given by *faith*. This, as we have seen it, is the second supporting element of the all text. In it God is not contemplated in himself, but in his loving addressing to man, in his merciful acting “for us men and for our salvation.” For this reason, in the text it is always present the addressee of this action: the believer. Therefore, faith appears as the only answer that God is expecting from man in order to accomplish in him his salvation. In reading this page, we breathe an air that is genuinely biblical. Faith, for Miani, is trust in God “source of all good” (5,4); it is trust “in Him alone and not in others” (6,1); it is serene and confident abandon to his design of salvation (6,14-19); it is to persevere in his ways and to overcome all obstacles that stand in the way of exodus (6,11-12); it is humility and fortitude in trials (6,22-23); it is indispensable condition for God to accomplish his works (6,15-16), his wonders (6,19); in synthesis, it is to let oneself be guided by the Holy Spirit (11,18), “to stay with Christ” (2,6).

In this perspective, therefore, faith takes the shape of unconditioned openness and total dedication to God in hope, trust and confidence. Understood in the biblical perspective, faith contains in itself the marvelous energy that springs from the encounter with the Lord. This encounter, that in faith is destined to grow till the total assimilation with the Risen One, makes man more and more open to God’s action, and instrument, through love, of divine salvation (“ He wants to use you...”).

The salvation itinerary, where St. Jerome sees his Company deeply rooted, presents in its development a constant component: *trial*. No doubt that Jerome, because of the trials his Company was struggling in, has suffered a lot, has pondered over all the

elements of which he was aware, and has looked for the best solution with all his strength. Every man endowed with prudence, wisdom and responsibility does that. However, Miani has done something greater: he was able to take the “leap” of faith. Miani has seen all these difficulties in the light of the Word of God and, therefore, in the perspective of the divine design which questions man, pilgrim in history. In this way, he was able to understand their ultimate meaning. Difficulties take the shape of “trial” and as such, they represent a characteristic element of the exodus of the believer, a decisive moment where there is at stake not only the future of a human organization, but the realization of the design itself of God in Jerome and his companions. In fact, as the trials of Israel’s exodus put the liberated people in the alternative of returning to Egypt or of following in faith the way of the Lord, now through the current difficulties God poses another alternative: “or you will lack in faith and *will return to the things of the world*, or you will stand strong in faith and in this way He will put you to trial” (6,21-23). In this context it appears the true meaning of trial: growth in faith as a condition for man to open more and more to God’s design (cfr “in order to increase your faith in Him and not in others” in 6,14s).

The picture that has surfaced, we repeat it, in tune deeply and vitally with the Scripture. Beside the known page of Dt 8:2-5 (cfr also Gn 22:1) a text deserves to be recalled here since it allows us to have a glimpse, in a synthetic way, of this theological vision of the Word of God. It is the passage of Dt 13:4b-5, which we reproduce: “The Lord your God is testing you to learn whether you really love him with all your heart and with all your soul. The Lord your God you shall follow, and him shall you fear; his commandment shall you observe, and his voice shall you heed, serving him and holding fast to him alone.”

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Two observations are still necessary to complete and to put in the right light what has surfaced in the analysis of our text.

First of all, the richness of the biblical and theological perspectives we have seen, do not represent an isolated or occasional case, but they constitute a fundamental component of the formation activity of the Saint. This statement, which obviously represents a basic datum of the understanding of St. Jerome’s spirituality, stands over what Miani himself writes soon after the first part of the letter we have examined: “And you know that it has been assured by me and others, that God will treat you in the same way...” (7,6s). Therefore, as we can see from this solemn statement, Jerome himself and “others” would communicate to all the members of the Company the certitude of the evangelical values recalled in the letter, values that, internalized in the light of the Word of God, would form the basis of their “staying together” and their charitable work. This sentence, read in the light of the first part of the second letter, has a lot of importance. It, much more than all the other letters of Miani and than “Our Prayer”, let us see how lively and deep was the formation of the members of the Company and how much spiritual efficacy could develop in them the words of Jerome, who would comfort them “in the love of Christ and the observance of the Christian rule.” (5,3).

Second, the analysis developed here demonstrates that St. Jerome's spirituality is biblical not only in its contents, but also in the language itself. Perhaps, further studies will allow pinpoint in details this statement, to find the main sources of his spiritual world. However, the biblical mentality and language are so clear in our text that to deny or to ignore this dimension in the spiritual and historical profile of St. Jerome would close the possibility to objectively understand the experience of faith and the charism of the Saint. Miani's spirituality has grown by feeding with the reach food of the Word. For this reason, it has developed in a fecund tuning with the Scriptures, as the language itself of the letters will attest. Obviously, we speak of biblical spirituality, not of exegesis; a spirituality that develops, manifests and communicate itself first of all with the witness of life and the wisdom of the Word.

## NOTES

1. For the first elaboration of this article, cfr *Somascha* 1(1967)7-14
2. We follow the text of the critical edition: C.PELLEGRINI, *Le letetre di san Girolamo Miani*, (Fonti per la storia dei Somaschi 3), Rapallo 1975. Qotations will be made in the way pointed out in the note # 2.
3. That it was a situation very critical we can see it from the words: "(God) has led you to these steps: or you will lack in faith and will return to the things of the world, or you will stand strong in faith" (6,21).
4. This principle is valid also, with the due proportions, for the other letters, above all for the first and the sixth one. From here, despite the scarcity of the writings of the Saint come to us, it is right the attempt to discover his spiritual world through them.
5. The external structure of the first part can be divided in this way. After an introduction (5,1-6, 9), Jerome recalls three reasons in order to explain the difficulties in which the members of the Company were struggling with (6,10-7,5); later on, he deals with the practical issues he was worried with. As the analysis of the terms and sentences will show, the internal structure of the first part extends itself at least to 7,7, since the lines 6 and 7 of p. 7 are intimately connected with what precedes.
6. Here it is present, it seems, a vision that is clearly biblical. Speaking with a language that is more ours, we could paraphrase the expression in this way: God has manifested his work of salvation in you through me. The O.T. expresses this concept with the sentence "God has manifested his glory (*kabod*)", "has glorified himself." The ancient latin versions translated the Hebrew term *kabod* not only with "glory," but at times also with "*claritas*." From here, the name "*claritas*" and the correspondent verb "*clarificare*" entered the use of the liturgy with this meaning typically biblical. The analysis done has shown that also in our sentence the verb "clarified himself" presents the same biblical-theological meaning.
7. The expression "to stand strong in faith" recalls the biblical sentence "*fortes in fide*" (1Pt 5:9).
8. This is evident also from the fact that all the sentences about faith are used in subordinate propositions. Faith, as unique response of man in order to receive salvation, is a genuine biblical theme, dealt widely and deeply by Paul, especially in the letters to Galatians and Romans. Paul himself, however, wants to show that his teaching is contained in all the Scripture. From 6,17 we can see that for Jerome,

charity supposes faith. Also this idea is present clearly in Paul, for whom the Christian, as a new creature, is just characterized by the “faith that operates through charity” (Gal 5:6)

9. For this reason Jerome sees the “trial” as a component of the life of the Company: “..or you will stand strong in faith and in this way He will put you to the trial” (6,22s). Even here we have a conception that fully corresponds to the biblical one (cfr Gn 22:1; Dt 8:2-5; 13:4-5; Rm 5:3-4).
10. This vision of Miani deserves particular attention. It shows in fact, an internal tune with the Scripture’s conception where the existence of the single believers is understood solely in the light of the journey the people of the covenant take with his God.
11. From the other letters, as from other documents, we can see that the figure of Christ takes up a forefront position in St. Jerome’s spirituality (in our letter he comforts his own “in the love of Christ”, cfr 5,3). However, a global examen of all the witnesses allows us to see once again that the christological dimension is inserted, as in the N.T., in a conception clearly Trinitarian: “only *God* is good and... *Christ* works in those instruments who let themselves to be guided by the *Holy Spirit*” (11,17s).