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## FIRM IN THE WAY OF GOD

*Study on the biblical dimension of the spirituality of St. Jerome*

### INTRODUCTION

The knowledge of the spirituality of St. Jerome Miani represents one of the major urgent issues of our Congregation. Some considerations can confirm the truth of this statement.

Few decades separate the Somascan family from the fifth centennial of its providential existence in the Church and human society. It is an event to which the Somascan family must arrive well prepared with a great awareness of both its spiritual tradition and its historical responsibility, so that it may be prophetically open to God's future. In this perspective, the rediscovery of the spiritual lymph, from which our family was born and has drawn the vital energy for its mission, appears as an essential need and a primary task.

Such a need, moreover, stands in all its urgency if we consider the moment of growth of our Congregation. Such a moment, understood in the light of faith, is a sign of God's blessing and altogether as a talent that the Congregation is called to welcome responsibly, in order that it may give abundant fruits, according to God's plan. If unity is an essential good for the identity of any religious family, it is evident that unity develops peculiar dynamics with the growth of the family itself. The spreading of the Congregation in regions that present socio-cultural differences, demands awareness of its unity in order to assure its same identity, which is rooted in the rediscovery of founding values and in their renewed assimilation and inculturation. These founding values, which characterize the tradition of the Congregation, have their original charismatic expression in the spirituality of St. Jerome. For this reason, its knowledge, that is vital in every time for the Congregation, today presents itself as a condition for growth in identity, for unity in pluralism, and for authenticity in mission.

To these two reflections we still need to add an ulterior observation. Our Somascan family, in its centenary tradition, has always had in St. Jerome its father and model. However, it has not yet acquired a scientific comprehension of its Founder's spirituality. In fact, while some desired the knowledge of such spirituality, others, especially in the past, doubted its existence. Therefore, the comprehension of the spirituality of St. Jerome that illumines and supports the journey of the entire Congregation, becomes a vital need and a task that cannot be renounced.

This book is born from the desire of promoting and developing the conditions that make a scientific approach to Miani's spirituality possible.

In it we can find gathered some of our articles already published in "Somascha" or in the "Rivista della Congregazione," to which it has been added a study that outlines a synthesis of the spirituality of St. Jerome. Those who would like to have a large picture of it could start from reading this article. However, it could not have been elaborated without the process of maturation promoted by the previous studies that are here included

and that the conclusive synthesis takes into consideration. At the end, there is an Appendix, a work of T. Federici on “Our Prayer,” that has been re-printed here in order to make it more accessible. It has marked an important step toward the scientific knowledge of the spiritual richness of our Founder.

As to our articles, they have not been merely reported, but they have been re-elaborated substantially either for style’s reasons or for the need of updating them with the more recent developments.

Given the autonomous nature of the articles collected in this book, it is inevitable that there will be some repetition. Their deletion would have meant a serious mutilation of some works and this appeared to me to be contrary to the anthology spirit of this publication. Moreover, the various repetitions allow to verify the continuity in the progressive development of the understanding of the spirituality of Miani. In the same time, they offer the opportunity to perceive the different facets and perspectives that converge together in delineating the spiritual profile of Miani. The plurality of aspects is an eloquent sign of the rich depth and extraordinary virtues of our Founder’s spirituality.

The works gathered here develop an approach to St. Jerome’s spirituality in biblical perspective. The presence of the Bible in the “Letters” and “Our Prayer” is a data so continuous, homogeneous, and deep that it is easy to be noticed by those who are familiar with the Word of God. The more and more promising results of our research have constituted an important encouragement to continue in our quest.

We are fully aware that the biblical perspective is not the only approach to the knowledge of the spiritual world of St. Jerome. At this point, it is not only desirable but necessary that scholars of other disciplines (history, theology, spirituality, biography, etc) could contribute with their research to give a more detailed picture of St. Jerome and the original elements of his spirituality.

In the meantime, it is already possible to maintain that the search of the biblical dimension has offered and keeps offering a scientific contribution based on theology-spirituality. Since the Word of God, source of life for the believer, is the supreme light of any spirituality, its assimilation in Miani’s existential itinerary represents a fact whose importance hardly could be overstated. The biblical contents we find in the “Letters” and “Our Prayer” give witness to the richness of Miani’s spirituality and also reveal his virtuality, as work of the Spirit.

The following pages aim at leading to this richness and at emphasizing some of its vital and meaningful components. Still there are some aspects and themes that need to be studied with a biblical approach, and others probably could be identified in the future. However, the results so far obtained, because of their foundation and inner coherence, already allow us to depict a rich and articulated picture of St. Jerome’s spirituality. Thanks to it, Miani appears as a “means” chosen by God to reveal His glory, and therefore His paternity, in the Congregation, the Church, and the world.

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## BIBLICAL TEXTS IN THE LETTERS OF ST. JEROME <sup>1</sup>

St. Jerome's letters, as one can see from a simple reading, contain biblical quotations and references in so a high proportion that the phenomenon cannot be considered fortuitous or superficial. On the contrary, it is a revealing sign of the style and inner world of Miani. The project of individualizing the presence and influence of the Bible in the spirituality of the Saint, as it can be detected in his writings, finds its justification in the multiplicity of these quotations and references. At first glance, such a work can be perceived easy and limited. In reality, the more the search goes on, the more the horizon widens, and the possibilities of new and unexpected connections increase.

Therefore, it is necessary that the research aim at finding and recording those sentences, which constitute a clear quotation of or a sure reference to a specific biblical text <sup>2</sup>. Such a research, carried out with scientific method and self-imposed limits, will allow us to acquire some elements, which not only are fundamental for a more appropriate knowledge of St. Jerome's spirituality, but also constitute the basis for further studies and researches.

### 1. ANALYSYS OF TEXTS

#### First Letter

a) *rogamus patrem eternum ut mitat operarios* (1,6). We meet here the quotation of Jesus' saying, "Rogate, ergo, Dominum messis ut mittat operarios in messem suam," that is found in Mt 9:38 and in the parallel passage in Lk 10:2.

At first glance, we might think that it is a well-known sentence, quoted in sermons or in meetings of religious nature. In this case, we would be considering a sentence that Jerome could know and report as far as it belonged to the cultural patrimony of the Christian environment of his time. However, the text contains a clue that leads us to say that Miani referred consciously to a concrete page, the one of Matthew. In fact, in the following line Jerome suggests, as a second "remedy," "to persevere until the end" (1,7-8). This is an expression that sends us back to Mt 10,22: "qui perseveraverit usque in finem salvus erit." The fact that in the third letter Jerome unequivocally shows that he refers to Mt 10:24-25a, constitutes a further confirmation of our thesis and underlines the importance of these evangelical sayings in Miani's life and spirituality.

In the Gospel according to Matthew, the saying about perseverance belongs to the discourse of mission (Mt 10:1-42). According to the structuring of the first Gospel, the mission of the twelve constitutes the confirmation that the Father fulfills the prayer to which Jesus invites his disciples (cf. Mt 9:38). Such a similar text correlation allows us to affirm that, in our case, Jerome does not just quote a single sentence, but refers to all the context where it is present. This datum, that will be confirmed in examining all his letters, is very important, because it makes us think that for Miani the biblical quotations are

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1. <sup>1</sup> The article is published in *Somascha*1(1976)50-63.

2. <sup>2</sup> Mt 24:13 and Mk 13:13 report the same saying of Jesus, but in a form very different. For this reason, in our case, the dependence on Lk is sure.

neither a display of erudition nor an expression of a vague and discontinuous memory of biblical sayings, which has become part of the cultural patrimony of his time. On the contrary, it is a question of quotations, which develop in the thinking of those who constantly nourish their faith with the Word of God, internalize it, and deepen it in the inspiration of the Spirit and in the light of the divine wisdom.

In this context we still have to note that the quotation is not reported in direct way, as in a didactical or doctrinal work. On the contrary, the biblical text is modified to form an organic and harmonious whole with what Miani is writing. For this reason, instead of the imperative "rogate" of Matthew's text, we encounter "rogamus," that presents in a plastic way the Company that executes Jesus' command, through its prayer to the Father. Also this way to recall a text of the Scripture is an evident sign of intense and daily internalization of the Word.

b) *and even though I am not in the battle with you on the field, I hear its clamor and in prayer I lift my arms as far as I can* (2,2-4). In this sentence Jerome alludes clearly to the passage of Ex 17:8-16 (cf. Especially vv. 11-13), the known page where Moses' figure appears. The latter intercedes for his people, who is fighting against the Amalekites, and with his prayer he obtains the victory of the Israelites over the enemy's army.

The way the quotation is done, is the same we met in the previous paragraph: Jerome applies the word of the Scripture to himself, avoiding any explicit reference to the biblical text. Without a break in continuity in his epistolary style, he presents himself praying for his Company by using the terms and images with which the Scripture describes Moses in the function of efficient intercessor for his people. We can also note that Jerome does not delight in details nor linger on secondary aspects. On the contrary, he grasps the biblical message in its essence and expresses it with a strong living (cf. "I hear the clamor"), personal and peculiar language (one may note the beauty and efficacy of the expression "as far as I can").

c) *mane nobiscum domine, quia vespersit* (2,9). Miani now quotes the prayer of the Emmaus' disciples: "Mane nobiscum, quoniam advesperascit" (Lk 24:41). The vocative "domine," absent in Luke's Gospel, draws inspiration from the profession of faith of the eleven and disciples, profession that is the conclusion toward which all the story is oriented: "surrexit Dominus vere... Et ipsi narrabant... quomodo cognoverunt eum...: (Lk 24:34-35). The presence of this vocative not only reveals probably a liturgical influence in the quotation of the Saint, but also it has the function of conferring to the text the tone of ardent prayer, that connects the Gospel quotation to the theme of the first part of the letter. An interesting observation to keep in mind is the prayerful atmosphere in which Miani internalizes the Word of God, so that it might become light for him and his companions, on the daily paths of the Christian existence and mission.

With the quotation, the text of the letter contains also a reference to the initial part of the paragraph about the Emmaus' disciples. When Miani invites his own to pray to Christ "pilgrim," it is evident that he refers to the question that starts the dialogue of the disciples with the "unknown:" "Tu solus peregrinus es in Hierusalem...?" (Lk 24:18).

Such observations show that also in this case Jerome does not only quote the biblical sentence that enlightens his message, but he is aware of all the paragraph to which it belongs.

## Second Letter

a) *without faith he cannot perform many miracles (says the Evangelist) (6,2-3)*. Faith appears always in the Gospel as a condition necessary for Jesus to perform a saving intervention. However, the text that is closer to this sentence of the second letter is Mt 13:58, “And he did not perform many miracles because of their lack of faith.” Either the fact that this verse is not part of a discourse, but it is a consideration of the evangelist, or the expression “many miracles,” or also the verb “perform” constitute a clear confirmation that Miani thinks of the verse in Mt 13. Therefore, “says the evangelist” is not a generic reference to the “Gospels” as literary places, but it contains a clear reference to the first evangelist, Matthew.

This shows that our sentence contains a quotation of Mt 13:58. However, we need to note that Jerome recalls the evangelical text in a synthetic and personal way, so that the verse, thanks to a process of wise actualization, is located harmoniously in the topic of the letter. What in Mt sounds a condemnation judgment of the unbelieving of Nazareth’s inhabitants toward Jesus, in Jerome it becomes a statement of the need of persevering in faith even in the enigmatic moments of trial. He wants that the members of the Company of the Servants of the Poor become the space where Christ accomplish his work and realizes the saving plan of God.

b) *and abandoned even by the corporal presence (but not by the heart) of your... father (6,6-7)*. This expression is very close to the passage where the Apostle writes to the Thessalonians: “As to us, brothers, after a little time we were separated from you in person but not in heart, we were impatient to see your face again’ (1Ts 2:17). Is it only similarity or an authentic reference to the Pauline text? We think that it is probably the second possibility, given that the nature of reference is also confirmed both by the affectionate and parenetic style pervading the letter of St. Jerome and the first letter to the Thessalonians, and by the fact that the Apostle, just few verses before (cf. 1Ts 2:11-12) presented himself to the community in Thessalonica as a father who “exhorts,” “comforts,” and “beseeches” his children to journey in a way worthy of God.

A surprising parallelism is found also between the beginning of the letter and 1Ts 2:1-12. Particularly, Jerome’s recall to his witness (“I have shown with facts and words”) seems echo vv. 9-10 of the Pauline letter.

We are at the presence of a wisdom reading of the Word of God. In our case, everything points to considering that the Pauline text just quoted, has exercised great influence on St. Jerome’s spirituality both in the comprehension of his mission or in the awareness of his paternity.

c) *he will make of you great things by exalting the humble* (6,19). In this sentence we breathe the atmosphere of the Magnificat. Jerome quotes it in a discourse-like way without interrupting his speech. The quotation embraces two different verses of Luke's composition: Lk 1:49 (*fecit mihi magna*) and Lk 1:52 (*et exaltavit humiles*). Also this case shows that Jerome does not give a material quotation of the Bible. On the contrary, he has in front of him, and in some way he recalls all its context. Such a procedure unveils a deep assimilation and internalization of God's Word. Moreover, as we have already seen (cf. First letter at \$b; second letter at \$a), Miani actualizes the biblical text by applying to his companion what in Luke's Gospel is stated about God's work in Mary. The spirituality of "Magnificat," that is placed in the biblical wake of the "anawim," appears here as a component that marks the face of the spiritual experience of Jerome and his Company of the Servants of the Poor.

d) *to try you as gold is tried in a furnace* (6,24). The image of gold tried in fire constitutes a wisdom motif (cf. Jb 23:10; Ws 3:6) that in NT is resumed in 1Pt 1:7 (1Cor 3:13 cannot be quoted here because the image seems deeply transformed). The comparison of our text with the quoted biblical passages allows us to infer that Jerome draws inspiration from the text of Wisdom, the only one that speaks of gold, not purified by fire, but "tried," "tested" in the furnace: "he has tried them as gold in the furnace" (Ws 3:6).

The reference to this text unveils perhaps Miani's familiarity with wisdom motifs. It is a meaningful witness of it the image of gold tried in the furnace in order to metaphorically signify the condition of the servant of God who, purified by trials, grows in value. The reference to the page of Wisdom is very interesting because Ws 3:6 belongs to a context where it speaks of the condition of those who are risen and, because of their immortality, they are close to God (cf. Ws 2:23 and 6:19). Jerome's discourse reaches it apex by hinting at one hundred percent in this world and the gift of eternal life "in the other." Also here the quotation is not reported in a casual or superficial way. On the contrary, his choice enlightens the thought that Miani develops in this part of his letter to the point of reaching the apex of faith: the joyful certainty of eternal life. In this way of recalling the biblical texts we see the spirit of the one, who has developed in himself, through faith, the inner ability to welcome and assimilate the Word of the Lord.

e) *and he gives one hundred fold in this world of what one leaves behind because of love for Him, and eternal life in the other* (6,28-7,1). The text recalls the famous Jesus' saying that is reported by the Synoptics (Mt 19:29; Mk 10:29-30; Lk 18:29b-30). From the comparison of the three Gospel passages we infer that only in Mk and Lk we find the explicit distinction between (this time) and the "future time." In order to find out whom of the two evangelists Jerome refers to, it is necessary a comparison between the two texts. For this purpose they are here reported in synoptical form:

|                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mk 10:29-30               | Lk 18:29b-30              |
| An I tell you             | And I tell you            |
| That those who leave home | That those who leave home |
|                           | or wife                   |
| or brothers or sisters    | or parents                |

|                                    |                               |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| or children                        | or children                   |
| or fields                          |                               |
| because of me                      |                               |
| and because of the Gospel          | because of the kingdom of God |
| will receive a hundred times       | will receive much more        |
| in this present time               |                               |
| in houses brothers and sisters and |                               |
| mothers and children and fields,   |                               |
| together with persecutions,        |                               |
| and in the future                  | and in the future             |
| eternal life.                      | eternal life.                 |

The analysis of this synoptical picture makes it possible to elaborate some data worthy of notice. Only in Mk there is “hundred times” and Jerome writes just “one hundred fold.” Moreover, the sentence “because of love for Him” recalls Mk’s “because of me,” that is absent in Lk. Mk, at last, lists in what “a hundred times” consists by repeating the exemplification adopted before. To this repetition Miani seems to refer in a synthetic way when he writes “of what one leaves behind.”

Therefore, it is legitimate to conclude that Jerome recalls Mk’s text and draws inspiration from it. However, we need to specify that also in this case Miani shows he is far from quoting only verbally, but he assimilates the biblical text and presents it in an actualized and personal way. Jerome knows how to gather the fundamental and core message of the biblical text, message that has the inner energy to express and fulfill itself in every situation of the Christian existence and Church’s history.

f) *if you stand firm in faith* (7,7). This expression contains a precious biblical reminiscence. It is about the first letter of Peter, where the Christians are exhorted to remain faithful to their vocation and resist against the persecution and attacks of the Adversary. The exhortation climaxes with the imperative: “resist him, standing firm in faith” (1Pt 5:9). The author of the first letter of Peter reminds to his Christians that God “takes care” of them (1Pt 5:7) and that He himself, “after a brief suffering,” “will restore” them, “make” them “strong, firm and steadfast” (1Pt 5:10).

The same order of thought is found in Jerome’s letter: “if you stand firm in faith during temptations,... the Lord will console you... and will free you from temptation, and will give you peace and tranquility...” (7,8-11). This parallelism is an evident sign that even in the previous case Miani does not limit himself to reporting the text he quotes. His thought is enriched by the message that is developed in all context. This is an unequivocal sign of a reading of the Word of God that is characterized by intense internalization and vital actualization.

g) *comforting everybody in the Lord* (9,4). This expression recalls the exhortation that appears in the last chapter of the letter to the Ephesians: “De cetero, fraters, confortamini in Domino” (Ep 6:10). The Vulgata version, that translate the Greek “endounamousthe” (draw strength) with the imperative “confortamini,” allows us to grasp the Biblical meaning of the verb “to comfort.” In Scriptures the verb “to comfort” does not denote a consolation of a mere psychological-emotional nature, but it means

communicating to the brothers the strength that one draws from the Lord. As a consequence, it means orienting everybody to open up with faith to the Lord, aware that only the Lord “comforts” his people (cf. Is 52:9), as far as He is the One who opens the future of the new Exodus and new Covenant, the future of salvation.

This conclusive sentence in the second letter throws a new light on the initial part of the writing, when Jerome maintains: “Your poor father greets you and comforts you in the love of Christ and the observance of the Christian rule” (5,2-30). Jerome’s fatherhood is fulfilled as far as he “comforts” his own, by guiding them to opening to the love of Christ, so that all their existence be radiation of the “Christian rule,” that is, of the new life that springs up from this love and by it is for ever characterized.

The fact that the commitment of those who are responsible is synthesized in the syntagm “comforting everybody in the Lord,” gives us precious information. Jerome did not consider his fatherhood as an attribute tied exclusively to his person, but as a gift the Lord grants, in a particular way, to all those belonging to the Company of the Servants of the Poor: first, to those who in the Company have the mission of being the sign of unity in faith, of vitality in hope, and of community in the mission of charity.

### Third Letter

*a) In your patience you will possess your souls. What good will be for a man to gain the whole world? (10,1-3)*

We have here a particular case where Jerome moves near to each other two Biblical quotations belonging to different books. The first sentence comes from Lk 21:19 (3), the second is drawn from Mt 16:26 “Quid enim prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur?”(4).

Matthew’s sentence belongs to the context of Jesus’ followship (Mt 16:24-28). Having received the faith in the resurrection, the early Christian community not only understood the saving meaning of Jesus’ death, but also understood that the disciples of the Lord are as such because they participate in the resurrection. For this reason, they are enabled to make of their life an offering of love for the brothers and everybody, by witnessing in every time and place the One who has loved us and gave us his life. This deep and bright vision of faith is included in the saying that presents the existence of the disciple connected with the demand of “carrying the cross.” In this theologically rich context, the saying handed down in the Gospel of Mt climaxes with the solemn statement: “qui... perdidit animam suam propter me, inveniet eam” (Mt 16:25).

The Mt context we have briefly recalled, allows us to affirm that the Miani’s combining of the two texts of Mt and Lk reveals an unexpected depth. The “possidebitis animas vestras” of the third evangelist corresponds to “inveniet eam” of the first one; analogically, Jerome’s expression “in your patience” is understood in the light of “perdidit animam suam propter me.”

The union of the two Gospel sentences shows once again that the Saint considers all the context where the quoted expression are located, and that just this knowledge of such a context allows him to combine different texts, highlight their correlations, and open perspectives of solid thematic value. The wisdom reading of the Word of God, that

is developed in a process of increasing listening and coherent assimilation, shows here its immeasurable fecundity.

We can affirm that in this text we encounter a type of reading of the Bible used by the rabbinic tradition and later on re-used by the Fathers of the Church. Such an approach takes place in a wisdom perspective and allows to catch the Scriptures' text in its genuine and fresh message and in the radiant light of its virtuality. Also the recent exegesis, after a laborious and troublesome sailing (5), begins to be more sensitive to this kind of deep message of the Scriptures. In reality, the imperative of the being scientific demands that the believer will not ignore the fundamental Scriptures' claim of being the Word in which God reveals Himself to man and lifts him up to Him (cf. Ex 19:3-4).

b) *we are like the seed on rocky soil* (10,3-4). It is evident the allusion to the known interpretation of the parable of the sower we find in the Synoptics (Mt 13:18-23; Mk 4:13-20; Lk 8:11-15). The following sentence (cf. c) shows that Jerome refers to Lk's text. The comparison reveals awareness of the greatness of man who receives the seed of the divine Word, and at the same time the awareness of his inborn weakness. Without divine intervention, which renews the interior of man, the latter cannot be the good soil where the seed of the Word sprouts and grows.

c) *at times they believe and during temptations they give up* (10,4-5). Here Jerome quotes Lk 8:13: *ad tempus credunt et in tempore tentacionis recedunt.* This quotation with the previous one confirms first of all that Jerome recalls a versus in all its context. Moreover, the content of this quotation offers a precious datum because it allows us to see the great importance that the Word of God has become for St. Jerome. This importance can be seen clearly in the need of internalizing and actualizing the Word in his own life with coherence, perseverance and faithfulness.

d) *and He through you...*(11,7-9). We encounter in this passage an interesting example of how Jerome draws inspiration from a biblical text and builds the sentence starting from it. Our text presents a parallelism with Mt 5:16, as we can see from this prospect:

|                             |                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| and He through you          | ut videant opera vestra bona  |
| be illumined                | Sic luceat lux vestra         |
| and the Father be glorified | et glorificent patrem vestrum |
| in heaven                   | qui in coelis est             |
| in his Christ               |                               |

The addition "in his Christ" is important to understand the Saint's entire quotation. It recalls the theme of glorification of the Father in the Son, dear to Jn and present in the chapters 13-17 of the fourth Gospel. It is expressed in an impressive way in the words "so that the Father be glorified in the Son" (Jn 14:13). The same thought we can find in 1Pt: "so that in everybody God be glorified in Christ Jesus" (4:11). In Jerome the Jn theme of the glorification of the Father in the Son, as it may appear, is influenced by the formulation of the versus quoted in 1Pt, versus that, as we have seen previously, Miani would know and internalize (cf. Second Letter, f).

The analysis of the expression “in His Christ” highlights the fact that Miani reads Mt’s sentence in Jn’s perspective and probably under the influence of 1Pt. Only an inner same wavelength with Scripture, that is born from a wisdom listening of the Word of God, can enkindle in the heart of the believer the light that allows one to unite in a marvelous theological synthesis texts belonging to different books and traditions of the Scriptures.

e) *only God is good* (11,17). The expression echoes Jesus’ response to the rich youth that the Synoptics register in this way:

- “Only one is good” (Mt 19:17)
- “No one is good but only God’ (Mk 10:18)
- “No one is good, but only one, God” (Lk 18:19)

It is difficult to maintain if Jerome just quotes the sentence *ex auditu* or he has before himself a precise text. In this last case, the most probable influence is Mt’s Gospel, that in Vulgata sounds like this: “Unus es bonus Deus.” To the man who does not feel capable of performing brotherly correction (“I am not good”), Jerome counters with God’s capability. The evident recall to Mt’s text or to the synoptical tradition, shows that Jerome develops a linguistic play with the term “good.” Referred to Viscardi, the adjective “good” surely denotes human capacity (in our text: the fear of not being up to what is requested by the duty of the brotherly correction). Referred to God, the same term denotes divine capability. It is necessary, however, to notice that, on the same wavelength with the theological thought of Scripture, the performing power of God is affirmed in the perspective of his goodness. God’s power, in other terms, is epiphany of his and merciful faithful love, and, just for that, it is expression of his being “good” (cf. Ps 100:5).

The skillful semantic passage that transfers “good” from the ambiance of the human capability to the one of divine goodness, understood as saving power of love, might shed light on the way in Jerome the language of daily experience opens, through a process of linguistic association, that is, with the mediation of the Scripture language, to the vision of faith.

f) *and to pray so that we see* (11,30-31). We have an allusion to the prayer of the blind man in Jericho: “Lord, I want to see” (Lk 18:41) (6). The reminder to the healing of the blind of Jericho enlightens a deep motif in Miani’s spirituality. He has in fact a sharp awareness of the need to receive the light of God in order to walk in his ways and make the existential choices in tune with the divine design.

The reference to Lk Gospel allows to understand the relationship between the gift of inner “vision” and the risen “Lord,” a theme that recurs frequently in the Saint’s letters, especially in the first and the sixth one.

g) *and let us pray the father of the harvest that he may send workers* (12,24). It is the same quotation we met in the first letter (1,6). In our text, we see, with major evidence, how Jerome assimilates the biblical quotation and incorporate it in his text. The expression “and let us pray” continues in a regular way the discourse started before and in the same time it constitutes the beginning of the quotation. This is demonstrated clearly by comparing it with the first letter, where the verb “rogamus” corresponds to the imperative “rogate of the Gospel passage.

It is interesting to notice how “*Dominum messis*” becomes “*patrem eternum*” in the first letter and “*patrem*” in the third one. It follows that Jerome’s prayer for vocations is always addressed to the Father in an explicit way. Also here Miani unveils his intense assimilation and personal internalization of the Word of God. Moreover, the re-reading of the evangelical saying in a way that the prayer is addressed to the Father, witnesses in Jerome a closeness to the spirituality of the NT, spirituality that always is deeply and vitally oriented to the Father.

h) *blessed those of whom are said every kind of evil...* (13,2-4). We encounter another example of the style with which Jerome recurs to the Bible. He assimilates the text and actualizes it so spontaneously that he can describe a situation not only with words explicitly taken from Scripture but also in a form so close to what he is dealing with, that only a careful reading allows to pick up the presence of a biblical reminiscence.

The source of our text is Mt 5:11-12 as it is evidenced by this comparison:

|                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Blessed the one                | Beati estis cum maledixerint    |
| Of whom is said every kind     | vobis and persecuti vos fuerint |
| Of evil falsely                | et dixerint omne malum ad       |
| And he has to bear it          | vos mentientes                  |
| With joy                       | gaudete et exultate             |
| While waiting for great reward | quoniam merces vestra copiosa   |
| In heaven                      | est in caelo.                   |

The comparison between Jerome’s sentence and the Gospel passage serves more than any other comment to see to what degree the Saint has assimilated the Word of God making living part of his spiritual world, and therefore, of his thought and language. In this context it is really enlightening the actualization of the Word. In this passage, in fact, Miani refers to the innocent who bear the slander, the beatitude of Jesus’ disciples who live the hour of persecution with persevering faith and “joyful” hope. The strength and fecundity of this correlation are evident because of the virtuality that it discloses to the existential dimension of faith and because of the vital perspectives that it allows to see in the life and spirituality of St. Jerome.

i) *those who do not work must not eat* (13,9). We have the quotation of the words of Paul to the Thessalonians: “*si quis non vult operari nec manducet*” (2Ts 3:10). Despite the difference between the Latin expression reported by Jerome and the text of Vulgata, the dependence on 2Ts 3:10 is out of the question. The quotation not only mirrors the practical character of Miani, but, read in the light of its context, it holds precious information. First of all, it witnesses the sensitivity of the Saint to the wisdom tradition, from which it derives the maxim reported by Paul. Moreover, we can perceive a strong tension in working in agreement and peace, without discouraging in doing good. This tension characterizes the spiritual fervor which animates Miani and he cares to instill in his own. This industry in doing good is enlightened by the faith in the risen Lord and in its turn it enlightens it. To Jerome interests, in agreement with the NT, that the confession of the Lord be not reduced to empty words or vain ideology, but be an authentic sign of

the new life of those who walk in Christ's love and express it in the "Christian rule", that is in the form of their risen existence (cf. Col 3:1).

1) *the disciples are according to the Master* (14,30). In this sentence resounds the text of Mt 10:24-25a: "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master." Also in this case we encounter the style with which Jerome usually recalls the biblical texts. The allusion to Mt 10:24-25a represents an ulterior confirmation of the importance that the discourse of mission had taken in the life and thought of the Saint. In the same time, the text of Mt underlines the importance of the relationship "teacher-disciple" in the vision Jerome has of his own mission and the future of the Company. It is a fundamental motif of the wisdom world. In the Hebrew tradition the pericope of Moses' intercession during the battle of the people against the Amalekites (pericope that Jerome recalls in his first letter) has received a very enlightening interpretation. While in the Christian interpretation the emphasis is put on prayer, the Hebrew scholars (as Rashi) draw attention on the fact that Moses gave Joshua the task of facing the enemy (cf. Ex 19:9) and from this datum they infer that Israel would be able to overcome all the enemies who will face it during the centuries if its teachers are able to form their disciples, and make them, on their turn, teachers. We thought opportune to report this interpretation of the Hebrew tradition because it may enlighten a deep reality that seems overlooked in the culture of our western world. The wisdom familiarity with Scripture has taken Jerome to see in the relationship "teacher-disciple" an essential aspect of the life of the Company. In this vision, already interesting and intriguing enough, Jerome was able to infuse the fruit of his wisdom and experience. In this vision, the teacher qualifies as such on the basis of his "better example" and the disciple, in his turn, is characterized by his cooperation and he is seen in a relationship of full responsibility with his teacher.

#### Fourth Letter

In this letter we have only one biblical quotation: *faith without works is dead* (19,15), that is taken from Jm 2:26. It is not improbable that this sentence may have felt the effect of the influence of the counter-reform that would contrast Luther's "sola fides." The prayer for the "reform" of all Christianity we find in "Our Prayer," points in that direction. In Jerome, however, it is absent any polemic hint. Also here, as elsewhere, we have the word of God applied to the concrete case in its message always living and operating.

The analysis of the second letter showed the rich theological and existential meaning that for Jerome has the term "faith." Such a meaning faithfully mirrors the depth of the biblical language. The above quotation underlines that faith contains in itself the same need of expressing itself in the reality of the new life of the resurrection. In the perspective of resurrection, the new life manifests itself in the concreteness of the existence that continues Christ's works of love in the time. These works – just to use Paul's language – are nothing but the "fruit" of the Spirit who guides the faithful to fulfill the manifold possibilities of realizing the divine commandment of love, according to God's design (cf. Gal 5:22-23).

Here we can see Jerome's vital inclination for the works, since in them and through them, the Spirit's guide, Christ's action and Father's goodness are revealed on earth.

#### Fifth Letter

a) *the Lord who says...* (20,5-7). We encounter again a text that witnesses the personal and colloquial way Jerome quote the Scripture with. For reason of clarity, we report the text of the letter and Mt 6:33 synoptically:

|                                         |                                |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| the Lord who says that we               |                                |
| have to look first for                  | quaerite ergo primum           |
| the kingdom of God                      | regnum Dei                     |
|                                         | and iustitiam eius             |
| will provide these things appropriately | et haec omnia adicientur vobis |

This saying of Jesus is either in Mt or in Lk (Lk 12:31). We have, however, a clues that Jerome refers to Mt. In fact, Miani's words written earlier ("It is not necessary that you pay too much attention to the collection;" cf. 20,3-4) contain already a clear allusion to Mt's text, "Nolite ergo solliciti esse..." (Mt 6:31).

Once again, therefore, we have a confirmation that Jerome's interest does not exhaust itself in the sentence that represents an explicit quotation or a sure allusion. On the contrary, the thought refers itself to all the context, grasped in its essential lines and in the vital depth of its message (7).

Some themes deserve to be pointed out in this context: the search for the kingdom of God as a fundamental expression of Christian existence; the motif of trust in connection with the search of the kingdom of God; the emphasis the Saint put on the Lord contemplated in the saving mystery of his resurrection. This latter aspect is confirmed if we observe that the expression "all these things will be given to you as well" of Mt 6:33b, assume in Jerome's version the following form: "(the Lord...) will provide these things appropriately." Such a comparison, in fact, shows with undoubted clarity that Miani directly refers to the work of the risen Lord the promise of divine reward reserved to those who first look for the kingdom of God.

b) *We will not miss to remember you in our prayers* (21,7-8). This expression echoes a language that occurs frequently in the letters of Paul. From them it emerges the apostolic image of St. Paul who in prayer always recalls the various communities founded by him, and blesses God for the work of salvation He has accomplished in them. The text, to which Jerome seems to refers to in special way, is the one from 1Th, where the apostle writes: "always mentioning you in our prayers" (1Th 1:2).

## Sixth Letter

- a) *with the father of lies* (23,11.12). This expression recalls the language of John who he presents the devil as “liar and father of lies” (Jn 8:44).
- b) *and they know that I say the truth because they do not have it from God?* (23,12-13). The discourse of Jesus reported in chapter 8 of John’s Gospel reappears also here: “If I say the truth, why do not believe me?” (Jn 8:46). It is another confirmation that when Jerome recalls a verse of the Scripture has constantly present its context.
- c) *Pax vobis (Peace be with you)* (24,3). It is the greeting of the risen Lord (cf. Jn 20:21; 26) that the Christian community continue repeating in time and space. With this greeting practically the last of the letters of St. Jerome which are in our possession, ends.

The collection of the letters of St. Jerome begins with the image of the Company which, in order to “remain with Christ” invokes the Lord to remain with us. Now it concludes with the word of the risen Lord who gives peace. This inclusion, constituted by the invocation to the Lord and by the awareness of His coming with the Easter gift of peace, witnesses the sublime faith of Miani and his being rooted in the Word of God. In him, we can state, Scripture was not the text to tap for quotations or sentences to support ideas of pietistic or moralistic nature. On the contrary, it represents the light that enlightened his faith and the power that consecrated his thought.

## 2. SOME OBSERVATIONS

The exam of the texts of Sacred Scripture contained in the letters of St. Jerome makes it possible to comprehend the importance and the value of the quotations or allusions we have found (8).

First of all, we report the list of the biblical quotations or allusions which our analysis has allowed to pinpoint with surety:

Ex 17:8-16;

Wis 3:5-6;

Mt 5:11-12.16; 6:31-33; 9:38; 10:22.24-25a; 13:17; 16:26; 19:17;

Mk 10:29-30;

Lk 1:49.52; 8:13; 18:41; 21:19; 24:18.34-35;

Jn 8:44.46; 14:13; 20:21.26;

Ep 6:10

1Th 1:2; 2:17;

2Th 3:10;

Jm 2:26;

1Pt 3:9; 4:11.

The first data we gather in the light of this list is the clear predominance of the texts of the NT in comparison with the only two quotations of the OT.

In the NT Jerome quotes or draws inspiration predominantly from the Gospels and, among them, especially Mt, followed by Lk.

If from statistics we go to the contents, some biblical central themes emerge clearly. First, we need to observe that, despite the contrary appearances, the OT is heavily present, given the fact that Jerome's language recalls its fundamental themes, such as: the kingdom of God; its glory; His love and His tenderness, the exodus of salvation, the filial communion of the covenant, faith, trust, prayer of intercession. This presence of the OT, which is more meaningful than what the two quotations may suggest, receives a sure and authoritative confirmation from "Our Prayer."

In the light of these great themes, some ideas of the NT acquire a particular importance. We list them following the order of the texts:

- the spirit of the Beatitudes, in the suffering and witness for the kingdom of heavens (Mt 5-6).
- the Father and the harvest (mission speech: Mt 9:38-10:33).
- the spirit of Magnificat as a confession of God's works in the history of salvation (Lk 1:46-55).
- the Word of God (Lk 8:4-15).
- faith (1Pt 3; Jm 2:26).
- the presence of Jesus among His own (Lk 24:13-35).
- the glorification of God in Jesus and in the believers (Jn 13-17).
- the presence of the "founder" with his love (1Th) and his prayer (1Th 2:1-12; Ex 17:8-16).

These themes allow to see how deeply rooted was the biblical dimension in Jerome's soul (9) and constitute points of reference for a deeper comprehension of his spirituality. On the basis of the results attained, it is possible now through the scientific research to examine the letters of the Saint in order to find and point out the connections that Miani has established among these themes and the way in which they were assimilated, lived, and proposed by him.

Another observation of certain interest regards the way St. Jerome resorts to Scriptures. As it was demonstrated in the previous analysis, he does not only report some sentences which could be a religious idea dominant in his time or in the environment of his renewed life. First of all, the texts he quotes are deeply inserted in the context, and therefore, never constitute forced or ideological quotations. In some cases, on the contrary, it is evident that the biblical quotation is suggested, because of linguistic association, by what he himself is writing with full and authentic participation of his heart that vibrates for the good and peace of his Company (10).

Moreover, the way Jerome develops the quotations demonstrates that he has present to himself not only the text but also its context and he let himself be influenced and guided by it. In some cases it is clear the influence of some chapters on the thought of the Saint. This is especially true for the passage of the Beatitudes, for the mission speech, and the theme of the presence of Jesus among His own.

In this context we think it possible a deeper study of the letters that will allow the discovery of other connections. Thus, even though the statement must still be demonstrated, it seems that the 1Th (especially 2:1-11) may have guided St. Jerome to understand his role as a father and to develop in himself the richness of spiritual bonds

that will characterize the familiar relationship of the Saint with his companions. Similarly, also the theme of the glory of God that fulfills itself in Christ and believers would deserve to be studied, since this theme surfaces often in the letters of Miani. Such a study could reveal new aspects and new richness inside the same letters arrived to us.

At last, always regarding the way Jerome uses the Bible, we still have to observe the presence of an actualization so living and spontaneous that, if on one hand, it reflects a lived internalization of God's Word, on the other, it manifests a conception of salvation as an event that reaches man in the concreteness of his history, and makes him participant in and contemplator of the "marvelous things of God."

### 3. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the texts and the observations emerged have allowed us to have a hint of the deep familiarity of St. Jerome with the Bible. Even though materially the quotations or allusions come almost exclusively from the NT, St. Jerome is not a specialist who has addressed his research in some sectors of the Sacred Scriptures. He manifests himself as the true "believer" of the NT, the one who listens to the Word of God and puts it into practice. For this we speak of his familiarity with the great themes of the Word of God. The Saint aims constantly at the heart of the biblical message, actualizes it, lives it, and proposes it to the life of his companions.

As it has been demonstrated, it is familiarity with the genuine biblical message, when it is grasped in its essence, where it is absent any allegoric or pietistic interpretation, and from where it emerges the vision and experience of the love of the Father, love that reveals itself –in the work of Christ and in the guidance of the Holy Spirit – to all those who open themselves to the Gospel with faith.

We note, lastly, that it is a dynamic and existential familiarity. The expression "we are like the seed sowed among the rocks" (10, 3-4) enlightens all the personal work with which Jerome let himself be shaped and transformed by the Word of God. With this observation, our study goes beyond the limits of the simple literary research and enters in the mysterious and fascinating world of the spirituality of a Saint, Jerome Miani, who appears to us more and more as a valid model for those who are, as a Church, "in religious listening of the Word of God."

### NOTES

1. The letters of St. Jerome are quoted by following the critical edition: C. PELLEGRINI, *Le lettere di san Girolamo Miani* (Fonti per la storia dei Somaschi 3), Rapallo 1975. Quotations are made in the following way: the first number indicates the

page of the text, while the number after the comma refers to the line that is of interest. Thus, the quotation 5,6 refers to page 5 of the critical edition and to the sentence contained in the line 6.

2. Also this saying is registered by the other Synoptics: Mk 8:26 (Quid enim proderit homini, si lucretur mundum totum..?) and Lk 9:25 (Quid enim proficit homo, si lucretur universum mundum...?). The quotation of St. Jerome refers clearly to the text of Mt.

3. The study of the Fathers and the reading of their works have known a period of noticeable flourishing beginning in the second half of 1400 until beyond the first half of 1500. Some interesting news, because they regard persons with whom Jerome dealt directly, can be found in G. LLOMPART, "Gaetano da Thiene (1480-1547). Estudios sobre un reformador religioso", *Regnum Dei* 24(1968)216-222.

4. The reference to the page of Lk can be considered sure because in the parallel passage in Mk the blind man calls Jesus not with the title of "Lord," but with the title "Rabbuni" (Mk 10:51), while in the text of Mt, where the healing of the two blinds is told, the question of the two people, even though it contains the title "Lord," is formulated differently: "that our eyes may be opened" (Mt 20:33).

5. The fifth letter, as we know, is not autograph of St. Jerome (only the signature is of his hand). There is, therefore, the problem if Miani pointed out only the content or if he dictated it directly. The way the Scripture is used in this letter, similar to the one found in the other letters, suggests rather this second hypothesis.

6. These observations are based on the letters of the Saint known to us, which however are kind of few in number. For this reason we limited ourselves to those elements which because of their consistency can be considered a characteristic of the way he expressed himself and of his spirituality.

7. It is useful to remember that the Theatine communities would read the Gospel every week. In the span of four weeks the readings of the Gospels were distributed in accordance the following division:

|                                               |                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| MATTAEUS                                      | MARCUS                                   |
| <i>Dominica</i> Cap. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7            | <i>Dominica</i> Cap. 1,2,3               |
| <i>Feria 2<sup>a</sup></i> Cap. 8,9,10,11,12. | <i>Feria 2<sup>a</sup></i> Cap. 4,5      |
| <i>Feria 3<sup>o</sup></i> Cap 13,14,15,16,17 | <i>Feria 3<sup>o</sup></i> Cap. 6,7,8    |
| <i>Feria 4<sup>o</sup></i> Cap. 18,19,20,21   | <i>Feria 4<sup>o</sup></i> Cap. 9,10     |
| <i>Feria 5<sup>o</sup></i> Cap. 22,23,24,25   | <i>Feria 5<sup>o</sup></i> Cap. 11,12,13 |
| <i>Feria 6<sup>o</sup></i> Cap. 26,27         | <i>Feria 6<sup>o</sup></i> Cap. 14,15    |
| <i>Sabbato</i> Cap. 28                        | <i>Sabbato</i> Cap. 16                   |
| LUCAS                                         | JOHANNES                                 |
| <i>Dominica</i> Cap. 1,2,3,4                  | <i>Dominica</i> Cap. 1,2,3               |
| <i>Feria 2<sup>a</sup></i> Cap. 5,6,7,8       | <i>Feria 2<sup>a</sup></i> Cap. 4,5,6    |

*Feria 3°* Cap. 9.10.11  
*Feria 4°* Cap. 12,13,14,15,16  
*Feria 5°* Cap. 17,18,19,20,21  
*Feria 6°* Cap. 22,23  
*Sabbato* Cap. 24

*Feria 3°* Cap. 7.8.9  
*Feria 4°* Cap. 10,11,12  
*Feria 5°* Cap. 13.14.15.16.17  
*Feria 6°* Cap. 18.19  
*Sabbato* Cap. 20,21

For this division, cfr R.DE MAULDE LA CLAVIERL, *San Gaetano da Thiene e la Riforma cattolica italiana*, Roma 1911, 183-184.

10. We think that a contribution of this work is to have pointed out the characteristic style with which the Saint quotes the Bible. It is done in such a personal way that the text is presented as really united and homogeneous. The most of the times, only an attentive reading can reveal the allusion to a biblical text or even the presence of the same biblical language.

This observation opens the possibility of new researches. Sentences that at first glance may seem of St. Jerome, could be only the reflex of his living internalization of the biblical message. We mention, as an example of a possible research, the expressions “to confirm the brothers in the love of God... in the works of Christ... in the love of Christ” which recur in the first letter.