

The Texts of the Convivium

A VISIONARY BIBLIST

A series of written works by Don Guido Bortoluzzi (1907-1991), parish priest in the province of Belluno, edited and published on his own by Renza Giacobbi, goes by the title of *Genesi biblica (Biblical Genesis)*. The subtitle is *Nuova luce superna sulle origini dell'uomo, della terra e dell'universo (New supernal light on the origins of man, earth and the universe)*.

The treatment is entrusted to rational matters, which however take place on the basis of the material offered by a progression of "revelations".

Don Guido was tormented by problems concerning the interpretation of the Bible, and in particular of the Book of Genesis. "I was searching for the truth in order to reconcile science with the Bible, and 'the Truth' came to meet me".

He made use of a series of visions, occurring on different dates. He made every effort to try and interpret them with reasoning; however the most valid help seems to have come to him by a Voice, which commented and explained every thing. It presented itself as the voice itself of the Lord Jesus. In theological terms the phenomenon, when corroborated by the authorities of the Church, could be defined as a "private revelation".

During his rather long parochial existence and experience, Don Guido was considered, by his superiors and his brothers, as well as by the small mountain peoples whose souls he looked after, as a pious priest who had rather bizarre ideas. No acknowledgement has ever been granted him.

Faithful to the discipline of the clergy, Don Guido had always conformed himself to his bishop's injunction to avoid any expressions of his theories. It was only on the occasion of the apparent theophany, which I will mention shortly, that he confided the experience to his parishioners who thronged the little church, obtaining, at least, the result of bewildering them. Furthermore, on a different occasion, he took the floor during a local meeting of parish priests earning himself explicit objections if not humiliating silence.

Don Guido was convinced he heard the words of Jesus himself, which answered the questions posed by the Biblist parish priest. It therefore happened that in the middle of a certain night the verbal manifestation was preceded by a rumble of thunder, by the sensation which could be provoked by an earthquake shaking the whole rectory, and finally by a long whistling like that of a violent wind that enters all the windows of the house.

These signs faintly remind one of the theophany of Yahweh on the mount of Sinai (Exodus 19, 16-25), and also the manifestation of the Spirit of Jesus in the Refectory of Jerusalem (Acts 2, 4).

And so here are the first words, which seem to have been uttered by the voice of an adult man: "I am". The voice spoke to the priest as if from his heart of hearts. It therefore gave the reason for what it would say straight after by explaining: "This is the answer to your question".

It was at this point that the priest remembered a question, which he had put forward to his own spirit just a few minutes earlier: "How did Adam manage to find the Woman who was to become his wife?"

The answers came through visions and locutions which comment them.

By considering it as a whole, one may wonder whether the answer is “true” or “false”. By formulating the problem in a somewhat different manner, one could ask oneself “to what extent” such an answer is true: “if it expresses elements of truth and which ones”; and “if, and in what sense, one could find something false, erroneous, illusory, misleading in it”.

They are all words that have a relative, imprecise meaning, which forgo defining things in their most strictly logical terms and nevertheless try to “give an idea” of what one is talking about.

If I am certain the answer comes to me from God, I could be tempted to take it by the letter in my need of absolute certainty. What does God want from me? He wants me to believe in this and that, and for me to do these certain things and to avoid certain others.

The Islamics will say: to be precise, Allah expresses himself in Arabic. Let us make ourselves understood once and for all!

The believer is obliged to deepen his knowledge of that language. As a mere listener he has to make every effort to understand well. He shouldn't reserve any interpretative role for himself. He should keep a good distance from any idea that he who hears the word of God has to consider himself a channel. He is what is known in postal terms as the simple addressee. God is the only Sender.

A determination of roles deducible in such a clear manner from the postal regulations is that which, in theological terms, one could call fundamentalism.

In addressing me, God said to me, colon and new paragraph, commas, this and this. As a human individual who would like to be considered respectable, I am obliged to being utterly clear when I speak or write, and in this way I take every responsibility of what I affirm, otherwise I would create the impression of not having any clear ideas and I deceive myself and others. And so, say the fundamentalists, the same is attributable to God to an eminent degree.

What seems to me as being much more realistic and correct is the idea of distinguishing a Perfect Truth God from men who are only the imperfect receivers and channels of such a Truth. Since God Himself emanates it, the Truth is absolute; and this is made relative only as the man in his imperfection receives and transmits it.

Therefore, that which passes through man is a filtered truth. It finds its expression in visions, in notions and images which, compared to the original, appear to be something similar to a kind of symbol of it.

How can one define the relationship between this kind of “symbol”, which we can imperfectly call as such, and its “original”? Definitely not as a logical identity (*symbol and original are the same thing*, or, if we wish to express ourselves in a more mathematical formula, *symbol=original*). But not even as a total inequality (one is *not* the other *in the absolute sense of the word*).

So, it now concerns placing increasingly more adequate symbols into light. One could deduce them through reasoning, but also receive them through inspiration.

They concern inspirations that can be gradually invoked, to then place oneself in an attitude of openness and of waiting. One can go back to what one receives, to infer, to deduce, to bring every implication to light.

An intuition received more passively and an analysis carried out in a more active manner will alternate their movements like the two legs of knowledge, like inspiration and expiration, like the systole and diastole of the heart.

The inspiration can burst in after a lapse of time after the attempts – for the time being vain, at least in appearance – that the subject has practiced in order to formulate the problem. The interval could be an entire night dedicated to sleep. One sleeps on it and then, in the morning, one wakes up with the problem solved, with much clearer ideas.

However, we could have an incomparably much longer period of incubation: of weeks, months, years. And in the end we have the inspiration that all of a sudden bursts in all together.

The “answer” could be had in the form of words, that the subject perceives in his own heart of hearts, or rather, to his own exterior as if it came at the distance of one or two metres from the front or from the side.

The answer could also be had through a vision that comes into sight before the subject, very distinct from him, or, compared to which, the subject is immersed as if in a dream.

In normal dreams that we have every night we are so immersed in that situation that we are unable to realise the purely oneiric character of that experience, which instead we mistake for an experience of real life.

Then we have “day dreams”. And this is the case of our visionary Biblist, like visionaries in general. The hallucinatory character of these day dreams could reveal itself also immediately at the first experience of this kind, but it could also remain unnoticed, unfelt by the subject for a long period of time, even after a series of such experiences, spaced out by pauses of various durations.

During these hallucinations the cerebral hemisphere which governs rationality remains suspended in the practice of all its critical faculties: therefore the illusion is perfect like in the dream.

The inner discourse he listens to, the vision he perceives can have its own depth of truth, but, as we have already mentioned, this is expressed through a symbolic disguise.

Therefore, although it could be illusory, the experience that comes out as a result could have an element of deformation, of error, of illusion, which is not however total.

Was it really the Lord Jesus who supplied all those “answers” to the questions that tormented his priest? One can definitely say that, in more general terms, a “supernal light” illuminates, sustains and guides every thought addressed to the Absolute.

However, one then has to see how its manifestation is welcomed. The sun that illuminates the entire planetary system is one and always the same, but it reaches the various situations in the most different ways.

There is a clear difference between how the sun beats down on our heads blinding us in a clear sky at midday of a summer’s day, and, on the complete contrary, how it comes down to us in the winter at sunset in a sky full of heavy black rain clouds.

The sun is always the sun, but, whereas it is burning and blinding in certain situations, it appears to be very weak in others.

Here the defect should not be ascribed to the sun as such, but to everything that comes between the sun and us: amongst which one should include the inclination of the earth’s axes, the distance and the clouds.

The glass window panes of each one of us could be differently coloured, so that the same sun could enter the house of one of us coloured red, green in another person’s house, and so on, despite the fact it is neither one nor the other colour in itself.

This image of different coloured glass window panes, which allow the light of the sun to enter in different ways, could symbolise the diversity of the human interpretations of a Truth which in itself is one and always the same.

If a certain analogy stands, then it may be that in the same way as the sun becomes very weak in our eyes, the presence itself of Christ weakens in our theological valuations.

What can we put such a weakening down to? I would say, also here, by analogy: to everything that comes between us and the “Truth” of Christ himself.

I think that in the case of Don Guido, the diaphragm that weakens the vision of the divine Truth of Christ in its correct terms is more than anything else formed by his

whole extremely abstruse and muddled discourse, where the Biblist priest places far too much of his own.

It is a discourse that is shaped by inner locutions, that is by words that he perceives in his own heart of hearts. Don Guido attaches a character of divine revelation to them without carrying out any critical revision, although necessary, on them.

He showed critical spirit right from as far back as the times of his own studies in the seminary, so much so as to induce certain of his superiors to seeing a kind of “contester” in him. However, his critical spirit stopped at certain personal conclusions, on which he seemed reluctant to exert any self-criticism.

He read, re-read and analysed the Biblical passages, which, taken literally, provoked great doubt in him. Nevertheless he remained firm to a literal interpretation. Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, are, as far as he was concerned, historical characters. He did not perceive any mystical meaning in the stories of the Book of Genesis.

He asked himself what happened in the factual and historical sense. Certain facts appeared unlikely or improbable to him. He concluded that things must have gone differently, therefore he reconstructed the Biblical story in his own way.

In this kind of view, the interpretation that Don Guido gave of original sin assumes particular interest. What does it consist of? It does indeed remain a sin of disobedience and presumptuousness as in the orthodox version. However, what exactly was the divine command? God had forbidden Adam to join a certain “Eva” who belonged to an inferior animal species. By doing this, the first man qualifiable as a spiritual being would have extinguished the pure human species, giving rise to a hybrid descent, to a degenerated humanity.

So what was the mission of Christ supposed to have been? His work would have consisted in guiding the humanity, become beastlike as a result of the hybridization, in the recovery of its original spiritual image.

The verbal answers, given by Jesus himself, increased, and with them the visions. They were visions of such clearness, that Don Guido could not only describe them, but even quantify them, as he could, when, for example, he measured the height of Adam, concluding that the ancestor of the human family was one and a half metres tall.

The multiplication of the visions allowed the parish priest to see how the creation of the world had been carried out. In this way he came to learn of countless things regarding the secrets of the universe: in his eyes they were all unquestionable truths, since the images were proposed and explained to him by the Man-God Himself.

Don Guido posed himself with problems, carried out reasonings, induced and deduced, gave himself the answers. However, the answers he considered important and fundamental were those that the Divinity itself gave to him. Furthermore, God proved to be really benevolent to him by confirming the conclusions reached by Don Guido by himself and giving them exciting developments.

What ensued were those that the subject could consider profound intuitions, and not only, but likewise those visions that were so clear that the subject could no longer interpret them as pure hallucinations, in the same way as it is very difficult that he who dreams is aware that he is dreaming, until the moment in which the oneiric experience disappears when one awakes.

The elaboration of these dreams takes place on the subliminal level. The subject can “sow” his own intuitions or also problems that he poses to himself and leaves unresolved. The unconscious elaboration does the rest, working in a decidedly autonomous manner.

And so, at a certain point, a “finished product” emerges from the innermost recesses of the unconscious, which could be well symbolised by the image of the goddess

Minerva who, from the head of Jupiter split in two by Vulcan's axe, comes out as a fully dressed and armed adult.

The fact that the new intuition or vision is born in such a manner gives very little in favour of its alleged divine origin. Elements of truth can be expressed both in an experience of this kind as well as in conclusions reached due to a spiritual maturation encouraged by reasoning and pursued on the level of consciousness. In itself, the manifestation of a truth in the symbolic form of a vision only confirms that this subject has, so to speak, a visionary structure.

The important thing is that discernment is performed. This is obtained by grace, as a reward for an authentic spiritual life. The real mystic takes on an attitude of absolute availability. He entrusts himself to inspiration and lets himself be guided by it, suspending what could be an excessive intense activity of the analytical mind.

Heaven help if the mind is not curbed by a comparison with the experiences of other subjects, especially those that could be called better qualified.

Nobody can claim to have a direct telephone line with God, without taking the inadequacy of the human channel into account. It is true that we can and, as a matter of fact, have to pace ourselves and maintain ourselves open to listening to God, but how can we forget the limits of our receptivity?

This memento is a kind of climbing iron, which a good climber of the spirit would do well to sticking to, so that he doesn't slip into the visionary.