

'In very truth I tell you : There is no servant who is greater than his master, and no apostle greater than him who sent him. Knowing this, blessed are you if you act in this way.' That is a priest's blessedness ! It is easy to see the beauty of serving the brethren ; it is more difficult to put it into practice. Jesus knows this, and that is why he adds a blessing to the injunction of duty and even to his own example. But the man who can humiliate himself in practice like a slave, will be blessed from then on in the present life, and in the future dispensation he will have a real superiority. One is never so great in the eyes of Jesus and never more closely united to him than when one agrees to lower oneself further, like him (Phil. 2:3), to serve one's neighbour.

(To be continued)

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THE BIBLE : NEWS OF GOD

If it has pleased God to hide his truth in a dunghill, that is where we shall go and find it.—JACQUES MARITAIN

How can we speak of 'news' of God ? 'What is the latest news of God ?' sounds like a joke. And so it might be for one who thinks in terms of essences and not biblically. The Israelite did not pry into the nature of God. Indeed, when Moses dared to ask the question : 'Who are you ?' he was told : 'I am what I am,' which sounds suspiciously like : 'Mind your own business.' The concern of the Bible is not with what God is but with what God does. Consequently the Bible is always on the lookout for news : it is a commented diary of God's activity among men. The polytheist and the pantheist are bound up with the cycle of nature ; their hope is born yearly in the Spring, and it is a hope of earth ; when this hope fails, nothing is left. But the Israelite accepted no god immanent in nature ; his was a personal God, the free and independent maker and controller of nature, a craggy unreasonable God who will not conform with nature's cycle. For the Hebrew hope might bloom in the winter and when earth's hope failed he looked instinctively to heaven because the God of the Hebrew is the God who interferes. It is the same with history. This God does not merely use history, He makes it. That is why He is the God of the two great historical religions, the one based on the historical exodus from Egypt, the other on a historical exodus from the grave. History is God in action, and the particular history the Bible relates is regarded (rightly regarded we would say,

because it is self-vindicated by its climax) as God's chosen sphere of unique self-revelation.

News? Why, Israel was always looking for news. 'Stand up,' cries Isaiah, 'stand up on a high mountain, you who bring good news to Zion.' And the angel says to the shepherds: 'I bring you news of great joy' because God had at last chosen to play a personal part in His own history. And so the Hebrew read the story of his race as an interpretation of God. Delivery, fall, repentance, rescue were Israel's recurring seasons, and in those she found a God powerful, intolerant, eager, forgiving. She acknowledged no such agnostic word as coincidence, no inevitable fate, no repetitive circles of time. Quite the opposite: not a sparrow fell without the hand of God, repentance and prayer could move God's heart and turn catastrophe, a Providence drove along rectilinear time to some future goal that was not Paradise Regained but a new heaven and a new earth. This was the God Israel knew, and she knew Him from experience.

If the Bible does not pry into the nature of God it is not from a sense of reverence but from a cast of mind, for in fact it does not inquire into the nature of man either. It can see man only in relation to God, as creature to Creator; and the relation is not, as it were, static; it is by this or that posture before God that man may be assessed. Now since the individual is always seen in that relation, the crisis of one man like the experience of the whole nation may, when reflected upon, contribute to the pattern of images that make up our Biblical picture of God. Thus the impatient Job does not learn only that God is inscrutable, he learns also that God is active even in suffering and riddles. Indeed this Semite, refreshingly free of metaphysical refinement, knows his God as the one who sends the suffering and sets the riddle; that in this very act God reveals Himself as the Mystery in which suffering has some hidden meaning. A century later Ecclesiastes reflects on his experience not of pain but of pleasure. Disillusionment is *his* revelation: Blessed are not the rich. All that remains is to fear God and obey. It may be said that his experience and the lesson he deduces from it are more profound than Job's. A God is trustworthy whose very gifts do not satisfy. It is only a step from here to 'Blessed are the poor' and the promise of the vision of God.

Both Job and Ecclesiastes went forward through the dark—but they went forward. With them the revelation, the news of God advanced not on sunlit peaks of triumphant prophets but in a gloomy valley. The two could not see their way, but in fact they were going to Calvary; they were learning the deepest divine knowledge of all: that pain and problem are part of a crucified and mysterious God.

But to this may I add a prosaic warning, too often ignored, that each book of the Bible is only a part of the living word of the living God which must not be arrested and challenged at any stage or God will cry : ' Wait till I finish.' And He has not finished—even yet.

God, therefore, translates Himself into human action for human understanding. How is He translated into human words? The Bible, it seems, would suppose that in man, made to the image of God, there is some resonance in sympathy with his maker ; that he can be led by mental image, by pictorial representation inadequate but not invalid. But let the Bible itself speak with its pre-logical unmetaphysical tongue :

Moses said : Please let me see your glory. And God said : I shall parade all My majesty before you and in your presence utter the name ' Yahweh.' I have compassion on whom I will and pity for all I please. And again God said : You cannot see My face because no man can see My face and live. Here is a place near Me. Stand upon the rock and when my glory passes by I shall put you in a cleft of the rock and I shall shelter you with My hand as I pass by. Then I shall take My hand away and you shall see Me from the back ; but My face no man can see. (Exod. 33:18-23)

We smile at the anthropomorphism as if we were not guilty ourselves. But consider how it lifts Biblical language above all fashions of philosophy and how, with the wisdom of simplicity it deliberately refuses to seek entrance into the mystery. And yet it has a deep significance for its own time. If the Hebrew knew that no image could be made of his God, he also knew that God could not be adequately symbolised by Sun, or Moon, or planet. For him the only mental image possible was that of a person. The only language by which his God might be addressed is drawn from the institutions of human society—as Lord, King, Father, Judge and the like. Anthropomorphism is not the pathetic childishness we may think : it indicates God's personal relation to history, to man's story ; as such it is not a weakness at all (except the weakness of all theological language) but an important witness not indeed to what God is but to what God does. And if in the end what God does is to assume a human nature, why then we have anthropomorphism in real earnest.

The Bible, then, this newsreel of God, never shows God's face ; we see Him from the back. Or rather it is a series of news flashes, of mental images disconnected and all but incompatible. Thus what we think of as ' father ' God is that and much more ; but He is a mother, too, who carries Israel at the breast. He is Love without qualification, or better—because the Semite, true to his genius, always prefers verb to noun—He is loving, in all our imaginable ways and beyond them. Let us take the boldest image of them all. Driven

almost to incoherence by the effort to express the ineffable, driven anyway to intolerable daring, the Biblical writers, both early and late, preach the *jealousy* of God. God indignantly insists that He alone is God, that He alone has a just claim to Israel's affection and appeals for proof to His action in her history : in front of Israel He challenges the gods :

I am the king and redeemer of Israel
 I am the first and last
 You are my witnesses
 Is there any other god but Me ? (cf. Is. 44:6, 8)

But there is worse, or better, than this : God's jealousy is that of a thwarted husband, a figure of ridicule who waits until her lovers tire of his wife :

She will chase after her lovers and not catch up with them
 She will seek and not find them
 Then she will say : I shall go back to my first husband
 For I was happier then than now. (Os. 2:9)

God waiting for spoiled goods ! It reminds us that the Prodigal found an eager father though driven home not by love but by starvation. The allegory of Israel, the faithless wife, is recurring reality in her story, and the recurring news of God was that He had been made a fool of again. It is still the same news, the good news, the gospel. For love of men God came among them and was hanged for it. But the folly of the Cross is the best news we ever heard.

You may have noticed that whether we spoke of the Bible's simple anthropomorphism, or of God's foolish love, or of man's senseless suffering, we were drawn relentlessly towards the final revelation in Christ. The taking of a human nature by God—and this is an object of faith—sanctions our thinking of him in terms of man and justifies our language. That same singular event turns figure to fact—or rather shows how fact always lurked behind the figure : man and God are two in one flesh. The death and resurrection of that flesh show how even suffering, especially suffering, can be used redemptively. And all this is as it should be, for the Word made flesh is—if I dare call it so—the paroxysm of God's effort to make his word understood. It is *the* revelation of God to human nature through one human nature and insofar as the revelation can be put into human words it is Christ who will do it.

But why speak of ' words ' ? You know that for the Hebrew the term ' word ' does not signify something merely denominative and abstract, but something operative, efficient. God's events speak ; these are God's words—and the coming of our Lord is no exception.

‘REDEMPTION’ IN ST PAUL

For this coming is itself a word-event of God, climax of so many. And yet it is unique : unique because this time it is not the historical event that becomes a word ; the Word itself becomes an historical event. Christ, being what he was, did indeed work our salvation in action and passion ; but he also enacted a parable of divine love such as the world had not heard nor would hear again—for he was the Word of God. In the dunghill of this creation, in its sordid history, in its stammering tongue, in its crucified flesh, the Truth of God was found. And the last word was the foolish word of the Cross.

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‘REDEMPTION’ IN ST PAUL

To say that St Paul preached the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ is a commonplace, but to pinpoint accurately the total background of the term ‘redemption’ as used by St Paul is quite another matter. The core of this problem is the Greek word *apolutrōsis*, ‘redemption,’ found in a number of places in the Apostle’s epistles. The texts are : Rom. 3:24 and 8:23 ; 1 Cor. 1:30 ; Eph. 1:7, 1:14 and 4:30 ; Col. 1:14. In Rom. 8:23 and Eph. 1:14 and 4:30 there is an echo of Luke 12:28, and these texts refer to an eschatological redemption which is yet to come. The remaining four are concerned with that redemption worked on Calvary and in the resurrection by Christ.

Even though this term ‘redemption’ in St Paul can be generally categorised, the question of its background remains. One prominent explanation considers the sacred manumission found in antiquity to be the real key to St Paul’s thought, and this theory, as advanced principally by Adolf Deissmann,¹ has held the field. Many Pauline phrases are compared to the technical formulae of the manumission records in order to bring out the full force of the term ‘redemption.’

Manumission of a slave was accomplished in various ways among the ancients, but emphasis is placed here on the peculiar ceremony by which a slave was purchased by a god. Inscriptions at Delphi are the principal sources of knowledge concerning the nature of the rites involved in sacred manumission. At Delphi the ceremony is connected with Apollo, but manumission of a sacred character was not exclusively

¹ *Light from the Ancient East*, New York 1927, pp. 319–30