

volume of his *Meditations* the inwardness of obedience is dominant: that he who leads must be led, and led by the response of a full and voluntary committal, for lack of which everything will be futile. There is perhaps no finer set of meditations available for a Catholic teacher than those in which, at the beginning, De La Salle extols the teacher's vocation as that of a veritable coadjutor with Christ in the forming of human persons. 'Do you bear in mind that what you do now, in their behalf, will become the foundation upon which all the good, which they will hereafter practise, must be built? . . . It is Christ himself who wishes that your pupils should look upon you as taking his place, that they should receive your instructions as coming from him, and that they should be persuaded that it is the truth of Christ that speaks through your lips. . . . Thus you are given to understand that whatever good you do in favour of those for whom you are responsible, will be true and effective only in so far as Jesus Christ will give it his blessing, and only in so far as you yourself remain united to him. . . . Thank God therefore, for the grace he has given you in allowing you to share in the ministry of the Apostles. . . .'³

³ *Meditations*, ed. Battersby, *Meditations for the Vacation Retreat*, pp. 3-45.

CATECHISM FOR ADULTS:

V. 'And Suffered'

IAN HISLOP, O.P.

THE fourth article of the creed, 'Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried', summarizes the events in our Lord's Passion. It is important in considering this article to remember the general interpretation given in the Scriptures to these events. It is this interpretation that directs the awareness in faith of the significance of the events. The dramatic force of the story is so great on its human level that it can sweep us away into a jungle of feeling and emotion which has little

theological character, unless it be recalled by a constant reiteration of the dogmatic values involved.

In the accounts given in the Synoptic Gospels of the baptism of Jesus, there is a strong implicit reference to the prophecy of Isaias about the suffering servant of God. This servant is the elect, in whom God delights, the one who is despised, and the most abject of men; who bears their sorrows and infirmities, 'since he was wounded for our iniquities; he was bruised for our sins' (Is. 53, 1-7). He, says the prophet, is to be led 'as a sheep to the slaughter and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer'. St John's Gospel makes the reference explicit. 'The next day, John saw Jesus coming to him; and he saith "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who taketh away the sins of the world."' (John 1, 24). All the Gospels then introduce Christ, at the beginning of his ministry, not only as the Messiah, but also as the suffering servant (*pais*). In their witness they thus bring together two elements in the Jewish tradition and, by joining them, transcend the limits of the old covenant. This union tells something of the character of Christ and his kingdom that from the first makes it quite different from popular or rabbinic expectation. He is the Son of Man, who will be seen 'sitting at the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14, 62), and he is also one of whom men will be ashamed (Mark 8, 38), for the Son of Man must suffer many things and be despised (Mark 9, 11).

This body of teaching points to the fact that the account of our Lord's life in the Gospel reaches its climax in the Passion narrative, and each of the evangelists is careful to stress his character as the pure victim who is the Lamb of God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews this is expressed by speaking of his high priestly function, 'Christ being come as a high priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is, not of this creation; neither by the blood of goats or calves, but by his own blood, entered once into the Holies, having obtained redemption—now once, at the end of ages, he hath appeared for the destruction of sin, by the sacrifice of himself.' (Heb. 9, 11-12, 36.) He is victim and priest; he both offers and is the sacrifice, the consequence of which is that as by one man's offence 'death reigned through one, so also by the justice of one' grace is given 'unto all men to justification of life' (Romans 5, 17-18).

The death of Christ is the redemption of man from sin, for it is the sacrificial act by which God opens again to mankind the kingdom of heaven. This act took place in our sort of place, and in our sort of time—it happened under Pontius Pilate. Pilate thus becomes for the Church a witness, since it was under his rule that Christ was put to death. He appears in the creed because this is a historical, a factual statement. There was a real crucifixion. Since the event is factual it is verifiable by the use of ordinary historical methods. Apart from the Scriptures, Tacitus, probably using sources independent of Scripture, wrote of this execution, 'at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate'. A much controverted passage in Josephus may provide another source, while in the Talmudic collections there is sufficient evidence of the fact of the execution. The creed, by the context in which it places this statement, is not merely interested in its factual character, it quite explicitly asserts that this fact has a significance and a value. Even the other sources witness to this—there is at least something to be explained away; for the Rabbis 'he practised magic', for Tacitus all this was involved in a 'foreign superstition'. Inevitably to a world lacking faith, this element of significance, the claim it implies, are a stumbling block and a scandal. The world overcome by Christ must always, in so far as it does not recognize him, be hostile by reason of its loyalty to the prince of the world that is cast out.

'There assembled together in this city against thy child (holy) Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel' (Acts 4, 27). This is the rejection by the world of Christ, who is the sign of God's loving mercy. When man's life is founded on power and possessiveness, he will always reject love, and the rejection of love is the rejection of God.

The presence of Christ implies no mere acceptance of an eternal truth of reason, but of the judgment of the world. All world history, all state power that separates itself from God, is here seen as failure and sin. True enough Herod, Pilate, and the priests had authority from God; it is not their authority that is under judgment, it is the corruption of authority and State, as used by weak and selfish men. Pilate could have released Jesus, but through self-interest, prefers Barabbas, a symbol of the world at its worst; the priests do not recognize their Messiah and through

jealousy, through their very real exclusion of God from their systems, choose to acclaim Tiberius Caesar, of all people, as their king.

The world is judged by the presence of Christ, but at the same time his presence brings new life to the world—his kingdom is that new world. Judgment and restoration go together. The severity of the judgment brings with it a recreation in love.

Jesus, says the creed, 'suffered'. This, undeniable as the evidence is read, brings about an almost intolerable tension of mind, which is only supported by faith. The victim, born a child at Bethlehem, is one with the Father, his whole will is to do the will of the Father and this leads to the great 'must' of his human life—he must go up to Jerusalem, drink of the chalice and die upon the Cross. In doing this he, who has all the Angelic Host at his beck, renounces power and force; he chooses poverty and humility, he submits to wicked men. He identifies himself with the weak, with publicans and sinners. The Lamb of God is crucified saying only: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. His only weapon is his faith in the Father, and his love that always reaches out. But that is not all, one must not tip over into sentimentality. The mystery of faith is that the story is not of the tragedy of the best of men rejected by his people, it is the story of the way God chose to redeem men.

It is difficult to realize, when one's mind is infected by the soft thinking of the world, that sin is really important. Here it is seen as it is; the guilt of sin is such, the guilt that arises from man's rejection of his true being as belonging to God is so great, that before it man is helpless. Mankind cannot carry the burden it inflicts upon itself. God, in the Cross, takes it upon himself, and in taking it, shows the infinite extent of his love. He makes no strange and lofty decree, but condescends to reach out towards man, in a way that transforms the futility and brutishness of the world. The Son takes on our flesh that as the head, the first of all mankind, he may gain for mankind victory over sin.

It is not that God alters anything of the texture of a sin-conditioned world. There is no sweeping away of the rubble of our lives. It is rather that the rubble and confusion are given a meaning, that they become valuable through being put in a new context. By the life and suffering of Christ, even pain and desolation are integrated into a new creation, and the most

barren of circumstances becomes the possibility of the greatest achievement.

But again it must be remembered who he was. The one who suffered was true God and true man; he sorrowed, felt pain, he has 'compassion on us, because he is one tempted in all things, like as we are, without sin' (Heb. 4, 15). Man in every sense, yet the person that is there is that of the Word. In faith we cannot explain, but can only acknowledge. The metaphysician may tremble before condescension, the psychologist strain to breaking-point over the problem, but the fact remains after all have had their say—the mystery of the presence of the Son of God.

This is an end of all trivial talk about the value of human actions, for here is revealed the infinite value before God of an act of love that arises out of suffering and sacrifice. This way was chosen that God's love should be shown and that men should discover that they are called to share in this love. Calvary is the pouring out of this love on mankind, so that it may transform all that men do. It has a prodigal character, for in the sphere of love it is the action of the Creator.

Christ offered himself freely and in doing so provided the possibility of salvation. He meets the demands of justice by not only justifying man before God, but by re-creating him in love. His sacrifice is *the* sacrifice in that it unites man to God. It is the great price paid that brings man so near to God that he is caught up by the love of God into union with God. It is redemption in that the power of evil over man is broken, and man no longer is a slave of sin, but becomes a member of the household of God. It is, then, not merely the paying of a debt; it cannot in the last resort be expressed in the language of justice, for it is the charity of God.

He was crucified under the curse of Israel, for 'cursed is he that dies upon the cross'. He died, his physical life came to an end; he was buried, 'put away' out of sight of men, in the oblivion of the tomb. Going outside the company of the living, he brings life to a world whose soul is dead.

Once again this is the judgment before which Jew and Gentile fail, yet neither is rejected by the love of God. To the Gentile a kingdom is opened, but what of the Jew? What of Israel, waiting in empty expectation? How delicate must be the response of the Christian to this question. 'By their offence is salvation come to

the Gentiles' (Romans 11, 11). They are the natural branches to whose place the Church has succeeded. Before them we must not be wise in our conceits, 'for blindness has happened in Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles should come in . . . if the loss of them be the reconciliation of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?' (Romans 11, 15). Suffering and lost, they are still a chosen people for whom the Church waits with longing, until the Father disposes the time, and in whom we reverence the flesh which Christ deigned to assume.

Both Gentile and Jew wait for God to give his free grace. That gift, given through Christ the Mediator, is conditioned in its first giving by no human factor; for saving grace is the free gift of God's love that creates in the loved one the very power of response. It makes him a sharer in a new life which releases him from the bondage of sin, and raises him in the very being of his soul to a supra-natural level, so that he can now live and expand all his powers before God and in union with God. Apart from grace, our deeds, our works, can be naturally good, we can do isolated good actions, but before the demands of life we must fail. Even the good action avails nothing, for it is shut up in a sin-conditioned world. It is this that grace breaks through, and in doing so gives the possibility of doing works that have merit, that are worthy of heaven; for it so transforms the heart of man that his works become not merely worthy of human approval, but holy. And this, because he suffered under Pontius Pilate.