

BLACKFRIARS

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Inasmuch as you did it to one of these . . . you did it to me.
(Matt. xxv, 40.)

I. THE CONDEMNATION

- (a) God is condemned by Caesar, not willingly but in fear. We often resist truth because acceptance would "break up the happy home" . . . as we guess. In this case the fear was of the mob—
The mob inflamed by the religious leaders and politicians and financiers.
By the religious leaders because Jesus had condemned their hypocrisy and insulted their privilege (the turning out of the money changers had occurred only a few days before)
By the politicians and financiers because Jesus had stormed against riches:
Woe! Woe to you rich men . . .
and against those who sought power grinding the poor . . .
defrauding the labourer . . .
buying cheap and selling dear.
Producing for profit rather than for use.
- (b) Let us consider how often we refuse justice because of fear, and how often we put the gaining of money before good work, and how often we pander to the rich and great envying their power.
How often do we condone what we know to be unjust?

II. JESUS RECEIVES THE CROSS

- (a) God accepts the condemnation with the most abject humility. He will not only accept the punishment, but also He will deign to carry the very instrument of His suffering. Thus He becomes not only an object of pity, but of ridicule.

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The fool who carries his own halter . . .

But the cross is more than a thing of torture. It is the whole created material world.

The four arms stretch out to embrace all things made.

God is not only punished by the world but *on* the world.

The world He has made punishes Him, and it is the whole world—not only Palestine in the year 33.

He does not only die in Jerusalem but throughout the whole universe.

The only limit to His humiliation is His own creation.

- (b) Let us consider our own lack of humility and let us also consider the ignominy we inflict on others—on our employees and servants, and not only physical indignity, but moral and intellectual indignity also—
we employ them simply as instruments of profit-making,
we regard them simply as “hands,” sentient parts of our machines,
we have deprived them of the dignity of economic freedom and of intellectual responsibility as workmen.
And we do not only inflict the indignity of subhuman labour upon them—
We also brand them with the mark of that indignity—
with the tickets and cards of servile insurance and compulsory education—
We make them carry their own cross.

III. JESUS FALLS

- (a) And His humility is such that not only does He accept condemnation without protest—
not only does He accept the ignominy of ridicule—
He accepts also the ignominy of weakness.
He will not even accept the honour of walking proudly to His punishment.
He is not a dignified criminal of whom it will be said,
“He walked upright without flinching to the scaffold.”
He accepted the indignity of the lowest and weakest.
“There is *no* beauty that we should desire Him.”

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- (b) Let us consider this matter of humility.
It is the absolute foundation.
Pride is the root and ground of all sin.
Humility then is the root and ground of all virtue.
Virtue = strength.
How then can humility be the ground of strength?
Because all good is of God.
Humility is reliance on God.
Pride is reliance on ourselves.

IV. HE MEETS HIS MOTHER

- (a) Who was the Mother of Jesus?
Queen of heaven——
Tower of Ivory——
Seat of Wisdom . . .
And now this Queen's Son passes by His Mother on the way to His cruel and shameful death.
The Queen of Heaven shares in His humiliation.
- (b) Let us consider how we also must share.
It is not meet for us to assume that because He died for us all that therefore He was humble for us all.
In the dark age which is upon us we shall find our mistake.
Could He not have called on ten thousand legions of angels to fight for Him? And He did not.
And shall we think to make a Christian triumph by calling up ten thousand armies equipped with all the products of our commercialism—guns, bombs, poisons!
We can only obtain such things by calling in the financiers and borrowing their money.
Shall we thus "make the world safe for Christianity?"
Mary, carpenter's wife, Mother of Jesus, pray for us.

V. SIMON HELPS HIM

- (a) A man from the country—a stranger, a passer by.
Not one of the cheering mob of Jerusalem citizens.
A sort of good Samaritan—an outsider—a defenceless person to help the defenceless—Jesus, scorned by His own people.

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deserted by His intimate friends.

- (b) Let us consider whether the work of Christ is in our own time not being done more by outsiders than by us. We are professedly Christ's friends. We are proud of it—and complacent. Have we not fine churches and fine vestments? Are you not respected members of the community? We have members of Parliament and big cathedrals. What right have we to be respected? What right have we to big cathedrals in London and Liverpool? Are London and Liverpool Christian cities? From Westminster to St. Paul's, is there one single thing that you can call holy? Yet it is all the work of men. Should not the product of men's hands be holy? What are we Christians doing? What right have we to condemn outsiders when we are neglecting the work ourselves?

VI. VERONICA WIPES HIS FACE

- (a) She, a woman, dares to brave the anger and ridicule of the crowd. Perhaps, being a woman, she had not so much to fear from men's violence——
Nevertheless, whereas Simon was compelled to help, Veronica's act was an act of pure and voluntary charity.
- (b) Let us consider how often we suppress our instinctive impulses to help or comfort those we love or in whom, in our hearts, we believe, because of fear of ridicule or contumely or disgrace.
It is easy to be on the winning side—on the safe side—on the side of the police.
How easy it is to be deceived by the argument that the law is, on the whole, just——
That "the poor in the lump is bad"——
How easy it is to think that riches are the reward of virtue.

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We like to think of ourselves as ordinary, respectable citizens.

We dress and behave as the rest of the commercial world, we even think in the same way. We don't want to be conspicuous.

We want to be thought well of by the world.

The wounded Christ is passing——

We are too respectable to wipe his face.

VII. JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME

- (a) But the world is hard to convince.

Perhaps He only stumbled the first time.

Perhaps few saw Him.

It was meet that the indignity should be displayed to all.

Here He comes! Where is He!

He's fallen down again.

What a sorry procession—"the most abject of men."

- (b) Let us again consider humility.

For not only do we rely on our own strength—we rely on our own *worth*.

"Thank God I'm not as other men—extortioners——"

"Whatever else I am, I'm not mean . . . "

"One loves one's men . . . "

"God knows I don't want to be uncharitable, but . . . "

"After all, one has one's position to keep up . . . "

"I don't claim to be clever but . . . "

Other people's virtues are not so obvious to us as their faults.

Our own faults are less conspicuous to us than our virtues.

VIII. HE SPEAKS TO THE WOMEN

- (a) "All creation is female to God."

Hence it was meet that Our Lord's last address to the people should be an address to women especially.

And what a frightful prophecy!

As though the Crucifixion could be improved upon.

The crucifixion of God was done in the green wood.

What shall we do in the dry?

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- (b) Let us consider how we make mock of the gospel of Love and Justice.
They took the Body of Christ and crucified it.
But we take the very gospel and desecrate it.
They crucified the Son of Man.
We crucify humanity itself.
Oh consider, consider.
And it is not simply pain and hunger that we inflict on the poor—"the broken down and powerless"—that is the least part of the evil we do.
"Think of the millions in our industrial cities condemned to do work unfit even for machines . . .
How can we ask of them that when they are not working they should live according to goodness and beauty and truth when we degrade their minds all day long.
Oh man, oh *woman*!
In these latter days, in this dry wood, how have we defaced the image of God?

IX. HE FALLS THE THIRD TIME

- (a) Yet again, very near the place of execution.
He is hardly strong enough to reach it.
God Himself—Not strong enough to walk—
Hardly a fine enough specimen even to be nailed up.
"He *emptied* himself."
There is not one single effort to appeal to our sense of dignity.
He is condemned to be crucified.
He is hardly worth crucifying.
- (b) "He emptied Himself."
So also should we . . .
Let us consider—especially in these days of mechanical triumph—
of transport, telegraphy, domestic comfort and amusement—
How we rely on our own cleverness.
We think ourselves independent.
We have, we say, conquered "Nature" and brought it into subjection.

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But we have not conquered greed and avarice and lust for amusement.

We threaten our neighbours with wars more terrible than ever waged in the past.

We bring the whole force of our cleverness to the support of our greed and lust for commercial advantage.

The power of money is the ruling power in the State because it is the ruling power in our hearts.

Even the poor are more ready to trust in material remedies than to "seek the Kingdom of God and his justice."

"He had compassion on the multitude"!

But He said to the multitude: "He that loseth his life shall save it."

Our social reformers, whether Communist or Fascist, are also moved by compassion for the multitude.

But they also are enthralled by man's material triumphs.

They desire to make the poor richer.

But Christ wishes to make the poor *holy*.

Are we Christians on the side of Christ?

Do we not generally side with the materialists?

Are we Christians notorious for our love of holy poverty?

Do we not cling to our possessions with all the tenacity of merchants and men of business?

Do we not forget that the Christian doctrine of private property is not the aggrandisement of the individual owner?

"A man should not regard his material possessions as his own, but as common to all . . ."

We forget the needs of others and the common good.

We think to be self-sufficient—"stand on our own feet"—

"Let him that thinketh himself to stand take heed lest he fall."

X. HE IS STRIPPED

- (a) It was the custom of the Romans to crucify men naked. Clothes are for dignity and adornment:

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the angels of our imagination are so adorned.

To strip a man naked is more than an affront to his modesty; it is to deprive him of all status and all evidence of the freedom of will which marks man off from the beasts.

- (b) Let us consider how we also thus spurn our fellow men. It is not only criminals that we spurn.

If we deprive any man of what is due to the dignity of humanity ("Child of God and if child heir also") we are in effect stripping him for his crucifixion as Christ was stripped.

And man's principle dignity is his responsibility—
the consequence of his free will.

In our industrialism it is chiefly man's responsibility as a workman that is destroyed.

He is no more than a "hand," an instrument for the profit of his master.

We may not be able to do much to alter our world—

We can at least set our minds against it.

To be anti-communist is no good at all.

Unless we are against the evil system of which Communism is the necessary and inevitable consequence.

How many of us Christians take any trouble to discover why millions of workers are in revolt against capitalism and money rule?

What dignity and adornment is there in the life of the factory hands of Birmingham?

We have stripped our fellow men naked.

XI. HE IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

- (a) At last the climax of His indignity is reached.

He is nailed, spread out, naked, on a pair of boards.

What other king has thus given himself for his people?

Let us admit that the pain was frightful.

But was it to inflict pain that they did it?

Not at all. They knew not what they did.

They were preparing to display God to the world—

God denied, God ridiculed, God hated.

Not the soldiers, not the Romans, not even the Jews

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—it was not any man or group of men that deliberately and knowingly did this thing.

It was God's submission to the utmost evil that could be done to Him——

the sum of all the evil of which man is capable—
that is what crucified Jesus.

- (b) Let us consider our part in this thing.

It did not happen merely in the year 33, and so it is not merely a thing of the past.

There is no time with God.

It is as much happening now as then.

Even the self-styled atheists in Russia are not denying God as we Christians deny Him when we think well of ourselves——

when we think ill of our neighbours——

when we deprive the labourer of his just wages——

when we think lending money and investment are more important than making good things——

when we think our private property is an absolute right and not simply a trusteeship for the common good——

For "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

Thus we nail God to the cross.

Thus we spread Him out so that everywhere they may know that we have brought God to nought.

We have nailed Him down helpless on His own creation . . .

XII. HE DIES ON THE CROSS

- (a) The cross was lifted up.

Jesus died upon it.

We may note that He died in a few hours and not, as was common, after days of lingering agony.

He was not just a hard-bitten murderer, a man almost as insensitive to pain in himself as to that of others.

Moreover, He was worn out before reaching Calvary.

But these things are unimportant.

The sufferings of Christ *on* the Cross are not the chief thing.

His whole life had been one of suffering.

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The chief thing *now* to be thought of is that He is lifted up.

And "if I be lifted up, I shall draw all men unto me."

The standard is raised.

His own executioners raised it.

He is shown to the world.

His own judges showed Him.

They knew not what they did.

"Father forgive them"—He Himself said it.

(b) Let us consider what is thus signified.

The sign of the Cross is against the sky.

It is painted, carved, on the face of heaven.

It is on the very door of eternal life.

"He that loses his life shall save it."

We now see that this is not simply an injunction to self effacement.

It is the very basis of the universe——

The warp and woof of its texture.

"Unless the seed fall into the ground and die . . . "

With the lowest things, so with the highest. At every moment of the day, in every place, in all our ways and works—that is the principle of God's creation.

All things are a sacrifice—everything is sacrificial.

Nothing, nothing, nothing can be won except by the giving of oneself.

Against the sky it is written.

XIII. HE IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

(a) His body is laid in His Mother's arms.

(b) Let us consider :

Mary, the second Eve, represents redeemed humanity. She acted for us.

By her reception of His dead body she accepts Christ for us.

It is the sacramental act.

It is not sufficient to see with the eye—to make an intellectual act only.

Man is matter as well as spirit—both real.

We must act bodily as well as spiritually.

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("Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord . . .")
We must take Christ in our arms as well as in our hearts.

XIV. HIS BODY IS PLACED IN THE TOMB

- (a) The Cross was on the hill.
The tomb was in the garden.
"Unless the seed fall into the ground . . ."
It was necessary that He should be buried in order that we might know that He died.
It was necessary that He should die—in order that we might live.
And *we* can live only if *we* die also.
- (b) Let us consider once more the whole sum.
Christ came that we might have life . . .
He showed man that only he that loses his life can save it.
He showed this by His own life and death.
He taught this by every possible word and act.
Now in our own time it is still true—it is still the foundation.
We live in a time racked by widespread misery, discontent, war and fear of war.
We live in a time, famous, as no former time has been, for its material triumphs.
Can we not put these things together?
Can we not see that our material triumph, because it is hollow in itself, is the very cause of our spiritual and physical misery?
We have gained the whole world and lost our soul.
Man is a social animal and the human family is the basis of the social structure.
All our politics, nations and states derive from the family.
The social problem is therefore the root problem.
Unless the social problem be solved on lines compatible with the nature of man it cannot be solved at all.
Our modern industrial commercial states flout human nature at every point.
What is man?

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To us Christians has been given the answer—

“Child of God, heir also.”

But we betray our trust.

We acquiesce in the betrayal of our fellowmen.

We are complacent in front of their degradation.

Instead of leading them in their righteous rebellion against their inhuman lives we waste our energy condemning their theories.

We say we are Christians.

Very soon it will be true to say that the only thing known about Christians is that they are anti-communists.

“*This is true religion and undefiled: to visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction and to keep unspotted from the world.*”

The world, getting and spending.

The world of trading and money making.

The world ruled by finance, money lending and investment.

The world of machines whose only object is the production of quantity.

“The bread you hoard is the bread of him who hungers,” says St. Basil.

But our own society is based upon hoarding, saving, investment—production for profit rather than for use.

This is an unchristian society.

In such a society Christians can only be passive resisters or active rebels.

Otherwise we shall be swept away—false stewards who have betrayed Our Lord.

Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees.

Woe to you, rich men.

Woe to you, hypocrites.

But glory to You, O Lord, Who by your holy Cross have redeemed the world.

ERIC GILL.