

THE MEANING OR MOTIVE OF THE RESURRECTION

WE have used the two words 'motive' and 'meaning'; although in the matter of the Resurrection the two words have but one meaning.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a deliberate act of the will of Jesus Christ. Now when we ask, 'What does X (a human being with a will) mean by doing this or that?' we are asking, 'What is the *motive* of X in doing this or that?'

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We must first say that *Jesus Christ did not rise again in order to prove that He is God*. When we reflect a little we begin to see that his Resurrection by itself could not *prove* that he is God. Even Catholics allow themselves to be confused in this matter. Thus they sometimes say: 'But if Jesus had not risen he would not have been God.'—Granted; because he had prophesied that he would rise from the dead. Clearly if he had not kept his word of prophecy he would not have been God.

But the fallacy misleading even some Catholics is the quite common fallacy 'that what is necessary is also sufficient.' Thus we cannot argue: 'If a-being has not two eyes it is not a man. But this being (a dog) has two eyes, therefore it is a man.' So, too, we cannot argue: 'If Jesus Christ had not risen from the dead he would not have been God. But he has risen from the dead. Therefore he is God.'

This statement of the matter does not need more writing about; but only more thinking about. More words would probably mean more confusion.

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In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ there are two facts—one of external evidence, the other of faith. The fact that 'Jesus rose from the dead' is a fact of external evidence. The other fact (constantly confused with the first), 'Jesus Christ rose from the dead by *his own divine power*,' is a matter of faith and not of external evidence. That he rose again by his divine power and therefore that he rose again because he was God, is no more evident than the fact that he is God. But that Jesus Christ is God is a fact of faith and revela-

tion; and not of mere reason working on external evidence. That Jesus is a man is a fact of external evidence, that Jesus is God is a fact of faith and revelation. St. Gregory, speaking of the doubt of St. Thomas, says: 'He saw one thing, and believed another . . . He saw a man; and confessed him God' (*Hom. in John xx*).

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But although the fact of our blessed Lord's Resurrection is one of external evidence, like the existence of Julius Caesar or the fact of the Great War, yet it is called a matter of faith because to deny it would lead to the denial of matters of faith. If Jesus prophesied that he would rise again, whoever would deny that he rose again would be implicitly denying that he told the truth; and therefore denying that he was God.

It cannot be too often insisted upon that we may sin against faith by not using our reason, rightly or at all. Hence when we say: 'A man is bound to believe the Resurrection,' we mean: 'A man who will not accept the evident historical fact of the Resurrection will commit a sin against faith.'

It is no paradox to say that the modern world's most common sin against faith is the misuse or the disuse of reason. This sin may be seen with special clearness in the modern world's attitude towards the Resurrection.

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There is one quality of the Resurrection which makes it unique amongst the miracles of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection is not just a miracle; it is a prophesied miracle. In other words, the Resurrection is not only a miracle that was wrought, but also a prophecy that was fulfilled.

Miracles and prophecy do not prove facts; they prove the truthfulness or goodness of the one who works the miracle or makes the prophecy. As miracles are completed in the present, whereas prophecies are completed in the future, their power to prove will be as different as the present is different from the future. Miracles have their full force when they are wrought; and over those who see them wrought. For example, when Simon Bar Jona sees the miraculous catch of fish, he at once throws himself in worship at the feet of Jesus, at whose word the net had been let down and filled. When the man born blind is given his sight, he, too, kneels down to worship Jesus by whom his sight had been given.

But if a miracle has its fullest force for those who are eye-witnesses, it has only a weakened force for those who hear those who

witness it. Miracles, then, are proofs to one who witnesses them. But miracles are but weakened proofs to one who accepts them because they are proved by one who witnessed them.

Hume had, then, some show of reason when he followed Tillotson in arguing that the miracles of our Lord were things to be proved rather than things that proved. But both Tillotson and Hume were wrong—as some of their contemporary Christian apologists were wrong—in thinking that our faith rested on miracles, when it rested solely on the word of God.

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The witnessing force of prophecy is quite different from that of miracles; though miracles supply what is lacking in prophecy, and prophecy supplies what is lacking in faith.

When a miracle is wrought it is at its strongest witnessing-force. When a prophecy is uttered it has no witnessing force. But the longer the time between the utterance of a prophecy and its fulfilment, the greater is its witnessing-force. Thus our blessed Lord's slowly fulfilled prophecy that his Church would last becomes of such witnessing force that miracles are no longer necessary; because the greatest of miracles is a prophecy fulfilled.

Now, the Resurrection is not just a miracle wrought or a prophecy fulfilled; it is a prophesied miracle wrought and fulfilled. It is therefore the most evidentially valuable miracle and prophecy. Had Jesus said, as he did say, that he would be betrayed by his own Jewish people and crucified by their Roman conquerors, the fulfilment of this prophecy would have proved that he was 'a true speaker.' But this proof would have been given its strongest possible force if he had said, as he did say, that after seeming too weak to prevent his dying he prophesied and fulfilled his prophecy that on the third day after his death he would rise from death to life.

What we have here said is confirmed by an incident recorded by St. John alone. When he and St. Peter having run to the tomb found in it only the grave-clothes and the napkin, they saw and believed 'because as yet they knew not the Scripture that he must rise again from the dead' (John xx, 9). Certainty that Jesus had risen came at once when St. Peter and St. John recognised that the Resurrection, though so astounding a miracle, had been prophesied not only clearly by Jesus himself, but darkly by those who had prophesied of Jesus.

Yet again the Resurrection of Jesus Christ did not prove that he was God; but it did prove that he was speaking the truth when he said or implied that he was God.

In this as in so much else Jesus acted as the father of a family acts. Probably none of my readers have ever heard their father say : ' I am the father of this family ; and I will prove it.'

The father of a family is proved to be the father not by something that he says or does, but by everything that he says and does. His chief duty is not to prove to his children that he is their father, but to support his children and the mother of his children as a good father would.

In saying this we have passed from what our blessed Lord did not mean to what he did mean by his Resurrection.

Two texts are of great importance in discovering our blessed Lord's purpose in rising from the dead, and remaining in this risen state for forty days.

' God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son ; that whosoever believeth in him may not perish but may have life everlasting. For God sent not his Son into this world to judge the world, but that the world may be saved by him ' (John iii, 16-17).

. . . Giving commandments by the Holy Ghost to the apostles whom he had chosen, he was taken up.

' To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion, by many proofs, for forty days appearing to them and speaking of the kingdom of God ' (Acts i, 2-3).

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Although Jesus Christ did come into the world and did prove that he was God, he came into the world primarily to save us. That saving of us meant firstly saving us *from* sin ; and secondly saving us *for* heaven.

On God's side, though not on man's side, this work of saving was finished on Good Friday, when he said : '*It is finished.* And bowing his head, he gave up the ghost ' (John xix, 30).

But on man's side not everything was finished when we were forgiven and redeemed by the self-sacrifice of the Cross.

Two things had still to be done in us.

(i) We had to be assured that he had forgiven us ; and
 (ii) not all, but the chosen officials of the Kingdom, *i.e.* the Church, had to receive instruction in the way the Church must apply official forgiveness to each and all.

(i) AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION MEN HAD TO BE ASSURED THAT GOD HAD FORGIVEN THEM.

There is a great difference between a fact and a man's certainty of a fact.

It is a fact that God's forgiveness and redemption of man was

completed when Jesus died on the Cross. But the conduct of even the chosen Apostles during the Passion was cowardly or sinful enough to justify God's cancelling his forgiveness. For less than this criminal cowardice and denial God had threatened to break his covenant with his chosen people. The men who still thought that Jesus was dead, once for all, could hardly think that, if he were alive, he would forgive the part they had taken in his death.

St. John's account of the risen Saviour's first meeting with his apostles gives the meaning of the Risen Life in a masterpiece of condensation. 'Now when it was late that same day, the first of the week, and the doors were shut where the disciples were gathered together, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst of them and said to them, *Peace be to you*. And when he had said this he showed them his hands and his side.

'The disciples therefore were glad when they saw the Lord.

'He said therefore to them again, *Peace be to you*. *As the Father hath sent me I also send you*.

'When he had said this he breathed on them; and he said to them

'*Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them. And whose sins you shall retain, they are retained*' (John xx, 19-23).

Something that we can call only the divine courteousness is in every act of this incident, which cannot accurately be called an incident. In what we call incidents things happen. But here there is no happening; but only a fulfilled planning of divine wisdom and love.

(a) St. Luke had written, 'See my hands and feet that it is I myself. Handle and see' (Luke xxiv, 39). From this we might think that Jesus had asked them to 'handle' his feet. But St. John's words are delicately directive: 'He showed them his hand *and his side*.' There is no mention of his feet.

(b) 'Peace be to you.' This is the first time that Jesus said these words to the group of apostles. In his plan of Incarnation and Redemption he could not have said these words of Peace before. Only on Good Friday when he had made the redemptive sacrifice of his life was there official peace between mankind and God. And only through the apostles could the official promulgation of that peace be made to mankind. In their own sphere these simple words *Peace be to you* are as official and final as 'This is My body.'

(c) 'The disciples were glad.' The psychology of this gladness leads us, not to a natural, but to a supernatural cause. A wounded body does not make for joy. Moreover even the least guilty of the apostles had such part in these wounds that fear and horror rather

than joy would naturally have wrung the apostles' hearts. Had the apostles, and especially St. Peter, been terror-stricken by the sight of Jesus, we should not have thought it unnatural. Ask the theologian what this joy means. He will say: With God's official redemption of the world, God's love or charity has been given back to the world.

But charity when it comes to man's soul has two chief effects: Peace and Joy—the Peace that is the stillness of order in man himself and in man's relation with God—the Joy that comes to a soul in Peace with God

(d) When Jesus ended his life on the Cross he ended his time for meriting and satisfying, but not his time of causing.

He now causes, as before Good Friday he could not cause, the certainty that his death of Good Friday had brought to the world the peace of forgiveness.

To individuals, as to smaller and greater groups, he shows himself with such power to make hearts glad that even the most sinful could say that 'My Redeemer liveth' and still loveth.

This heart-felt assurance that God had forgiven man is the first reason why Jesus rose from the dead.

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(ii) THE OFFICIALS OF THE CHURCH HAD TO BE INSTRUCTED HOW TO APPLY THIS FORGIVENESS TO INDIVIDUAL SOULS.

This is the second reason why Jesus rose from the dead.

St. Luke's phrase though short is illuminating: '... the apostles whom he had chosen . . . To whom also he showed himself alive after his Passion; by many proofs appearing to them and *speaking of the kingdom of God,*' i.e. of the Church (Acts i, 3).

Here it is evident that to the Apostles alone, as to the officials of the Church (his kingdom on earth), he spoke on such church matters as concerned them alone.

If St. Luke's short phrase is illuminating, St. John's incidents are more illuminating. It is St. John alone who records how Jesus actually gave his Church, through the officials of his Church, the power to forgive sins. 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.'

How courteously has our Saviour delayed this commission to administer the Sacrament of Forgiveness which we almost misname the Sacrament of Penance. He delayed it until his death on the Cross, by its merit and satisfaction, had won man's full forgiveness.

Notice, again, how courteously he confirms the Apostles in their official position as Apostles. A merely human master or superior

of the Apostles would have rewarded their cowardice and denials by instant dismissal. This divine Master, seemingly forgetful of their cowardice and denials, not only confirms them in their official charges but, having shown them that they are forgiven, he sends them to preach this good-news of forgiveness to the whole world.

The four Gospels would deserve to be called 'The Book of the Courtesy of God' if only for a quality of this Risen Life so hidden as to be almost unnoticed. Never once does our courteous Saviour say to his Apostles—not even to St. Peter!—'I forgive you' or, as he twice said before his Passion, 'Go and sin no more.' Only when we see this exquisite quality of the divine forgiveness can we see the divine reason for rising from the dead and showing himself for forty days to men who could hardly be persuaded that sin so great as theirs could be forgiven. Yet though their Master's forgiveness of them never expressed itself in a single word, it expressed itself in every deed of his; and perhaps expressed itself most poignantly and unforgettably in his silence over their sin.

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The last incident of this Risen Life recorded by St. John is of such importance that it alone would be enough to justify our Lord in showing to the world that he had risen, with disarming and unrepentant forgiveness.

Feed my lambs—lead my little sheep—feed my sheep¹ express the Head-Shepherd's most essential and complete organisation of the Kingdom of God—the Church. Only in St. John's Gospel (x) do we find it recorded that he had called himself the Good Shepherd, and had called his Church not only a Fold, but a Flock. Indeed, as there was to be only one Shepherd there was to be not only one Fold, but one Flock. As he planned it to be, so it is. There is only one Head (now an invisible Head) of the Church. But this invisible Head, before ending his visible headship, placed over the visible portion of his Church a visible Vicar, Simon Bar Jona, the self-confessed and now self-mistrusting sinner.²

This visible Shepherd of the visible Flock has authority over the whole flock of lambs (lay-folk), little sheep (the lesser clergy), and the sheep (the Bishops). Moreover, as a Flock is one because it

¹ This is the literal translation of the original Greek of St. John XXI, 15-17.

² It is not quite accurate to say (though quite accurately understood when said by Catholics) 'The Pope is the visible Head of the Church.' There is only one Head of the Church, Jesus; and He is invisible. The Pope, as successor of St. Peter, and Vicar of Christ, is the visible Head of the visible Church.

has one Shepherd over it, so the Church is visibly one because it has one visible Shepherd, the Pope, over it.

What a lesson on Church government, and indeed on civil government, is given by the simple words, 'Feed my lambs, lead my little sheep, feed my sheep.' The visible flock does not belong to its visible Shepherd, that he may use it and dispose of it as he will. The flock belongs to the invisible Shepherd and must be used and disposed of according to his will.

If the Shepherd has rights over the Flock because of his duties to God, so too the Flock has inalienable rights against the Shepherd because it, too, has indispensable duties to God, the Head-Shepherd.

With this final and official commissioning of the Visible Shepherd of the earthly Flock was fulfilled our Saviour's motive for his risen life of forty days. He did not rise again to prove he was God, though every act of his was God-like in its wisdom and love. He did rise again to redeem mankind, because the end of his natural life on the Cross was the end of his human power to merit and satisfy. But he rose again to convince sinful man that his death was sinful man's copious redemption.

Lastly, he rose again not to commission a new group of men who had not betrayed or disowned him. But he rose again to confirm his first chosen group in their office and to commission them to tell sinful mankind that their Redeemer had *certainly* (*ἀσφαλῶς* Acts ii, 36) risen and mankind was certainly forgiven.

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THOMISM AND 'AFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE' (II).

SELECTED READINGS (cf. p. 126).

1. On 'Knowledge' in general: *De Veritate*, II, 2; *Summa Theol.*, I, xiv, 1.
2. Knowledge of Object the condition of Knowledge of Subject: *Summa*, I, lxxxvii, 1; *De Veritate*, X, 8.
3. Perception of Subject the condition of knowledge of Object as Object: *De Veritate*, I, 9.
4. Knowledge of truth in judgment only: *De Veritate*, I, 3; *Summa*, I, xvi, 2; lxxxv, 5, 6.
5. The Grades of Being, Life and Knowledge: *Contra Gentiles*, IV, 11.
6. Comparison of Sense and Intellectual Knowledge: *De Veritate*, I, 9, 11, 12.
7. The function of the *intellectus agens*: *De Veritate*, X, 6.