

It is a mistake to think of the cross as symbolizing only pain, for it is steeped in the sweet perfume of love. The sword which pierces the heart is aflame (and sets the heart aflame) with the fires of love. The perfume of loving sacrifice, the flames which leap round the point of the sword are the hall-mark of the divine Creator, for he is love, and his presence is *shown* by the presence of love.

When through faith we know in the cross, the gateway to eternal life, that fusion of the greatest pain and the greatest love, then we are almost near enough to beat upon that door.

Most of us will reach this point only in purgatory. The Saints come to it in this world. Meanwhile it is possible to cultivate a deep love for the cross, a love fostered each time we sign ourselves and giving us the courage to press steadily forward even when the cross of suffering seems to bar the way.

Above all the sign of the cross must bring to us not an empty symbol of pain, but the cross with Christ upon it. He is also on that cross marked on our soul; thus when we are hurt it is he who is hurt, so our compassion must be for him and not for that self which must die.

The sign of the cross is not to be lightly made, nor is the cross itself to be feared, it is the sign of the Word 'signed upon the universe'.



LIFE THROUGH THE CROSS¹

PAUL FOSTER O.P.

IN a famous picture of the Crucifixion the Cross is depicted soaring against a dark background of cloud, over the quiet waters of Genesareth—it recalls that moment when the Lord awakened from slumber in the heart of the storm and spoke the words . . . 'peace, be still' . . . and immediately there was a great calm.

It may have happened to many of you, as it happened to the

¹ The substance of a sermon delivered in Westminster Cathedral, Good Friday 1954.

disciples on Peter's ship, to undergo a moment of great physical distress, to be lost in the cloud or the desert, to have the sea raging about you, to see no way out from a lingering disease. Such moments of physical imprisonment are paralleled by spiritual distress, the soul in a state of utter loneliness and desolation . . . 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' There is no harbour visible, no landmark, no sense of direction; only barren snow or solitary sand, indifferent glances, the howling of air or sea. This tumult of the soul is not only like the storm on Genesareth. It is like something greater still, that chaos of disorder in the first verses in the book of Genesis, the waste of waters over which God said, 'Let there be light'—and behold light came.

And as it was the Lord asleep on the deck who awoke and rebuked the winds, so it was the same Lord who originally rebuked the disorder of creation and raised it to dignity and light. For the man asleep on the deck is the Emperor of the Universe, that second Person of the Trinity through whom all creation was, as it were, projected upon the nothingness that preceded it—'for they were all created through him and in him. In him all subsist.' As he is the Emperor of the Universe and the Master of Genesareth, so too he is the Lord of the storm-tossed soul of man. For we are all in the same boat as the disciples. We raise the same cry as they did—'Lord save us, we perish'. We look to the same figure as they did, now and forever nailed to the mast. It is he alone who can still the desolation of the soul's disorder and say, 'Peace be still', as he rebuked the wind and waters of the lake, as he raised the stripling creation out of chaos so that all things rose orderly and beautiful in obedience to his commanding word.

Man, too, who was to have the exquisite dignity of love, which is an eager and orderly obedience, emerged as the final term of all that springtime beauty of creation. 'But fast and far he fell', through the pride and disobedience of our first parents, and with him the order of creation was spoiled. The pages of Genesis flick over till we come to the terrible sentence which reads, 'No creature on earth but had lost its true direction', and the chaos of waters returns in the Flood to drown the world. Thereafter for the remainder who survived God sets his rainbow in the clouds. To those who emerged from the Ark, the arc in the sky was a promise: order, not disorder, should now prevail. Through the long centuries of preparation the chosen people will be guided in

the darkness which surrounds them by prophetic flashes. The writer of Ecclesiasticus will see the linking of the divine Wisdom with Mary—'I am that Word that was uttered by the mouth of the most High, he who fashioned me, my Creator, has taken up his abode with me'. And the fleet-footed lover of the Song of Songs is discerned by Isaias as the bearer of the Gospel. 'How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings'. But as the trumpets of Sion's watchmen sound these glad tidings from tower to tower, suddenly the abyss opens and God shows the prophet the end of all this beauty—'Behold my servant shall be lifted up; there is no beauty in him nor comeliness; despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows'.

A man of sorrows. When the appointed moment comes, the Word through whom all things sprang into being will take up the burden of a new creation by penetrating and bringing to new life the very centre of the fallen universe. He will assume a human nature and take its entire capacities upon himself. 'The Word was made flesh.' There will be a new thing on earth, in the Universe. The uncreated principle of all things will invade and occupy a created nature and make it his own. He does not come just as an example of good and holy living. Our religion is not just the attempt to approach someone else's noble idealism. Nor is it just the observance of a code of law. It is not only the way and the truth; it is also the life, and life in its most exact sense, the life of a human being deploying his full human activities and the immeasurable vitality of God. Because this Person who is life is both God and Man, that manhood of his has communicated to all of us the very life of God, if we will accept him in his fullness, which means of course accepting him in his death as well. 'No creature on earth but had lost its true direction.' No creature on earth but has its signpost, and that signpost is the Cross.

For the omnipotent Emperor of the Universe is the man asleep on the deck and the man nailed to the cross-tree of the world. This is no archetypal mystery for Sages to ponder and Magi to penetrate, this is Jesus of Nazareth, the babe of Bethlehem and the boy in the Temple, the priest at the Last Supper and the empurpled Pastor of the judicial torture chamber. These are human feet that have trod the dews of Carmel, and the dust of Capharnaum, the grass of Gethsemane and the stones of Golgotha. For the terror and the beauty of the Gospel are alike good news and in that cry

of utter desolation from the Cross—'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'—is the final decisive assurance that God is truly man.

Here we penetrate to the very heart of the mystery we are contemplating this afternoon, the loneliness of sin. Sin is disorder, and disorder is the lack of true relationship whether in the particles of the atom flying asunder or in the planets deserting their orbit; whether in man failing to be a neighbour with his brother or refusing to walk in company with God. No creature on earth but had lost its true direction; no creature on earth but was lonely. No creature on earth but was in disorder, no man on earth but had inherited the disorder of Adam, that sin which was loneliness from God. And there, in the very depths of man's disorder, the new Adam meets the old. The Emperor of the Universe, the second Person of the Trinity, has re-occupied the centre of the fallen creation—'and he was made man'. He has allowed that manhood to be despised, rejected and broken, and, as St Paul says, 'He was made sin'. Upon the Cross he permits the full flood of man's disorder to come upon him, and the Word of God speaks out the loneliness of man in sacred heartbroken words. But the pattern is thereby complete, and as death comes to seal the full assumption of human nature by God, God penetrates the chaos in the soul of man and brings it to light and dignity and love again. For the man asleep on the deck and the man asleep on the Cross is the Master of all things still, and as he brought calm to the waters of Genesareth and by his word brought the first creation springing into order, so here upon the Cross he brings to birth the new creation and beauty and order which is the Church. All things began here to rise again into a new and greater loveliness, the blossoming of a re-created world. No creature on earth but had lost its true direction, no creature on earth but was lonely. No creature on earth but now has its signpost, the Cross, and, through it, is no longer lonely, having as his neighbour and his brother Christ.

For the new sign in the heavens, the Cross, does not proclaim the salvation of an ark-borne remnant; it proclaims the salvation of a totality, of all those who will accept the orderly waters of baptism, and through them their co-crucifixion and burial in Christ. 'Let yours be the mind that Christ had.' We shall encounter the storm and the raging of the sea again. We shall cry, 'Save us,

Lord, we perish', and he will rebuke our lack of faith. We shall not perish, for he has died for us. He was forsaken that we might never be alone. Here upon the Cross is the beginning of a great calm, a great order, a great companionship, and if religion means, as it must, that man meets God, why here it is in the God-Man, in Jesus, never more human, never more divine, than when upon the Cross, with a great cry, he died.



THE TEACHING AND SPIRITUALITY OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

LEON JAMBOIS, M.S.

IN the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Christian life is seen in terms of the biblical theme of *exodus* or migration.¹ It is a theme recalling the life of the patriarchs and the generation contemporary with Moses in the desert. The spirituality of the psalms is steeped in it. The life of the pious Jew is an upward movement towards him who is pre-eminently 'the Holy One', 'the Holy One of Israel'. The first stage in this upward movement is marked by God's revelation of himself. This gives rise to faith, the initial movement towards the Most High. Faith calls for faithfulness, which is impossible without renunciation and which will improve in quality and merit with resistance to trials. The man who is not put out or discouraged by these will be confirmed in his faith and faithfulness. He will win the victory of faith, God will crown it by fulfilling his promises. These three stages are found in the traditional religious life of the Jews. The Epistle to the Hebrews takes and considers them in its turn and describes them in the light of the new covenant.

Faith rests on the Word of God. The unrivalled importance of the Word of God is brought out at the very beginning of the epistle in a majestic period difficult to translate exactly: 'In old days, God spoke to our fathers in many ways and by many means, through the prophets; now at last, in these times he has spoken

¹ Cf. C. Spicq, O.P., *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, introd., Editions du Cerf, 1950.