

This is Good Friday -- the day when freedom revolted against Truth, and nailed it to a Cross. It is not a history everyone likes to hear recalled, and generally those who most shrink from the sight of the Saviour on the Cross are the very ones who delight in the grotesque murder stories in our tabloids and follow with bold interest in the harrowing details of a sex crime. Why is it that the lover of horror cannot stand the sight of the Crucifix? Why is it that the fanatics of murder stories are so cold to the story of the world's greatest sacrifice? The answer is that unlike all other crimes the Crucifix is self-accusing.

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We can look on other scenes of injustice without feeling we are involved in them; but we cannot look on a Crucifix without feeling that we had something to do with it, either for better or worse; either as a robber brought before his victim for judgment, or as a drowning man brought before his rescuer for thanks.

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In the Crucifix is symbolized the perennial crisis in the soul of every man, the choice between the illusory end of time and the imponderable ends of eternity. Here are focused all the microscopic conflicts of good and evil that go on in every conscience; or, to put it another way, every man's soul is Calvary written small. That is why the Crucifix is inescapable; we either shrink from it or we embrace it; but we are not indifferent to it.

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For those who are brave enough to look at the Crucifix there is a revelation of the moral order -- not a moral order based on abstractions, theories and hypotheses, but a moral order revealed in a Person of absolute goodness who has met the impact of human evil and sin. It is more like a mirror than a scene, for it reveals not something unrelated to us, but ourselves, our moral beggary, our perversities and our defeats.

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Like nothing else in all the world [the Crucifix] seems to ask the questions: "Where do you stand?" "Which side do you propose to take from this moment on -- My side, or the side of moneyed Judas, cowardly Pilate, crafty Annas, or lustful Herod?" We cannot escape an answer. If on that Cross were someone who himself had been wrong and failed and had compromised with goodness, we could plead and excuse. But here neutrality is impossible, because there is no question of something more good or less good -- there is only right and wrong.... We cannot be on both sides, anymore than we can be in Light and Darkness at the same time.

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The [empty] Cross they can look at, for that might be only a symbol of the contradictions of life; but the Crucifix -- they call it 'horrible' when they mean it is accusing. They may run away from it during life, but they will meet it at the Eternal Judgment when the Son of Man shall come bearing the Cross in triumph in the clouds of heaven to render to every man according to his works. It is better to face it now.

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The modern mood of mutilating the Gospel, choosing some texts and ignoring others, makes men miss the purpose of the life of Christ. He came on earth not primarily to preach, but to *redeem*. He came less to live than to die. His mission was not one of mere benevolence, nor to create a revolution in politics or economics, nor to heal, nor to leave a humanitarian ethics -- all these were secondary to the one absorbing purpose of His life, the redemption of man.

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What happens often in the economic order, happened in the moral order; man contracted a bigger debt than he could pay. A sin against Divine Love is greater than man alone can repair. But if God undertook to forgive the debt through mercy, justice would have been unrequited. God of course could pay the debt of man's sin, but He could not in justice do it apart from man.

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God could not pay *our* debt unless He became in some way involved in it. This the Son of God, Jesus Christ,

did by becoming man, assuming a human nature like unto us in all things save sin. He did not merely substitute for us, nor take our place; there is an identification of Him with us. He is the Head of our sin-laden race. In a certain sense He and we are one Person -- the new Adam. Strictly speaking, Our Lord is man in an absolute sense, no just *a man*; His humiliation was not so much in assuming a human nature, but in making Himself one with us in the sinful conditions which we created.

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The Cross was not merely the outbreak of human passion -- it was the violent expression of anti-God. It was sin in its essence -- the attempted destruction of Divinity. Sin is self-mutilation, the destruction of personality -- when it takes the form of pride, it crowns Goodness with thorns; when it takes the form of dishonesty, it nails hands to a Cross; when it takes the form of hate, it blasphemes the dying; when it takes the form of lust, it crucifies. Nothing less than bloodshed could have been sin's worst crime and registered sin's deepest hurt.

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Evil must work its power to the bitter end, use all its hatred, exhaust all its deceits, unsheathe all of its bloody swords, that being exhausted Goodness may be revealed as triumphant. And now that evil was spent in the final act of crucifixion, seeing that in Justice the last farthing was paid in the red coin of His blood and the mortgage against man paid back, He uttered His Cry of Triumph: "It is consummated ... Father into thy hands I commend my spirit." All history, pagan and Jewish, looked forward to this moment; Heaven and earth were separated -- now they could be united. The Pontiff or Bridge-builder has spanned the shores of eternity and time, and the Bridge is the Cross. The last rivet has been put in place; the last nail driven; there is no "unfinished symphony"; with Him -- It is consummated.

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It was the beauty and loveliness of the God-Man Christ which on the one hand made the crime so great, and on the other hand made the Divine forgiveness so final and so certain. That Figure on the Cross bore to the full not only the physical effects of sin which any man might suffer, and not only the mental effects of sin which all of us ought to feel, but the spiritual effects of sin which only He could feel because being sinless He was not part of it. Only the sinless know the horror of sin.

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If you can stand the gaze of a Crucifix long enough you will discover these truths. First, if sin cost Him, who is Innocence, so much, then I who am guilty cannot take it lightly; second, there is only one thing worse in all the world than sin -- and that is to forget I am a sinner; third, more bitter than the Crucifixion must be my rejection of that Love by which I was redeemed.

