

THE LORD AND THE LAW

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I AM told that the Japanese, each Spring, will carry their children many miles on their backs for them to enjoy the sight of the cherry-tree in full flower. They all feel that:

since, to look at things in bloom
fifty springs are little room,
about the woodlands I will go
to see the cherry hung with snow.

It won't happen so often in our lives that we can witness such a revelation of beauty and . . . who knows . . . ? next Spring the cherry may let fall its silver upon our grave, next autumn drop gold upon our tombstone.

Such thoughts are the commonplaces of mortal man who compares his brief span of life with the smiling persistence of the plants and of the planets. But there is a more daunting comparison yet to be made, in the degrees of faithfulness with which plant and planet obey the laws of God and those with which man obeys him. The cherry tree blooms because it must, because it cannot resist the compulsions that God has put within its nature. The animals, too, go about their slaying and their mating sinless, because they obey a law they cannot choose to resist; and on an unimaginably wider scale the earth turns on its axis into day and night, and on its orbit into summer and autumn, in perfect fidelity; while the sun, its centre of attraction, with all the company of the stars of heaven, goes on its unthinkable course to some unknown destination. 'See how the skies proclaim God's glory, how the vault of heaven betrays his craftsmanship.'

It is a daunting comparison, because we cannot help observing how irregular and unfaithful is the way of man compared to the way of the stars. It is true that men have inverted the argument and pointed to a different conclusion; the planets and the plants, they say, obey no law of a creator; they obey only the promptings of their own material structure. The cherry-tree will bloom and die until the dying planet withers it at its roots; the stars pursue the constraint only of their chance-made conglomerations of

particles; and when the last red star is a dead star, the whole apparatus of the heavens will disintegrate and vanish, as meaningless and purposeless as on the day when the two first atoms collided and coalesced. And man is one with the stars and the stones; chance caused his emergence and at any moment another chance may hurl him back into the nothingness of all things that have lost their material composition. This fortuitous concourse of atoms may end utterly with the disintegration of an atom.

There are, of course, strong and subtle arguments to show that this doctrine is completely false, but apart from them Christian men, and, indeed, the vast majority of the human race, feel that such an attitude is deadly and unreal, and deadly because unreal. We, at least, have the knowledge that on a certain day in historic time a star did move at God's command from its path and, sweeping out of the vast depths of heaven, stand above the manger where the Christ Child lay. And the event which it signalled, the Incarnation, is itself a demonstration that the world, and we with it, are condemned to no closed circuits and cycles of change and decay, to no materialistic consummation in death alone, but belong to a new order which passes back through the tiny channel of the babe in the manger and is restored to God. As St Augustine said, '*circuitus isti explosi sunt . . . those closed rhythms are blown to smithereens*', and at the Incarnation the hour-glass of time is, as it were, turned upside down and all the sand-grains of the universe that had been flowing away from God reverse their course and flow back again to their consummation in heaven.

It is, of course, obvious that this child in the manger is the summit of the human race, the predestined path through whom we are all to return to God. But the full significance of this birth at Bethlehem, of this divine and human leadership that is given us, is lost if we forget the particular significance of our Lord becoming flesh, of the second person of the Trinity invading the sphere of time and changeability, of the Word assuming the world. For although God could have chosen other means whereby the gulf torn between himself and creation by original sin could have been filled in, the appointment of his only-begotten son to be the means of our redemption has an enormous appropriateness. He who is to be the King of the world is already the Emperor of the Universe. This is made clear by St Paul when he proclaims that 'his is that first birth which precedes every act of creation.

Yes, in him all created things took their being'; for it is through his eternal Word, 'the true likeness of the God we cannot see', that the Father projects, as it were, the whole of creation upon the nothingness that preceded it. Our Lord in his eternal generation by the Father is already the law by which all things move, for it is only in him and through him that they have their existence at all.

Therefore, St Paul implies, Christ who is already the master and law-giver of the created world is also the head of the new creation. In him was all completeness originally, and 'through him it is God's good pleasure to win back all things, whether in heaven or in earth, into union with himself'. The first creation is spoiled by Adam, who was its summit and object, and, by becoming man, our Lord reoccupies this focus of creation and from it begins the vast work of the reintegration of all things. He is that head whose body is the Church, which is the new creation, and we are all to be brought back into the 'kingdom of his beloved son'. The pattern is to be repeated, but marvellously transformed; 'in Adam all die, in Christ shall all be made alive'.

The new law of the universe, then, is the Lord Christ, and though the plants and the planets seem, in some measure, to obey that original fidelity which they received in creation through the Word, yet they, too, St Paul elsewhere implies, await the full regeneration of man before they can sing in all its perfection the music of the spheres. And that is why the Law is a Lord; for man has to choose from love the law to which he will be obedient. Man is only man, he is only specified, made different from all other creatures, by his faculty of choice, and it is the essence of our very nature that all we do we must choose to do; and it follows that we have to choose for ourselves what shall be the end and object of our lives. Choice is the same thing as love, and St Augustine renders this great human characteristic marvellously when he says: '*Amor meus, pondus meum*': literally, 'my love is my weight', but, far more accurately, 'what I love is my private centre of gravity'. We all of us have some object which we work for, as the planets have their centre of gravity in the sun. And this treasure, this love, this object of ambition, this centre of gravity, moves us the whole time, consciously or not, so that our whole lives revolve about it. It may be anything, physical beauty, scholarship, power, wealth, a person; and certainly, for the vast

majority of the human race, it is persons who have the greatest attractive power. Men's laws and measures may make the headlines but it is people that people are really interested in; at their lowest, in the exploits of professional footballers, at a higher level the attractions of the artists and the dictators, the latest philosophical spell-binders, or even in the activities of their sovereign kings. The highest attraction is in the Persons who are God, and so that this attraction shall have the utmost compelling power upon our acts of choice, when the world is to be redeemed, the second Person of the Trinity assumes manhood and is born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary.

That is why the Incarnation is carried out to the point we know of. The mere fact of Incarnation was enough to bridge the gulf between God and man; the new creation is already there in the child in the manger; but the divine act has to be completed by the activities of men. It is not a magically efficacious dispensation that is inaugurated at Bethlehem; the King is there, but the kingdom does not spring fully armed from the crib; it has to grow, 'thy kingdom come', and because it is a kingdom in which men play the key rôle, even though in union with their God made Man, it has to grow in a human way. It is easy, in the states of men, to proclaim a new constitution which is to regulate the human family, but all history teaches that a constitution is so much paper until the minds and hearts of men have become attuned to it, fitted into its pattern. So the child grows and becomes a man, and goes out on his public ministry, and on to his Passion and death and gathers around him that body of followers who have given him their hearts, that body which is the nucleus of his Kingdom. And to the end of time that Kingdom must grow in the same way, by the allegiance of the individual heart to the King who comes amongst us. It is a peculiar kingdom, in a sense the most tyrannical that can be imagined, for the Lord is whole law and in another sense the least despotic, for that Lord has shown by his life and death that he will have us for love and for no other reason. 'And if I shall be lifted up on high, I will draw all men to me.'

The law of the 'kingdom of his son', therefore, is a personal love, which is, besides, the law of the entire universe. This love of God through his son has, of course, been the subject of many debates and torturing speculations, as to whether such a love is

entirely disinterested or is, in its essence, a selfish, even a possessive love. To such speculations the greatest of the Church's theologians gives a sublime and simple answer; the love between God and man is a love of friendship, *amicitia*, and he defines this love by the expressive phrase, *amicus est amico amicus*, which we may render as 'I love my friend and he loves me back', or, 'My true love hath my heart, and I have his.' It isn't a question of selfishness and possessiveness, or an abandonment to a romantic ideal of hopeless passion, but a total situation of friendship, in which the love of the one person for the other is the greater because that love is returned, assured and mutual. You do not like God because he likes you; and the reverse is not true either; but each party has the other's heart, and knows it and, very properly, is glad of that assurance. So wholesome, so satisfactory, so unargumentative, so humanly right, is the relation we have with our Creator and Redeemer. As our Lord, consummating upon the Cross the life which is the model and law of our lives, gives us to his Mother in the person of St John, he gives us as beloved disciples, as individually those whom he particularly loves. Christ the King reigns from the Cross, to draw all men to him, to cause all men to choose him freely as their treasure, their *pondus*, their centre of gravity; and as we look upon our Lord, in Bethlehem or Nazareth or Cana, in Galilee, Jericho or on Golgotha, we see the Lord who is our law, and whose love for us, as he is the Word of God, is the eternal rule and structure and reality of the universe. If the states of men fall into anarchy; if we see the whole universe of the stars harvested and reaped, and every season and cycle of the material creation curve to its dissolution, this personal love for the moulder of the world and the Redeemer of men remains as the pledge of our own eternity and the ultimate reality of all things. *Christus vivit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat.*