

in him who could and would perform the good he demanded amongst men. The Messianic reign would take effect in society only in so far as it was rooted in men's hearts. Faith, confidence, piety, virtue, righteousness, towards the Holy One of Israel are the notes of his later teaching. For the sake of this future Messianic appearance, when such goodness would prevail, Jahweh now spared the sinful but still Messianic people.

All these wonders silently took possession of his soul, and slowly remade his mind, so that their tracing through his works is by symptoms and flashes; the record of the soul in the mystical way is impalpably delicate. Beginning at his first diffidence in his own judgment, he grew in this grace to a maturity after which his life was in a spiritual repose and equilibrium, which can be read as an accompaniment to his prophecies and poems, warnings and exhortations. Concomitant with his spiritual growth is the literary, and Isaias is surpassed by no Hebrew poet for the riches, variety, tenderness, exaltation and vigour of his style, wide in range, powerful in effect, as he moves from the visionary rhetoric of his earlier years to the tranquil sublimity of his latest. They mark out in this respect the change from the young man's powerful emotions to the Bach-like serenity of a reasoned faith which knows no fear or doubt, and most of all, with increasing force, before the last grave assault of Assyria.

(To be concluded)



JESUS 'IMITATOR PATRIS'

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CHRISTIAN spirituality and ethics, when most closely linked with the central affirmations of the Faith, have been traditionally expounded in terms of the 'imitation of Christ'. This it is which has given them distinctively Christian 'shape', and secured that the Christian life is conceived as a possibility only because of the saving acts of God in Christ upon which it depends. To describe the Christian life as the 'imitation of Christ' is not to present it, however, as a bare literal mimicry, but to stress that, in fact, the life of the Christian man is fundamentally

the life of our Lord himself which he lives out in us in the sacramental life of the Church, if we will to have it so. The matter is already seen in this light in New Testament times, in, for example, St Paul's 'Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies' (2 Cor. 4, 10) or 'I have been con-crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2, 20). The Christian life is thus, in one aspect, part of the Christian Gospel, and this has remained the central Christian tradition. That the imitation of Christ is not just a subjective endeavour to copy but a matter of allowing oneself to be conformed to and incorporated into Christ is put shortly by St Anselm in his *Cur Deus Homo* (2, xix): 'They will indeed be his imitators in vain, if they do not become sharers in his merit', or by St Bernard in his *Tractatus to Innocent II* on certain errors of Abelard: 'So neither the marks of humility, nor the signs of charity are anything without the sacrament of the redemption'. Jesus is thus not only the object of our imitation but, through his sacramental action, the very means of it. The life of the Christians as 'imitators of Christ' is itself the mediated life of Jesus who is himself the unique perfect 'Imitator of the Father'.

The 'imitation of God' as a description of the religious life was a common term for the Greek and the Hebrew, but there was this significant difference in interpretation. For Plato (and later for the Neo-Platonists) the imitation of God meant thorough-going 'flight from the world'. 'We ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God' (*Theaetetus*). In the Old Testament, on the other hand, the imitation of God takes the form of obedience in this world in imitation of God's dealings in history with Israel. 'Flight' in the Old Testament is an image, not for the highest reaches of the spiritual life, but for sin—the flight from God.

The character of Israel's vocation and life as the 'imitation of God' springs from the covenant relation in which Israel stands to God. The most frequent image for the life of Israel is the 'walk along the way', not alone, but with God himself who both makes the way, and walks along it as guide and companion: 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' (Micah 6, 8, cf. 10, 12). As the Lord of the Covenant God promises his providential care, his prevenience, his will to save, and sets before Israel in the Torah

the demands of his way. As the people of the Covenant Israel agrees to be used of the Lord for his own purposes. The covenant thus involved not only the call of Israel but the call to Israel. The deeds of God with Israel are to be his 'gospel' to mankind, and acceptance of the Covenant means that Israel must will that this should be so. Israel therefore has accepted the vocation to walk along the Lord's way of humility, patience, obedience, degradation, suffering, and to remain confident that there will be vindication and consummation in glory. This it is which constitutes the true 'election' of Israel.

Expressed in other Old Testament words, all this means that the way of Israel is that of 'sonship' to God. The vocation of Israel is to be 'son of God': 'Out of Egypt have I called my son' (Osee 11, 1), 'Israel is my son, my firstborn' (Exodus 4, 22), 'I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn' (Jeremias 31, 9). In Old Testament thought and practice the father-son relationship is much more than a matter of physical kinship. It is primarily a moral and spiritual relationship; true fatherhood coming into being, as it were, when there is the obedient son, and the vocation of the son is to imitate the father, which he does primarily by obeying him. Now Israel is summoned to the vocation of sonship to God, and this demands that the pattern of Israel's life should take the form of the imitation of God, the Father of Israel. God's dealings with Israel in history are to be the model for Israel's dealings with men (cf. here especially the book of Deuteronomy which Schechter has called 'Israel's book de Imitatione Dei'—*Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, p. 119). Israel's specifically filial duty is to honour or 'glorify' the Father, that is to obey him, and the basic pattern of life which this involves is set out in Torah. This vocation is, at the best, imperfectly fulfilled by the historical Israel of the day, and the thought of the Old Testament moves forward to the hope that God himself will be his own Israel, and will himself walk along his own way. The way of Israel is most closely focussed in the Old Testament in the cycle of servant-poems in the book of Isaïas. Here there appears a servant who has accepted Israel's vocation to walk in the way which the Lord has set before him, and this servant goes forward, confident in the conviction that God will finally vindicate his way, and that it would be an act of disobedience to the heavenly calling to attempt any kind of self-vindication, or to anticipate by some

preliminary verbal self-proclamation what God himself will proclaim. And the servant is justified in this faith; God does solemnly ratify, 'seal', the work of his servant.

The idea of the imitation of God in the Old Testament is not only linked with the theme of the Covenant and of Israel's sonship, but also with that of the knowledge of God. That God has brought the Covenant into being means, in Old Testament language, that God has *known* his Israel, has chosen him (cf. Amos 3, 2). It is the fact that Israel is first known of God which makes possible Israel's knowledge of God. Here the distinctive features of the Hebrew concept of knowledge become apparent. Knowledge is hardly ever, in the Old Testament, knowledge in the sense of speculative depersonalized contemplation of an abstract absolute, as it tends to be in Plato. For the Hebrew it is essentially personal, reciprocal, intimate, and its origin and development are to be sought in the act of personal commitment. Perfect knowledge of God on the part of man is not so much in the Old Testament the 'vision of God' as it is for the Greek, but the more intimately conversational 'audition of God'. As we have seen, to imitate in the Old Testament implies to obey, and obedience is for the Hebrew the mode of knowledge. Israel is called to be son, that is to obey, and that is to know. The disobedience of Israel means the wilful turning away from the path of filial imitation of the Father—the Israel of the day, in fact, does not *know* the Lord—and so we find the prophets regarding the knowledge of God as one of the marks of the messianic times, as a distinguishing feature of the Messiah himself, and it is actually one of the functions of the servant in Isaias to bring knowledge (cf. Isaias 11, 9, Jeremias 31, 34, Isaias 53, 11).

The idea of the 'imitation of God' gives the essentially religious basis to Old Testament ethics. The protection of the fatherless, the widow and the stranger, for example, are enjoined, not primarily because these are good actions in themselves—they are, of course—but because thereby the ways of God with his Israel in Egypt are imitated, and God is obeyed and known. The very 'faith' of Israel is first and foremost an imitation of the 'faithfulness' of God, who is utterly loyal to his steadfast purpose, to his 'righteousness'. The ethical life of Israel is a seeking to reproduce in terms of human relationships the grand design of God's revealing and redeeming work through Israel.

In Christ the hope of Israel is fulfilled. The purpose of God in history to call into being and fashion an 'Israel' has come to a head in Christ, the New Testament declares, and he was sent to be in himself the Israel of God, and to walk obediently in the way which the Lord had set before his Israel. That this was so for Jesus himself is clear, not only from the gospel tradition itself, where the Old Testament themes which we have been discussing are deliberately taken up by our Lord and used for his own purpose, but also from the fact that the characteristic early Christian vocabulary is dominated by the imagery of the way: 'walking', 'following', and 'imitating'. The description by the early Christians of their religion as 'The Way' would seem to point to the central place which this image occupied in the mind of our Lord himself. His incarnate Sonship would seem to have implied the call to be himself Israel, and this in turn for him would include the duty of imitation of the Father. Certainly one of the aims of the evangelist St John is to underline the fact that Jesus is the Revealer and Redeemer precisely because he is the perfect *Imitator of the Father*.

From this angle our Lord's act of obedience in being baptized of John is the full acceptance of the Father's covenant call to be in incarnation what he is eternally in the life of the Godhead, the 'Image of the Father', and this means a commitment to walk in the way of Israel-Son, which becomes for him the way of the Son of Man. The Son of Man *must* go even as it is written of him, and the Son of Man *must* suffer, because these are inherent in the purpose of the Father, and he must offer perfect obedience. The temptation of Jesus, the specifically messianic temptation which continues to the end (Luke 22, 28), is to turn, as Israel did, from the path of filial obedience, and to seek means of eluding the necessary destiny of the Son of Man. Here again is a point specially stressed in St John's Gospel, where the narrative of 'the Way of the Son of Man' is accompanied, so to speak, by the striking of the hour-bell. The temptation of Jesus is presented here as a seeking to anticipate the hour which the Father will give, and which he himself does not appoint. This temptation is put aside as Satanic in an act of perfect obedience, and our Lord continues, confident that this is the Father's way for him. The way in which Jesus must walk is the Covenant Way of the Son of Man. All that the Lord hath said, he will do (Exodus 19, 8). He is

the Israel of God himself, and in him Israel's vocation and destiny are perfectly fulfilled in history.

This way is, first, a proclamation, in work and word, that the providential purpose of the Father has come to completion in his own time, and that it is focussed in him. He issues the messianic summons to Israel to *follow* him, and this means to follow him not merely in the sense of 'accompany', but in the Old Testament sense of 'following after', 'walking' in willing obedience and utter loyalty, seeking to share his destiny. This first stage culminates in the recognition which the Father reveals to Peter that here is the Christ of God. Thereafter Jesus turns, as Israel's ingatherer, to the building up of the New Israel on the site which Peter has provided. And now two significant themes are presented concurrently—the Way of the Son of Man and Discipleship.

The Way of the Son of Man is presented in a detached third-personal way, and by its exact coincidence with the actual way of Jesus, the disciples are invited, nay summoned, to make the identification of the life of the Son of Man with his own life for themselves. To suggest that there ought not to be coincidence is a recurrence of the Satanic temptation: 'And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men' (Matthew 16, 22-3). The Son of Man is one who comes in degradation (he has not where to lay his head, and is dubbed a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber) to minister and to suffer in a life of constant obedient faith, confident that there will be the vindication of the Father who sees in secret, and then the Son of Man comes in glory. The life of the Son of Man is the life of Israel perfectly fulfilling the Covenant vocation. Jesus is himself the true Israel, the perfect Imitator of the Father.

But the Way of the Son of Man in the teaching and practice of Jesus as well as being a proclamation of Jesus as Israel-Son, is at the same time for him a description of the way which discipleship of him necessarily, and not possibly, involves. The Way of the Son of Man coincides with the way of discipleship. The disciples are, in fact, apprentices to his trade, and must seek to be like the Master (Matt. 10, 25). His way is to be theirs, because their way is part of his gospel. They must walk, as he does, in the

Israel way of degradation, ministering, humility, patience and suffering. In the mission charge to the Twelve, they are bidden to do what he is doing (preach that men should repent, cast out devils, heal the sick—Mark 6, 13—and announce that the Kingdom of God has come—Luke 10, 9). Their activities on the mission tour are his 'dynameis', and the places which refuse to receive them are judged in exactly the same way as Chorazin and Bethsaida which refused to receive him (Luke 10, 12). In them as in him the Kingdom of God has come: 'He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that rejecteth you, rejecteth me'. The history of Israel's way in the Son of Man is continued in their obedience to that way. Imitation of him in the sense of absolute obedience to the way of Christ is a paramount necessity.

That the pattern of the life of the Christian disciple must have certain fixed features would seem to have been part of the mind and purpose of Jesus himself. By this are all men to know that they are his disciples. They become sons (Luke 6, 35) through walking in the way of him who is pre-eminently, uniquely and eternally Son. The *Imitatio Dei* of the Old Testament reaches its fulfilment in Jesus himself, the *Imitator Patris*, and because of him issues in the Christian life as *Imitatio Christi*, and it is this theme which has influenced the pattern of early Christian literature, catechesis and liturgy, and determined the structure of traditional Christian spirituality and ethics.

**SPODE HOUSE, HAWKESYARD PRIORY, RUGELEY,
STAFFS.**

OCTOBER CONFERENCES

- 2nd-3rd. Aquinas Study Weekend: Fr Mark Brocklehurst,
O.P.
8th-10th. 'Small Ownership and the Christian', a weekend
for distributists, etc.
15th-17th. 'Our Debt to the Jews': Dr Alec Jones, Dr Marinoff,
Dr Elkisch.
22nd-24th. 'The Angels in the Modern World.' For the
Philangeli and others.

For particulars write to THE WARDEN at address above.