

A TREATISE ON THE INEFFABLE MYSTERY OF OUR REDEMPTION

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(Translated by a Nun of Stanbrook).

CHAPTER VI.

How all the Divine perfections, particularly that of goodness, show forth with greater splendour in our Lord's Passion than in all His other works.

We see, then, that the Passion of Christ our Saviour serves for the glory of God (which we put first), as it makes perfect satisfaction for offences committed against the Divine Majesty and gives Him honour that surpasses the offence rendered Him by sin.

But it did not glorify Him only in this way, for in the sacred Passion the divine grandeur and perfections shine forth more than in all His other actions together.

To begin with His goodness, which in our understanding is the greatest and that on which God sets the highest store: where is it more resplendent than in the sacred Passion? To make this clear we must first explain the disposition and nature of goodness. "It is", says Saint Dionysius, "generous both of itself and all it owns". (*De Div. Nom. Cap. IV*). We see this in the sun, which is a most noble creature. It illumines the whole world, so that nothing is hidden from its light and strength. And the better a thing is, and the more advanced in goodness, the more will it communicate itself. Consequently, God being supremely good, will be supremely communicative of Himself and His perfections to all His creatures: to some more, to others less according to their condition and capacity, as the same Saint declares. And since man has the capacity of goodness and beatitude, God ardently desires (as is natural to Him) to make men good and blessed, like Himself—and this with no self-interest, but from the disposition and nature of His goodness. This is what He sought to show us specially in the work of our Redemption.

But it must be noted here that there are two excellent degrees of perfect goodness; one is to do good with no motive of self-interest or thought of gain, but from pure and simple bounty. The other form excels this, for it is not only free from self-seeking, but gives at the cost of loss of property, honour or life, etc. And the greater the loss, the stronger the evidence of goodness that caused it. Our Saviour shows this grade of supreme goodness in His sacred Passion. For as Pedro Ravenas writes: "It seemed little to His supreme charity to bestow His goods on us, had He not also shown it by suffering our ills".

But since, as God, Christ could not suffer, for the divine nature is immutable, He undertook a thing unheard of, admir-

able and fitting for such goodness, which was to unite to His own a nature hable to suffering and change; a human nature in which He could suffer, whereas in His own He could not.

We will now speak of this most excellent degree of goodness, not only to confirm the faith, but also to kindle a fervent love and admiration for this sovereign goodness in the hearts of the faithful. This theme is so high that we must consider certain matters that will be as steps to the ladder by which to ascend to it. Among these the beginning and foundation of our whole welfare consists in the knowledge of our God and Lord. During this life we cannot know Him in His Essence and beauty, but only by the works and wonders He has wrought and still continues in this world. Of these, the most excellent show us the most clearly the excellence of their Maker.

Since in all God's works the most eminent is the sacred Humanity, it is this which gives us the greatest knowledge of His perfections and grandeur and opens the way to our entrance into the sanctuary of His divine Breast and the marvels it contains. This was our Lord's meaning when He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me". The sacred Humanity is aptly prefigured by the ladder seen by the sleeping Patriarch Jacob, which reached from earth to heaven, with God leaning on its top, signifying that from His loins must come the sacred humanity that was to be the ladder by which mankind must ascend to the knowledge of God. This is why the Church says "because by the Mystery of the Word made flesh a new light has risen to shine on the eyes of our souls by which to understand divine truths". (The Preface for Christmas Day). This, then, is the first rung of the mystic ladder.

The second rung of the mystic ladder consists in rising above all created goodness in order to understand the goodness of God. Thus whoever wishes to appreciate the divine goodness must withdraw his eyes from himself and the goodness of all the Saints of this world, however holy they may have been, and from that of the angels, and Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, and must understand that divine goodness is so supreme and so superior to this created goodness, and so different as to lose all its splendour in comparison, like a little candle in the noonday sunshine. This was the meaning of Our Lord's words, "None is good but God alone".

As the divine Essence and omnipotence are incomprehensible, so is God's goodness. It would be as mistaken for men to measure it by any human reckoning as to compare His power with any created strength, for His goodness is so exalted, so sovereign, so different from any other, that it infinitely surpasses them all. This comparison is denounced by God Himself by means of the Prophet Isaias after the Prophet had told of God's mercy for

those who returned to Him. God said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways my ways . . . for as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts". (*Isaias* I, 7-9). Then how mistaken men would be if they compared the mercy of God with their own, since His is so infinitely greater, for as He is greater than man, so are all His grandeurs and perfections.

As this work of our Redemption came entirely from the supreme and infinite goodness, we should try to understand it to some extent. We must know that all created things have their natural properties by which they differ from others. We see that it is characteristic of fire to ascend and earth to sink, etc. Although the Creator is outside the order of creatures, He possesses His own proper nature, which is to do good incessantly. For He is essentially goodness itself and it is the nature of goodness that as the sun ceaselessly sends forth its rays, so He continually communicates with and blesses His creatures. Therefore let men realize how they should glory in having such a Lord, whose nature it is ever to be doing good, and they will see how right the Prophet was in saying, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye just, and glory all ye right of heart". This is another truth very necessary to be understood, that we may know the reason for the inestimable benefit of our Redemption, which was no other than this same goodness.

But here it must be noticed that among the divine perfections shown in this work, the most evident are God's goodness, charity and mercy. Therefore Holy Scripture attributes the work sometimes to either one or the other. These perfections are so closely connected that we can hardly mention the one without referring to the others. But though they are all one in our Lord we think they differ. For goodness communicates itself to men, making them good by bestowing on them its own goodness, but charity wishes well to others, promotes the welfare of those it loves and unites itself to them by love. The quality of mercy is sympathy with those who suffer, taking on itself their pains to remedy them. But this blessing of our Redemption is so vast and full of benefits that these, and many other qualities, are included in it.

(To be continued).

REVIEWS

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL LITURGICAL WEEK, 1943. (Ferdinand, Indiana. English Agents: Society of St. Gregory, Ivy Bank, Entry Hill, Bath: 10s. 6d.).

Valuable as these reports are—and they are valuable—one does not always approach them with enthusiasm. If the papers are sound expositions of accepted doctrine, they rarely cast new light on old problems, or penetrate to the depths. In 1943 the