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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE REDEEMING LOVE OF CHRIST

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In this fine essay Fr. Morgenroth probes the Mystery of the Redemption by asking the fundamental question: How are we redeemed? What follows is an exposition of theology as faith seeking understanding. By focusing upon the love of Christ as the center of His redeeming act, he demonstrates how Christ died through us and by the love of His Heart transformed the through us into a for us by becoming a victim for our sin.



THEOLOGY IS TO BE IN THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH'S TASK OF "TEACHING ALL nations".¹ Pope and Bishops and all who are called and commissioned to aid them in this task are to preach not themselves, "but Christ Jesus as the Lord" and themselves as men's "servants for Jesus' sake".² If theological effort is not primarily in the service of the Gospel, it becomes an instrument of self-seeking, corrupts and becomes corrupt. If theology is faith seeking to understand more deeply the realities that constitute its content, it must be in the service of all men, of believers, and of the vast multitude of those not yet responding to the word of God in faith and sacrament. If theology becomes self-serving, the danger of snobbery (gnosticism) arises, and distortions in content and tone become inevitable. No longer does God shine "in our minds to radiate the light of knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ".³ His glory is crowded out by the seeking of one's own glory.

Faith is the realization (in the sense of Newman's 'realizing', of 'real assent') of revealed realities. These realities are meant for all, all are enabled by God's grace to grasp them and live by them, if these realities are adequately presented and made credible by that love (obedience to God, since love is response to a commandment)⁴ without which the content of the faith becomes distorted and loses credibility.

It would seem that incalculable harm has been done in Western Christendom by that popular distortion of the theology of redemption as it is, or has until recently, been taught and understood. What Joseph Ratzinger calls "a much coarsened version of St. Anselm's theology of atonement",⁵ may well have contributed to that shocking indifference to, and even predilection for, brutality in the history of Christendom. As Ratzinger wrote: "The 'infinite expiation' on which God seems to insist thus moves into a doubly sinister light. Many devotional texts actually force one to think that Christian faith in the cross visualizes a God whose unrelenting righteousness demanded a human sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own Son, and one turns away in horror from a righteousness whose sinister wrath makes the message of love incredible."⁶ And while this distorted theology is hardly taught now, for all practical purposes it would be difficult to find a teachable, consistent theology of redemption of which one may hope that it is balanced and free from error. To name only two prominent sources, where one would hope to find light, but where the treatment is pathetically insufficient - the otherwise excellent *The Teaching of Christ*,⁷ and the (tentative) *National Catechetical Directory*.⁸

In the former, the section on Redemption contains many fine statements and references to Scripture. But what ought to be the very center of all theology, the revelation of God's way and the pattern of Christian life as response to, and continuation of, God's work, is disjointed and full of what seems often to be a non-sequitur without indicating its place in the total event. The impression is still not avoided that we are redeemed by the brutal torture and murder of Christ, without clearly indicating how, the disaster of what Guardini calls "the second fall"⁹ was transformed by Christ into the new source of new life. Terms such as 'satisfied' and 'victory over sin and Satan'¹⁰ remain unexplained and may easily settle in one's mind as gross simplifications. Although redeeming love is clearly spoken of, the inner connections are not clarified. Many statements are conclusions. But theology is to show what they are conclusions of. When the words of Preface I of Easter are quoted, "by dying he destroyed our death, and by rising again he restored us to life",¹¹ one might want to ask why being murdered has redeeming, transforming, reconciling power over the murderer. And the same might be asked of the miracle of the resurrection, if our grasp of the event is limited to 'rising and ascending' stopping short of the goal of it all, the 'sedet ad dexteram Patris', 'being seated at the right hand of the Father.' How am I redeemed now by Christ having been murdered and having been restored to (glorified) life long ago? Redemption theology is to fill these gaps, which otherwise remain mere non-sequiturs.

The document already mentioned, published by the American Bishops, deals with the redemption in about two hundred words. Again we read that 'by his death and resurrection he redeemed mankind from slavery to sin and to the devil.'¹² Again one ought to ask, and answer the question: where lies the inner ontological (causal) connection between the murder of Christ, his resurrection, and my being redeemed now? Teaching must consist of filling out the connections, and showing that statements such as those quoted are headings calling for extensive elaborations. Otherwise there is no teaching, no comprehension, and the gap in the content of the faith in its very center remains a block even to seeking, and certainly to understanding, and becomes an embarrassment to be covered up by a silence most do not dare to break.

The content of the faith is to be living truth, "something alive and active",¹³ first in those who are to communicate it in word and witness, and then in the

hearts of the hearers. To bring this about we must have a sound, consistent, valid theology of redemption, that would clarify and resolve the questions we cannot help asking: where is the historical, where the ontological connection across time between Calvary and my Christian hope now? Where is the connection between the dying and death of Christ, and his resurrection? Is it merely a sequence of events, or is there an inner continuity? Are there assumptions formerly taken for granted, but now in need of being brought out, that would fill the gaps that seem to exist between statements?

We will try to indicate some of the lines of thought that might be pursued and coordinated so that eventually a sound and teachable theology of redemption may become available. Without this far too many realities realized in faith remain isolated and meaningless. As Urs von Balthasar wrote: "The truth of the Bible is comprehensible only in the total context of human existence. Unexpectedly do we discover here the ancient law of Catholic interpretation of the spiritual meaning of Scripture: that in every sentence the totality is in a sort of resonance, every word bears reference to the whole."¹⁴ And the Good News for which men are longing and waiting will continue to be presented in disconnected items, non-sequiturs, tempting people to suspect something like Andersen's "emperor's new clothes" - that really there is nothing there. And our sermons and teaching will become worse, if that is possible, and be actually counterproductive.

When Catholics in large numbers seek spirituality outside their church or at its fringes, this can only be interpreted as starvation, a hunger for divine truth which is simply not being satisfied in many parishes, dioceses or Catholic institutions. Dietrich von Hildebrand wrote a book entitled *The Devastated Vineyard*,¹⁵ Henri de Lubac spoke of "that spiritual collapse ... which since has accelerated in spite of the attempts of renewal by a Council that *since has been betrayed*."¹⁶ No prophetic voices are needed to point to the growing decline in numbers and in spirituality, at least on the visible level, in the church west of the Iron Curtain. The situation described more than thirty years ago by the German Jesuit Alfred Delp, writing in prison while the bombs were falling, expecting execution, have since become a realistic description of much of the church in this country: "A Church that makes demands in the name of a preemptory God no longer carries weight in a world of changing values. The new generation is separated from the clear conclusions

of our traditional theology by a great mountain of boredom and disillusion thrown up by past experience. We have destroyed man's confidence in us by the way we live."¹⁷

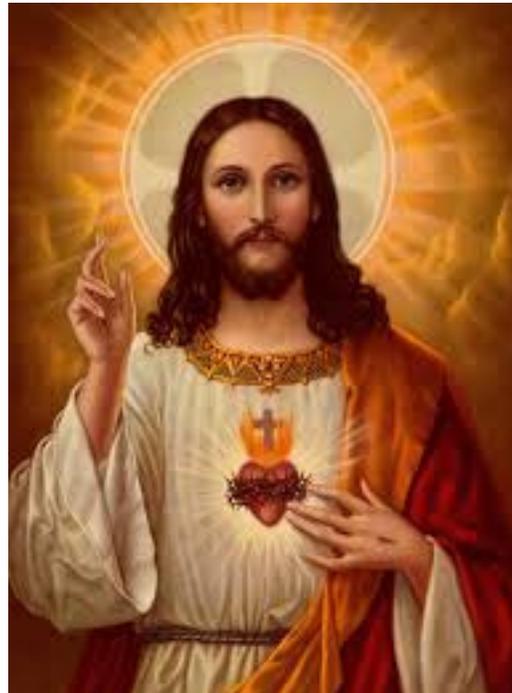
Part of the betrayal spoken of by Henri de Lubac is precisely our starving the people spiritually. Bewildered priests, sisters and seminarians add to the "mountains of boredom". And the silence, now considered the "virtue" of "not being judgmental", so often found in high places, allows the ever more precipitate decline to continue, at least on the visible level. Whether a renewal has begun in the hearts of men is not given to us to know. But orthodox proclamation of the Gospel, made credible by lives of redeeming contradiction¹⁸ is not always easily found and must be restored.

A return to the sources, without which there can be no renewal or reform, is the only answer we can attempt. And the ancient injunction still holds: "Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help."¹⁹ "We must look on the one whom they (we!) have pierced ..."²⁰ It is from the divine-human love of Jesus Christ, a love that has at its disposal the creative power and omnipotence of his Godhead, that alone we can hope for renewal of the Church, which is "at once holy and always in need of purification."²¹

In seeking the redeeming love of God, we must go to him without whom "no one can come to the Father,"²² the "only one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus."²³ For it is "in the Sacred Heart that there is the symbol and the express image of the infinite love of Jesus Christ which moves us to love in return."²⁴ Since we are to love (seek, hear, obey, serve) God also "with all our mind"²⁵ we must put our intelligence in the service of God. We must answer questions to enable us to come to a unified vision of the content of the faith, to come to see the great sweep of revealed realities in its unity. For in isolation the truths of the faith are often distorted and largely meaningless. God makes known his truth and his ways to us in revela-

tion in specific word, action, promise. And this must find a hoping and loving response in our hearts. The totality of revealed reality is for each particular word of God like the soundbox of a violin, without which the tone would be unconvincing, without expression, adding again to the "mountain of boredom" which chokes all hope.

The central question we ought to ask is: How are we redeemed? The death of Christ, even if not avoided by him in his obedience to the Father,²⁶ as such and by itself cannot possibly have reconciled mankind with the Father. Historically many became guilty in their resistance to the Messiah, a resistance consummated in his being eliminated from this world. To think that the redemption of man essentially came about through the commitment of crimes would throw a strange light on God. Nor could being tortured and crucified be called a victory. If we say that we are redeemed by Christ's death and resurrection, and mean by this primarily that our redemption derives from Christ having been murdered and restored to a new, glorified life, we risk creating in the minds of those who have the courage to ask, the danger of being embarrassed by what appears to be an enormous nonsequitur, leading to the suspicion that perhaps our faith in



its very center is not rooted in reality, and is therefore an illusion. Romano Guardini wrote: "The Christian may never accept as right and within the order of things that redemption came about through the death of Christ. This view would change the entire perspective. A certain rigidity and inhumanity would enter his vision, that would destroy all. The life of the Lord would cease to appear as a genuinely lived human life, to have been a real coming and acting, and the willing and the experiencing of a real human destiny. Then love will fade - but this everyone must himself come to feel, who has the will to come through contemplation closer to the core of the life of the Lord."²⁷

As was indicated earlier, where can the Christian in this country, where can the teacher, the seminarian or priest, find a plausible, teachable theology of redemption, rooted in reality, with clear indications, where exactly un-

derstanding must reach out into mystery? Where can he learn of God's redemptive

Do we have to resign ourselves to leaving the unifying center of the faith to the confusion of endless historical studies³⁰ only to conclude with the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* that the article *Redemption (Theology of)* "is not an effort to construct an integral theology of redemption according to any one soteriological theory. That is a work that remains to be done satisfactorily - if, indeed, it can ever be accomplished satisfactorily!"³¹ Not very consoling to read this in a Catholic encyclopedia.

And yet, how can we pursue, in the service of the Church's task of proclaiming the Good News, the development of a plausible, teachable theology of that reality, the source of man's justification and sanctification, of his salvation? Without this, the theology of the Sacred Heart would remain rootless and in danger of becoming shallow and unbalanced. We are dealing with the very center of the Catholic faith. At least in the English-reading world (which with regard to theology includes vast areas of Africa and Asia) there seems to be no accessible, available, coherent theology of redemption. Because of the urgency of the need to restore the very center of the faith to our total and integral vision of revealed reality and its implications, and because such a theology is central to Devotion to the Sacred Heart, which is but theology -of redemption lived in, and from, its very center, a few suggestions will be made here in the hope that people of considerable greater competence may soon give us such a theology. Otherwise we will have to continue to remain embarrassed by the lack of a unifying center in theology and life. The increasingly justified critique of the state of religious instruction and of the teaching of theology in this country, which may well be seen some day in retrospect as the great scandal of the American Church and the root of defection and of paralysis, this critique is a last call to metanoia, to a return to sound theology rooted in its sources, in the word of God and orthodox development. It is all depending on a balanced faith in Jesus Christ, the revelation and instrument of God, and on an understanding of his way to his Lordship through cross and resurrection.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON A POSSIBLE THEOLOGY OF REDEMPTION

Since man's redemption was brought about by an historical event, should it not be possible to begin by simply considering what actually happened, and to try to discern the divine, redeeming reality that was hidden under the external events? Moreover, is it conceivable that the faithful have had, and still have, an instinctive understanding of how Christ conquered sin, including their own committed long after Christ's redeeming death and resurrection, even if it has not been articulated for them? If theologians have been afraid to present us with an understanding of our redemption, we may perhaps find some hint in the work of Christian thinkers, philosophers, novelists. Thus we read in Jacques Maritain's *The Christian Teaching of the Story of the Crucifixion*: "Who killed Christ? The Jews? The Romans? I have killed Him, I am killing Him every day through my sins." And speaking of anti-Semitism, he continues: "If Christ did not die for their sins, then they flee from the mercy of Christ! In reality they do not want to be redeemed."³²

In François Mauriac's *Vipers' Tangle* we read: "And when Hubert protested that one must hate the executioners of Our Lord, the abbe replied that every one of us had a right to hate but one executioner of Christ: 'Ourselves, and nobody else'."³³

As we attempt now to develop a possible approach to the redemption, we will consider these words from the Apocalypse: "Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share his meal side by side with him. Those who prove victorious I will allow to share my throne, just as I was victorious myself and took my place with my Father on his throne."³⁴ What is this victory which brought the victor to the Father's throne, and whose victory we are to duplicate in our lives? The term victory is meaningless except where there is struggle. When Jesus raised the dead to life, this was, strictly speaking, not a victory. It was something accomplished by the creative power of his divinity. To be brutally murdered does not, as such, constitute a victory on the part of the victim. In what does then the victory of Christ consist? Was it essentially his obedience in accepting the course of events, and allow his arrest, torture, condemnation and murder to happen? Did this primarily constitute the content of his obedience? Would this lead us to a solution of the question of how we are redeemed now by what happened long



ago? Are we redeemed by mankind inflicting sufferings and death on the Son of God, and his allowing it to happen? If we wish to avoid the construction of a primarily juridical process, so “sinister” in character, what is left? The following is suggested for possible further development by theologians more competent than this writer. In the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* we read: “Should anyone inquire why the Son of God underwent His most bitter Passion, he will find that beside the guilt inherited from our first parents the principal causes were the vices and crimes which have been perpetrated from the beginning of the world to the present day and those which will be committed to the end of time.” In His Passion and death the Son of God, our Saviour, intended to atone for and blot out the sins of all ages, to offer for them to His Father a full and abundant satisfaction. Besides, to increase the dignity of this mystery, Christ not only suffered for sinners, but even for those who were the very authors and ministers of all the torments He endured. Of this the Apostle reminds us in these words addressed to the Hebrews: “Think diligently upon him that endured such opposition from sinners against himself; that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds.”³⁵ In this guilt are involved all those who fall frequently into sin; for as our sins consigned Christ the Lord to the death of the cross, most certainly those who wallow in sin and iniquity crucify to themselves again the Son of God, as far as in them lies, and make a mockery of Him. This guilt seems more enormous in us than in the Jews, since according to the testimony of the same Apostle: “If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory”³⁶; while we, on the contrary, professing to know Him, yet denying Him by our actions, seem in some sort to lay violent hands on Him.”³⁷ Clearly it is the opinion of this Catechism, prepared by theologians in the 16th century, that Christ died through us, as we have seen already in the words of Maritain and Mauriac. Thus everyone is involved in the crucifixion; through his sins and through his failing to become what God intended him to be. This is what Leon Bloy meant in those often quoted words at the end of *The Woman Who Was Poor*: “There is only one unhappiness, not to be one of the saints.”³⁸

In the Oration of the Feast of the Sacred Heart, in its former version, we read: “O God, through your mercy we possess the treasures of your love in the heart of your Son, the same heart we wounded by our sins.” And the same thought, that we, now, are wounding the Heart of Christ, is found in two of the three Orations in the new liturgies. There we pray, “we have wounded the

heart of Jesus your Son,” and, “we honor the heart of your Son broken by man’s cruelty, yet symbol of love’s triumph.”

Regarding the mystery how Sin committed after the death of Christ could have contributed to Christ’s suffering and dying, we may find some weak analogies in those great men and women of the Church who suffered intensely by foreseeing the disasters to come, already being prepared by men, Christians and others, in their blindness, their hardness of heart, their excruciating mediocrity. We only have to think of Leon Bloy, in whom the prophetic spirit became so extraordinarily articulate. Moreover, in trying to fathom how sins can have retroactively entered into the sufferings of Christ, we should not ignore the words of *Mystici Corporis*: “The knowledge and love of our Divine Redeemer, of which we were the object from the first moment of His Incarnation, exceed all that the human intellect can hope to grasp. For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God, when He began to enjoy the beatific vision, and in that vision all the members of His Mystical Body were continually and unceasingly present to Him, and He embraced them with His redeeming love.”³⁹ The difficulties an alternative to this view would present should make us take the words of the encyclical letter seriously. Here again, theologians could greatly aid the proclamation of *the Good News*. Heinrich Schlier would seem to imply the same when he wrote: “He died his death through the sins (unter den Sunden) of men, which he took away from them by his dying and death on the cross ... In the resurrection is fulfilled and revealed the hidden power of life in the cross of Jesus Christ, the power of that love which in obedience to God sustained the sins of the others even unto death - out of love. The death suffered out of this love proves itself to be entrance into life. But now he who died through us and for us, who was awakened into the life derived from God, is the same who in eternity intercedes for us. By this death the power of intercession has become his in eternity. ‘Could anyone condemn? Could Christ Jesus? No! He not only died for us - he rose from the dead, and there at God’s right hand he stands and pleads for us’.⁴⁰ And in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read: ‘It follows, then, that his power to save is utterly certain, since he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him’.⁴¹ Having sustained the burden of sin by enduring the sins of men even unto death, and awakened from the hidden depth of his death, he is now the Lord over life and death. We remember the words St. Paul has formed in a hymn-like manner: ‘The

life and death of each of us has its influence on others; if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord, so that alive or dead we belong to the Lord. This explains why Christ both died and came to life⁴², it was so that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living⁴³. -He who died for us, first died through us. He had become the target and the victim of our sins. He is target, in that he identifies fully with all the victims of sin -" ... in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me."⁴⁴ If failing to do good to our neighbor in need we fail to do good to Jesus, it would seem that all intended and permitted evil is also done to him. Thus all sin entered into his suffering and contributed to the long ordeal of dying, to his death. Each one of us both by his sins and his failures to become and be what he is meant to be, will have actually contributed to that evil flowering of what man's first rebellion had begun - the Sin of the World, which crucified the Lord.

That Jesus in his passion and death had become the target and victim of all sins that have been committed by all men in as far as they have become guilty before God, and the sins that will be committed till the end of time is clearly stated in the Catechism of the Council of Trent, already quoted.⁴⁵

Thus we can summarize: Jesus became the target and victim of sin, in the literal sense of the words, in his passion and death. In other words, Christ died through my, through our sins. And whenever we read, in Scripture and the Liturgies, that Christ died for us, we should understand that he died through us.⁴⁶ We will later consider how the through us was transformed by Christ into a for us.

This interpretation might help us to suggest a possible interpretation of II Cor. 5, 21 as alternative to the already quoted interpretation in the Jerusalem Bible (see p. 13) - that he became the victim of our sins, suffering all the destruction our sins bring about, in the sinner, in the world; that what sin intends, the implicit wish that God would be slighted or removed or temporarily set aside, would find its true goal and victim in God now having become vulnerable among us by having become one of us. Thus Jesus became the target and victim of sin, and sin achieved what it intended. The cross was, on the historically visible level, a victory of evil. The sinless one was made "into sin".

But how did Our Lord take away the Sin of the World, how does he continue to do so? The struggle in which Christ was victorious consisted in upholding his redeeming, pitying love for his murderers - his love for our first parents, and for us, their descendants in whom the temptation, and all too often, the rebellion, lives on. "What proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners."⁴⁷ The through becomes a for while he maintained his love for us sinners when the sins of men, our sins, the continuation and the fruit of the Fall, converged upon him. And when his death sealed and ended the ordeal, his love in its fidelity⁴⁸ had won the victory, after a bitter, inconceivable struggle. So that it may be said that on Calvary there was apparent the victory of evil, but hidden, there was a victory of love, a love maintained throughout the ordeal. And when the Lord rose and ascended into Heaven, this love rose in and with him. It was this love that would become the continuing instrument of man's redemption - retroactive for those who had died in God through hope, however dim. For hope is a seeking, and we possess the infallible promise that we will find if we seek.⁴⁹ And this victorious love in the heart of Christ would, till the end of history, be the instrument and power that would seek the lost sheep, awaken consciences, plead for, and channel, the powers that relate us to God-faith, hope, charity - and all the gifts that bring about our transformation into children of God, our sharing again the divine nature.⁵⁰

The human-divine love of Jesus is creative. When he said, "My friend, your sins are forgiven you,"⁵¹ friendship was restored and sin forgiven. Or when he called Lazarus forth from the tomb, what he said came to happen. By this love he forgave those who caused his passion and death - all men from Adam and Eve till the end of history - because it was then that he responded to the murderous effect of sin with his forgiving, restoring, creative love-with the "healing power of his love."⁵² And from then on, as "our sin has gone out of us, and one look, a sign, a dumb appeal suffices for grace and pardon to swoop down, as an eagle from topmost skies."⁵³ This love of his, cynically tested by us sinners⁵⁴ throughout our lives, was victorious when men's sins converged upon him during those hours between Gethsemani and his death. This love was in his heart when he rose, ascended, and was appointed Lord. For what else does the "sedet ad dexteram Patris", his Lordship, mean than that all power and authority (*exousia*) in Heaven and on earth has been given to him⁵⁵-the power of his creative love, to redeem, to forgive, to transform. And as the humanity

of the eternal Son is the instrument of God, in a certain sense we can even say that the divinity of Jesus Christ is at the disposal of his human heart. And thus he expiated our sins.

Expiation on our part is not the passive, even willing, suffering of pain, imposed in retribution for sin. It is to accept the painful consequences of one's own sins, to share the destructive consequences of sin in the lives of others, and thus to show one's existential willingness to assume responsibility for one's sins in the hope of forgiveness. But the only truly redeeming (that is, transforming, reconciling) re-creating⁵⁶ expiation is that vicarious expiation (possible because of the mysterious solidarity of men, into which God has entered by becoming man) offered for all by Christ, because all sin is ultimately a slighting and rejecting of God, and thus of him, who in both his natures is the "image of the invisible God,"⁵⁷ the eternal and now incarnate Son.⁵⁸ And as we said above, he became, while on earth, increasingly, and totally, the target and victim of our sins. His acceptance of this on our behalf was not primarily a "legal substitution", but the way of bridging the gap brought about by rebellion and flight from God. The redeeming, creative love maintained in obedience to the Father, while bearing the brunt of the first and continuing rebellion of man, bridged, and continues to bridge the abyss between God and rebel, as soon as the sinner is made capable again by this same redeeming love of entering into union and friendship with God. Then the forgiveness granted on Calvary by the maintaining of love while being rejected takes effect, and reconciliation comes about. Here would seem to lie the ontological bond between the historical event of the crucifixion and the redemption consequently brought about. The love tested and victorious on Calvary continues to be effective now.

In the *Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*, in the article *Subne* (Expiation) we read that Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII in their Encyclicals dealing with the Sacred Heart have defined 'expiation' as "restitution for the neglect and insult inflicted upon the uncreated love of the God-Man; expiation is 'compassion with the suffering Lord and consolation in his bitter passion' (quoted from P. Eder, *Subne*, p. 101). With this the concept of expiation has been transferred from the level of basic relationship implied in 'justification of man before God' to the level of an ethical following of Christ." And the hope is expressed that this development would become an important and wide-spread expression of Christian

piety and morality.⁵⁹

But may we not go further, beyond the ethical, and see redemption, the restoration of ontological union with God, the new sharing of the divine nature⁶⁰, the being baptized into (*eis*) the name (life, persons) of the Trinity,⁶¹ as an ongoing ontological process, ontologically rooted in the Risen Lord, in whom the redeeming love, tested and victorious on Calvary, is the burning center and source of reconciliation, of the 'new life'? The Sacred Heart of Jesus is absolute reality now, source of that real redeemed unity that goes essentially beyond a moral union, as it has been so strongly insisted upon by Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (section 62).



Perhaps it can be shown that the often convenient view that the brutally inflicted suffering and death of Christ had in themselves redemptive significance and actually brought about our redemption, that it may well have contributed to the shocking, still continuing brutalization of the Christian West. It is too easily forgotten because it would be embarrassing for some 'followers' of Christ that we are redeemed by the victory of Jesus' pitying, pleading love that turned the greatest conceivable disaster into the very source of all redemption. It is this victory that really constitutes the heart and meaning of the resurrection - which, as victory, was achieved and built up from moment to moment during the ordeal of his passion, to find its consummation in the final and obedient acceptance of that which can, after the Fall, be experienced only as violent severance and extinction - death.

Easter is the celebration of the restoration to life, and thereby of this love in the heart of the Risen Lord, that was now to become the universal instrument of reconciliation, of communication of divine love and life offered to each individual human being, unless he has closed himself in final impenitence as the result of long cultivated pride and rebellion.

We suggested that the core of our redemption lies in the fidelity of Christ's love for us, his executioners, while he suffered as the target and victim of the sins of men. The victory achieved on Calvary is the victory of a

love for us, his executioners, maintained in struggle and in obedience out of love for the Father, “even unto death on a cross.”⁶² This victory really constitutes the resurrection, which was the goal of the incarnation and of that long, increasingly difficult journey to death and resurrection, and thus to the “right hand of the Father.” That “God has made this Jesus whom you (we) crucified both Lord and Christ”⁶³ was the theme of the first Christian sermon. It must again become the central theme of proclamation and life. For our faith will become imbalanced if our co-existence with the risen humanity of Christ, the Lord and “only mediator”,⁶⁴ is lost sight of as the center of our faith, as the core of the reality grasped in faith, of our redeemable and redeemed existence as “sons in the Son”.⁶⁵ St. Paul did not preach himself, but “Christ Jesus as the Lord”.⁶⁶ “Here we are, preaching a crucified Christ . . . to those who have been called . . . a Christ who is the power and the wisdom of God.”⁶⁷ The power and wisdom of crucified love, upheld during the ordeal, is now constituted the pleading and mediating power in the risen Heart of Christ. Out of obedience, that is, in love, his human Heart, in a severe struggle, was kept in full harmony with the saving will of the Father, who “is always faithful, for he cannot disown his own self”, even when we are unfaithful.⁶⁸

It is through a deeper understanding of the obedient and redemptive love of Christ as the power by which we are drawn into divine life and transformed into true children of the Father that we will find a badly needed corrective of our understanding of “love”. That it was a struggling love on the part of Christ throughout his life, extended and maintained in obedience, would seem to be implied in his words: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away; because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me”⁶⁹ in obedience. And the same obedience, the same ‘overcoming’,⁷⁰ this VICTORY, was again revealed in the Garden of Gethsemane.⁷¹

When we dare to speak of love, a name of God,⁷² of that love which we are commanded to extend to God and neighbour, we must remain aware that we are dealing with mystery. “Anyone speaking of love in relation to God speaks of a great mystery - one may even say, he speaks of the very root of Christian mystery.”⁷³

Warnach also emphasizes the ontological character, and thereby the mystery, of Christian love. We read:

“I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you also must love one another.”⁷⁴ The *Kathos* (as) used here is not only a comparison, but indicates source and foundation (begründende Bedeutung). That is, we can love in the sense of the New Commandment only when in loving we actually are united with the love of Jesus (Jesu Liebe mitvollziehen), as Jesus himself participates in the Father’s love.⁷⁵ in the first letter of John this is confirmed when we read that we could not love at all, unless God had loved us first⁷⁶ Agape in us is first God’s own love, as it is communicated, or infused into us by the Holy Spirit And yet Agape actually becomes our own love, in that we receive it⁷⁷ and in that this love received assumes in us its form⁷⁸ Christ’s love as it were taking on flesh in us The eminently ontological character of Agape finds expression above all in the key sentence: “*O Theos agape estin.*”⁷⁹

As long as we analyze love primarily in terms of human categories, we are denying the unfathomable mystery of divine reality, of God and his gifts. We are not dealing with truth, with reality. Love as revealed reality escapes our immediate observation. God’s love for me remains the object of hope. I have no absolute certainty that I am in the state of grace and united with God.⁸⁰ And since the power to love is in me only if I am in the state of grace, love as supernatural virtue shares in the very mystery of God. “This love comes to us from God, and everyone who loves is begotten by God.”⁸¹ When we unite ourselves in faith with the ever-living God, a miracle takes place. By the power of God (von Gott her) there awakens in us a new life: there is given to us, in the weakness of our finiteness, to act as God acts.⁸²

The true, strictly mysterious dimension of love must be emphasized in corrective contradiction to the endless chatter about love, which in its shallowness only distorts, obscures and falsifies sacred reality and obligation. An example of this false yet widespread perception of love is found in a song: “Be with us, Lord, as we break through to each other to find the truth and beauty of each friend.” This is not only indelicate, but deadly, the beginning of a game of mutual possession.

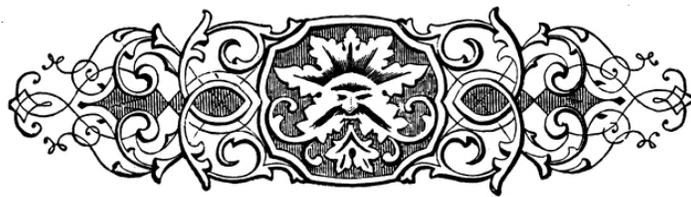
Closely related to the mystery aspect of love is the realization that both love of God and of neighbour are *commanded*.⁸³ Therefore love is an obedience and far from being a spontaneous response. It is rooted in faith, a victory over the world.⁸⁴ Love of neighbour is rooted in hope. “This is love, to accept the other by the will of the

Father, and this means, that it is truth: to love is to open oneself to the truth of the other. It is to help the other to achieve his whole truth.”⁸⁵

Redeeming love, in Christ, and in us, is that divine perfection by which we become “perfect, just as our heavenly Father is perfect” becoming “sons of our Father in heaven.”⁸⁶ It is a love, commanded here to extend even to the enemy. Christ’s fidelity in loving his murderers (us!) while we condemned, tortured and crucified him, was a love upheld by him in obedience.⁸⁷ For us, as we are seeking, discerning, and assuming our obligations in charity, it is obedience rooted in faith and hope. “We can be sure that we love God’s children if we love God himself and do what he has commanded us; this is what loving God is—keeping his commandments.”⁸⁸ And normally, the demands of love present themselves to us as obedience, that is, as duty. This duty may be giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, or welcome to the stranger,⁸⁹ or it may be the exhausting struggle of a Beethoven, throughout several years, to give perfection to his *Missa Solemnis*, or to give form to his last Quartets. This may be somewhat sobering. But we are not to impose our notions on the scriptural meaning of love. It is for us to learn from revelation, to “listen to him,” the Son, the Beloved.⁹⁰ As he, the Lord, the eternal Son, emptied himself “even unto death” in obedience to the Father, for us, too, love is obedience, to love as he loved us.⁹¹ This is the meaning of “having the mind of Christ.”⁹²

Love as divine mystery and, on our part, in imitation and extension of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as obedience, must be the theme of our teaching, made credible by our attempts to live it. Love, the hidden source of its manifold manifestations,⁹³ allows and enables us to extend the redeeming love of God, of the Heart of Jesus, into a “deceitful and underhand”⁹⁴ world, to become a sign that will be rejected.⁹⁵ “This may be a wicked age, but your lives should redeem it.”⁹⁶ As members of Christ, we are to be “ambassadors for Christ,” God, “appealing through us.”⁹⁷

The source and center, the exemplar and the goal of Christian existence is the Heart of the Risen Lord, the love which has responded to the attacks of evil with redeeming love. This love is the power and the wisdom of God. It is crucified love, love for the crucifiers maintained during the crucifixion. This love was victorious against the converging of evil, against the sin of the world. It was God’s love for his enemies, extended to us through the Heart of Jesus, the “only one mediatory between God and mankind, himself a man.”⁹⁸ We are to share this perfection of God.⁹⁹ We do so by being victorious as he was victorious,¹⁰⁰ extending his victory of love into a world “endangered by pride and inordinate self-love.”¹⁰¹ This I learn to do if “all I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death.”¹⁰² But the pattern of his death is revealed in the word from the cross: “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.”¹⁰³



NOTES

1Matt. 28:19.

2II Cor. 4:5.

3II Cor. 4:6.

4John 13:34.

5Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. by J.R. Foster (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 214.

6Ibid. p. 214.

7Ronald Lawler, et al., eds., *The Teaching of Christ* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1976), pp. 142-147.

8The (tentative) ‘National Catechetical Director’; U.S. Catholic Conference, *Basic Teachings for Catholic Religious Education* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1975), section 8.

9Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, trans. by Elinor Castendy Briefs (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1954), p. 242.

10Lawler et als., eds., *The Teaching of Christ*, p. 143.

- 11Ibid., pp. 145-146.
- 12U.S. Catholic Conference, *Basic Teachings for Catholic Religious Education*. 13 Hebr. 4:12.
- 14Hans Urs von Balthazar, *Verbum Caro*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1960), p. 81.
- 15Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Devastated Vineyard*, trans. by John Crosby and Fred Teichert (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).
95. 16Henri de Lubac, *On the Death of Cardinal Danielou*, trans. by Anton Morgenroth, *Communio*, (Spring, 1975),
114. 17Alfred Delp, *The Prison Meditations of Father Alfred Delp*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), pp. 113-114.
- 18Luke 2:34.
- 19Hebr. 4:16.
- 20John 19:37.
- 21Vatican II, “Lumen Gentium”, section 8.
- 22John 14:6.
- 23I Tim. 2:5.
- 24Pius XII, “Haurietis Aquas”, (1950) section 24, quoting Leo XIII.
- 25Mark 12:30.
- 26Matt. 26:39; Phil. 2:8.
- 27Romano Guardini, *Der Herr*, (Wurzburg: Werkbund Verlag, 1959), p. 451. (The published English translation seemed unduly curtailed).
- 28Is. 55:9.
- 29Ps. 103:11.
- 30Adolf Heuser, *Die Erlösungslehre in der Katholischen Dogmatik von B.P. Zimmer bis M. Schmaus*, (Essen: Ludgerus Verlag Hubert Wingen K.G., 1963). This work describes forty seven (!) theologies.
- 31E.L. Peterman, “Redemption, (Theology of),” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967, XII, 145.
- 32Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), p. 132.
- 33François Mauriac, *Vipers’ Tangle*, trans. by Warren B. Wells (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Co., 1957), p.
84. 34Apoc. 3:20-22.
- 35Hebr. 12:3.
- 36I Cor. 2:8.
- 37*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. by John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1923), p. 57.
- 38Leon Bloy, *The Woman Who Was Poor*, trans. by F.J. Collins (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), p. 356.
- 39Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, section 75.
- 40Rom. 8:33-34.
- 41Hebr. 7:25.
- 42Rom. 14:7-8.
- 43Heinrich Schlier, *Über die Auferstehung Jesu Christi*, (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1970), pp. 54-55.
- 44Matt. 25:45.
- 45This text was included in a dossier given to Pope John XXIII by the French Jewish historian, Jules Isaac, who urged the Pope that the Council should do something about Christian anti-Semitism, which so often found an excuse in blaming all Jews for the crucifixion - John M. Oesterreicher, Introduction and Commentary, in: *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vorgrimler, ed., translated from *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1967), vol. II, p. 407.
- 46Rom. 4:25; 8:34; 1 Cor. 15:3; I Thess. 5:10; and esp. Is. 53:3-6.
- 47Rom. 5:8.
- 48II Tim. 2:13.
- 49Matt. 7:7.
- 50II Pet. 1:4.

51 Luke 5:20.

52 Prayer after Communion, 21st Sunday.

53 Georges Bernanos, *Diary of a Country Priest*, trans. by Pamela Morris (London: The Bodley Head, 1973), pp. 176-177.

54 Wisd. 2:10-20.

55 Matt. 28:18.

56 II Cor. 5:17.

57 Col. 1:15.

58 Romano Guardini writes: “Jesus Christ did not only bring word that the Father in heaven forgives, but he has carried out this forgiveness by his own destiny, by his own life and death. Man’s guilt before God had converged upon Jesus as a monstrous injustice. All the evil gnawing in men’s hearts awakened when confronted with him who was the sign that would be contradicted (Luke 2:34), and turned against him. Yet he did not evade the ordeal, but he saw in the injustice he confronted an expression of opposition against God. He sealed the forgiveness he was to bring from the Father by pardoning, and thereby transforming the injustice he suffered at the hands of men into expiation for the sins of men. ‘Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23:34).

“Here we reach the most profound level: God’s forgiveness came to us not as a ‘mere forgiveness’ but as an expiation. God did not simply obliterate sin, but he has actually restored justice, that is, right relationship. That fearful guilt, accumulated through the ages, he has in a gigantic effort overcome and removed by taking upon himself what ought to be the burden of those who are guilty. This is meant by Christian expiation.

“But redemption is not only something that happened long ago for our benefit now, but it constitutes the very paradigm of Christian existence. We continue to derive life from Christ’s saving act. But the very pattern of redemption as it was accomplished by Christ has become the form of our very existence as Christians and must become effective in our lives. We cannot exist in a redeemed state unless the spirit of redemption is alive in us. Redemption cannot be ours without our actively sharing Christ’s saving act. And this consists in love of our neighbor, a love that becomes forgiveness as soon as my neighbor stands to me in the same relation as I stand before God - as one who has injured, who has offended God.” Guardini, *Der Herr*, pp. 357-358. The equivalent passage is found in the English translation *The Lord*, p. 308, but the translation seemed somewhat inadequate.

59 P. Neuenzeit, “Sühne”. *Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*, ed. Heinrich Fries (Munich: Kosel Verlag, 1963), vol. II, p. 595.

60 II Pet. 1:4.

61 Matt. 28:19.

62 Phil. 2:8.

63 Acts 2:36.

64 I Tim. 2:5.

65 Vatican II, “Gaudium et Spes”, section 22.

66 II Cor. 4:5.

67 I Cor. 1:22-25.

68 II Tim. 2:13.

69 John 6:37-38.

70 John 16:33.

71 Matt. 26:36-46.

72 I John 4:8 and 16.

73 Romano Guardini, *Johannkische Botschaft*, (Wurzburg: Werkbund Verlag, 1962), p. 123.

74 John 13:34.

75 John 15:9 and 12; 17:21-23; Rom. 15:7.

76 I John 4:10; 19.

77 II Thess. 2:10.

78 comp. Gal. 4:19, “until Christ is formed in us.”

79 V. Warnach, “Liebe”, *Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. II, p. 57-59.

80 Council of Trent, Denzinger 805, “Rash presumption of Predestination to be Avoided.”

- 81I John 4:7.
82Guardini, *Johannische Botschaft*, p. 110.
83Matt. 22:37 and 39; John 13:34.
84I John 5:4.
85Romano Guardini, "Christlicher Realismus," *Unterscheidung des Christlichen* (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald Verlag, 1963), p. 366.
86Matt. 5:48 and 45.
87Phil. 2:8.
88I John 5:2-3.
89Matt. 25:42-43.
90Matt. 17:5.
91John 13:34; Eph. 5:1-2.
92Phil. 2:5.
93as described in I Cor. 13:4-6.
94Phil. 2:15.
95Luke 2:34; Matt. 10:16-39; John 15:18-20.
96Eph. 5:16.
97II Cor. 5:20.
98I Tim. 2:5.
99Matt. 5:48.
100Rev. 3:21.
101*Gaudium et Spes*, 37.
102Phil. 3:10.
103Luke 23:34.

