

God, by the disgrace of the cross thou hast restored their original grace to those whom thou didst not wish to punish with death.

This text is taken from an old Easter prayer prayed at good Friday in antiquity. It tries to fathom the mystery of the crucifixion. But can it? Are we not incapacitated to understand this wild catastrophe as it happened in stark, cruel brutal moonlight, since we remember it in the mild twilight of this well-oiled machinery of a complacent church service?

To celebrate the mystery of the cross seems to be made impossible by the very fact that it is a celebration. Any celebration repeats. And when we repeat an event ceremoniously, we already know the final outcome in advance. Thus, on Good-Friday, Easter already looms. Our prescience of the victorious rise cannot help taking the edge from the harshness of the crucifixion. How, then, can a tragic event be relived? On the one hand, its supertragic outcome is known, and on the other hand, it is of the essence of the event that its outcome impress us as uncertain, aye that it impress us as final and hopeless. For the time being, for tonight, we are asked to ignore the resurrection, and to admit that God is dead. By killing a man, we have murdered God himself. The antisemites shout Christkiller at the Jew. Christ is ambivalent, meaning God and Man in One. Let us shake us awake: What is meant is that in murdering man, we are murdering the living God. And the Crucifixion says: you cannot be a Christian unless you realize that thou, too, hast be a party to the assassination of the Spirit, time and again.

Good Friday, looses its power unless we realize that Easter is not guaranteed.

This, then, is the first drawback. How can we stand under the Cross without anticipating Easter or basking complacently in the sunshine of the Redemption? This becomes even more puzzling when we consider the second fact. Christians always have been in this situation. Passion week makes sense in retrospect only. All our faith is rooted in the foreknowledge of the outcome. The apostles' mission, the outpouring of the spirit at Pentecost, the triumphant rise of a worldwide Church, the resurrection, were known to all the people who have lived through Good Friday. It is true, there were the women and there was John and there were the soldiers present on the real Good Friday. But we would not improve our service if we tried to duplicate or relive their feelings at the foot of the Cross.

before The unreal or ceremonious and theatrical and spectacular should strike us with full force. We set out to overcome it. One thing is sure. Unless we overcome this danger, we shall not gain the entrance to the gates of heaven. The desperate and real risk of a life of mankind that ends in the killing of their Christ must

choke us. How then can we prevent the remembrance of this death from becoming a formality?

There are two ways open, one pointing to our own cross in the future. The solemnity of the Crucifixion may have to be retransformed as in the case of the Christian martyrs who in April 1945, were murdered by Hitler simply because they invoked the name of the Christ. The crucifixion was ahead of Peter and Paul when they preached the Cross. *It remains true for all of us that*

Let me choose today the opposite road. (The crucifixion comes to life because it is waiting for all of us. ~~As when we look forward to the~~ However,)

It also comes to life when we understand what the world would be like without the Cross. Taking the crucifixion away from the center of history, you and I cannot recognize our ultimate and highest and most glorious destination. But taking out of life the occurrence of Jesus' death, all human history as it has been going on hitherto, also would lose its meaning.

We have stated two negatives and one positive task. To share in the ceremonious celebration of Good Friday merely as the eve of a glorious Easter would be too shallow. To share the blind feelings of the bystanders on Golgotha would be without directing force. Positively, we ask why the Cross was needed for the salvation of human society.

When our boys are killed in Korea, like young Raynes or young van Fleet, their love to their country deeply stirs us, and may well move us to tears. We can never repay them. This we know well. In their manner, Hector died for Troy long before Christ. The women beneath the Cross wept, wailed and mourned as Andromache did over Hector. The Marys bestowed on Jesus the same loving compassion which is due to a soldier dying from his wounds. For this very reason, the generous sorrow of the bystanders cannot suffice for explaining the crucifixion. These good women prove their affection for Jesus, they do not prove Christ's achievement. Don't we know that unworthy men are loved. And thank God that this is so. Where would we be unless we received love undeservedly? None of us could survive the day on which we could not overdraw our account, our credit of patience, forbearing, good will of our neighbors. Banks may deplore this irrational accounting. But it holds true even for the people working in banks. This is the difference between the bank which is under the law, and a banker who is under the cross, between our certified account and the most uncertain and never balancing account we can give of our selves. Our account of love always is overdrawn. And Jesus did not wish to be an exception to this rule. The oil poured lavishly over his feet, was a free gift, a royal diadem crowning him unaccountably. As a free overflow Jesus received it. He would have killed the God in the woman's soul, if he had thought that she owed him this gift as her debt. And Christ is the only man who never killed God.

From the bystanders, we may learn how to love unaccountably. They do not account for the meaning of the Cross.

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The other negative statement we have to make before also helps to brush aside a misunderstanding of the Cross. Easter does not transform Good Friday into a means to an end. The clever people are tempted to construe all our actions in life as planned. They mistake purpose and destiny. My purposes never are my destination. We may reach our destination despite our silly purposes and despite our good intentions; but God's ways with us are not our ways because he does not know the devil's tricks of treating one part of life as means and another part of life as ends. To God all life is divine. None is a means. None is an end. ~~To God all life is divine.~~ As soon as the theologians calculate how the crucifixion automatically operates and produces Easter, then Jesus appears as a tremendous operator. He moves heaven and earth, and he invents a gadget for the redemption of mankind. In the eyes of such logicians, he went to the Cross to produce precisely the explosion which would force the wheels of salvation to turn.

If they were right, we would think of Jesus as an inventor and we should have to admire him as the Thomas Alva Edison of the electric bulb. People who say that they love Edison for his invention, are confusing their feelings and their values. Superior intelligence ~~awaits~~; planning succeeds; gadgets work and cleverness is rewarded by a huge material gain.

Jesus would be a most useful citizen if he had planned the resurrection while hanging on the Cross. Accordingly, his usefulness could be properly rewarded. We could look upon him as our useful servant. But Jesus could not be the Christ whose name we invoke in order to know who we are ourselves. Because we have electric light, we do not have to become Edisonians. By construing the redemption as a precision instrument as the mass conversions sometimes suggest, Jesus is treated as a secular man.

And as long as we do not realize the distinction between secular and cosmic man, between myself and the God who works through me, we are not able to relive Good Friday. We all in our purposes are divided by the division of labor. We are sected away by such specialty of our private ends and their means. This sectarianism or secularism is not found in the man who continued the creation of the human race at the growing point, of the tree of life. That is the reason why the Cross is not a contrivance which he has engineered and for which we pay royalties to him or to a greedy church. How shall we express this difference? We and he are One and the same Man, the Man God intended and intends to create. Therefore, in the hour of Crucifixion, he went through thy eye of the needle, through the Bottleneck of the hourglass, through which the whole race had to be taken. Because there are no individuals involved in the Crucifixion, but Man, Adam, ~~he~~ in the crucible, we are not dealing with an individual performance of the man called Jesus, but we are faced with God's Creation of the Man called Adam *for whom we are cells of health or of destruction, ourselves.*

If this is so, it must show in the character of the Day. For when God creates, the more abundant life, the fullness of time should be felt. Any moment of time, graced by his presence, differs from our working hours and our own preplanned schedules. Can this be said of Good Friday? I think ~~and~~ so.

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The secular man says: the present^{is} today. Yesterday, is the past. Tomorrow is the future. Modern man sneers at the past as obsolete. For is he not modern? And as to his vision of the future, he naively exhibits his arrogance by building optimistic 'Futuramas', or by writing pessimistic '1984'. In these visions of the past or of the future, there is a complete absence of modern man's faith in God. He imagines that the past was superstitious and backward and that is, without the divine spirit and presence, and the future, too, is naively made the footstool of modern man's own will and lusts. Good Friday challenges this ridiculous idea that man knows time by calling one part of it, past, one part of it present, and the third part future. In God's time, every moment is all three tenses. What is called faith, is the reverse of the secular tripartition of time in three separate blocks, back into God's fullness of time. In the agony of the Cross, Jesus lived the fullness of time. This needs meditation. But it can become plain.

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Our unfaith says: yesterday is yesterday; it is gone by. But is this your real yesterday? On this Maundy Thursday, our present Service was expected; and on Wednesday, our congregation was preparing the service of Maundy Thursday and rehearsed it. Time is not fulfilled unless my today is somebody else's tomorrow and, again somebody third's yesterday. A day lived merely as leisure, is wasted, unless it is bound up with what precedes and follows. Easter is expected through the whole year and, if realized, it also is remembered through the rest of the year; holidays are high beacons shedding light over the times before and after. Time lived as eternity is time which is allowed to be as much a promised future as a fulfilment of past prophecies as representative of the present Divine Government.

A 'yesterday' that nobody ever was anxiously longing for as for his tomorrow, a 'tomorrow' that never becomes an enacted, an incarnating presence, and a fugitive (today) which is dissipated and wasted or grabbed and exploited, are all cut flowers, without roots, without fruit. This might be called harlot time. Many people dream of the past as a golden age. They do not realize the agony of birth and travail which has ushered in the most primitive steps of life among people. The golden past is a secular dream because this past also had to be prophesied as the distant future, and its proponents had to go to their Cross. More people than ever are dreaming today of some nice Utopia. You may be pretty certain that these Utopias will not come about because their dreamers would feel insulted by the idea that their dream of an afterlife, of a beyond, of a millennium, ever should be defiled and vilified by becoming stark and dirty reality. The Jews now have waited for the Messiah for more than nineteen hundred years after the first Coming of the Messiah. This is the typical attitude of our own dreamers of a better worlds to come. They all attach a condition to their dream: it never must come true. The lovers of antiquity or of utopia, then, both, are in the danger that they cut up the fullness of time into a past that never is anything but the past, and the future that has to stay put as a future never to come true. These people are the respectable people who populate the mere present. They rate as the most intelligent and the most respectable people in town. They represent public opinion as of today. Against these good and rational people, Jesus has come.

He is not respectable. To be respectable is to be looked back upon as a sign post of the powers that be. On his Cross, Jesus at one and the same time, was the Second Adam; he also was the representative of God's Presence, and the Judge of the Last Judgment. It is impossible to give any preference or precedence, to any one of the three aspects of his Fulfilment, For since the first Adam was created, Jesus was in coming. The Five Thousand years between Adam and Jesus are wiped away on the Cross. Instead of Adam's misunderstanding of his lifetime, as owned by himself or given over to his own will, Jesus sets things right. Man, knowing of his death, must connect all the generations; all the times, from beginning to end. Time is root and stem and fruits, or man misses out on his role on our planet. Jesus also was the final man and able to judge all our not yet Christian traits. Many pre-christians live among us and at all times. Their hearts are uncircumcised, their words unchristened. To all these, Jesus comes as the Judge at the end of their World, their Eon, and he is their Omega and ends their Today as its real Tomorrow.

But Jesus who thus annihilates the distances between Creation's first and last days, also represents the High Water Mark, the Apex of Today, in its full splendor. Today is fulfilled when it presents God's power in the strength and potency for which we call him the Creator. When God created Man, he put into marriages the power of ~~Saving~~ future generations from being merely second rate or decadent. Marriage restores the full force of the first generation in its vitality and, let us say, originality. The first is the freshest and the best. And our children must not look fat and pale like spoiled brats; we wish them to be original, to be the geniuses of the dawn of a new era. On Good Friday, there is no marriage as between Adam and Eve, there is agony pure and simple. Why, then, can it be the representation of genius, of origins and fresh vitality? The old Church called the Cross the wedding day on which Jesus made our souls his spouse. The sweet wood of the Cross symbolized the marriage of Christ to his Church. The Crucifixion is the Wedding between the living God and his assassinating children. For God is not angry with his murderers who do not know what they are doing. When Noah leaves the Ark, God says, Man is wicked. But I shall no longer be tempted to extirpate him. I want the life of the sinner so that he may live. This is expressed by Good Friday, so that those who have slain God in Man, shall be restored to their original grace as Men in God.

This, then, would be the horrid state of the world without the Cross: Righteousness and goodness would be identified with eternal life. Sinners and the poor would be sneered at as second rate creatures. Humanity would consist of the respectable and the rabble, and would disintegrate more and more without any hope of ever ^{making up} the slack or uniting ever men of different station, race or creed. The divisions, the statistics, the frontiers, the jurisdictions would split and split and split because it would be a loss of face, inside any of these groupings, to reject its standards. Once that what is, is made respectable, it also is definite. Then the power of creation is deleted. Then, today ceases to be triple time, gracious time, containing tomorrow's promise as much as yesterday's powerful ~~within~~ consummation of yesterday's promise.

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Christ was not interested in religion, he was not interested in race, he was not interested in states, and he did not believe in statistics. He put us in transit because he came to bring us eternally spouting life, the fullness of time. So, he lived life's most adverse moment. The first Child of God who became ~~God's~~ Son, in transit, the last Jew, and the first Christian, the second Adam, he lived his day on the Cross as the seed of all future life, as the fulfilment of all previous life, and he lived this Good Friday as representative of our everyday humanity in the presence of friend and foe as we all should live; *for life is a public office. There is no privacy and we all live under the open sky.*

When the righteous had no future, and the sinners had no present, when perfections prevented further union and when sins produced decay, he started us on our road to eternal life in unity by revealing the perpetual secret of creation. It always is based on disestablishment; Lincoln was loathed by the respectable people of his day, Jackson was, F.D.R. was. The respectable people cannot go through the eye of the needle unless they strip themselves of respectability. Eternal life is not acquired by law and order. It is acquired by our high priest made the victim, our great king nailed to the Cross. Without him, we would have lost the key to progress, the Law of liberty, the secret or eternal life. When freely given up in time any old form sacrificed, begets new life. He who deplores degeneration, let him not moralize, let him not judge. Let him give up the safety of his own orderly existence; such act will invite new, vigorous life as it is a vigorous act itself. On the Cross, this vigor is made contagious as it is shown in the most abject condition, under the howling of the respectable mob and of the powers that be and in the spite of the very people to whom this vigor has to be imparted.

What then would be missing without the Cross? Our joy of ~~so-co-~~ creating, our Mirth of living on the first and the last and the central day of God's ~~with~~ life among us. *Eternity reigns when seed, flowers, fruit are made simultaneous. Thus Jesus the man lived divinely.* God, by the disgrace of the Cross thou hast restored their original grace to those whom thou didst not wish to punish with death.

Thou liftest ~~up~~ on Thy shoulders
The weight that makest me pine
the crushing weight of boulders -
My curse thou mak'st it Thine.
and for my curse thou givest
thy bliss into my heart;
thy mirth now in me liveth
by which God's Son thou art.