

Meditation: Love on the Cross and in Hell

LET US NOW LOOK AT MAN. He is built up in the form of a cross. Naturally this bodily form originated outwardly and historically, because man began to work about him with his hands and therefore had only his feet with which to stand upon the earth. The law of the material form was in him, but already directed upward. And so we look with reverence at the upright posture of man. In it is announced beforehand, as in a prophecy, that man is destined to raise the earthly sense-existence upward again into the spirit. The power of erection, which has brought man from the horizontal into the perpendicular, is the same divine power, which in the fullness of time, has reared up the Cross to lead upward again.

Here also we must press forward from pale thought to full-blooded experience in life. If we again go through our fundamental meditation: I am Love! deriving it from Christ as strongly as we are able, and then look back again at our own body, and especially at its skeleton, we gradually acquire a really concrete idea from it of the way in which Christ is fastened to the Cross within us also. The German word *Kreuz* (Cross) for our backbone acquires new meaning. In us Christ is crucified—this is a feeling which actually expresses a very deep reality. The higher ego, in which Christ lives, bears the Cross in us as long as we live upon earth.

Certainly each of us has “his cross to bear” also in the sense that he has a hard fate to undergo. But

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“Every stronger union with Christ makes one freer in respect of one’s bodily existence, which lives in the Cross. Then Christ in one is less tied to the Cross, but freely bears the Cross.”

that is not yet the Cross of Christ. Again, every man has to “take up his cross” if he will follow Christ, in the sense that through his standing up for Christ, for the Christ-conscience, for the Christ-ego within him, he brings sorrows upon himself, which he might have been spared. This comes nearer to the Cross of Christ. But we are “Crucified with Christ” in the full sense, when Christ lives so strongly in us that, every morning when we return into our body and into our earthly life, a new resolve is required to take our cross upon us, to let ourselves be fastened with Christ to the Cross. In this capital resolve are included all things that our fate may bring us. It is all-inclusive.

Our personal fate becomes of no importance.

One cannot believe with what vividness the feeling of being crucified with Christ can fill a man. Down to the very details, one will experience the fact that every sacrifice of thoughts and feelings, which are connected with the sense existence, binds one more strongly to the Cross in one's being, makes one live more strongly in one's cross-form; yes, binds Christ in one ever and again to the Cross. But one will also experience that every stronger union with Christ makes one freer in respect of one's bodily existence, which lives in the Cross. Then Christ in one is less tied to the Cross, but freely bears the Cross. In such experiences one really becomes one with Christ and bears the Cross after Him. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:3)

Yes, the Cross will then become a living sign for us in all our daily experiences. In earlier times men made the sign of the Cross over that which they would dedicate to Christ. That has its own deep meaning and must be raised from being childish to being spiritual. We once discussed how every right practice of a profession, every true conversation, every earnest prayer is a passing through death to resurrection. But one can also experience how one's dying into one's profession can be a real stretching oneself out upon it, a permitting oneself to be fastened to it, in all its breadth and length, and therefore really being crucified. One's conduct of one's business becomes the better, the more one lays the Cross of Christ upon it, and gives oneself to the Cross.

This resolve to allow ourselves to be fastened to the Cross must continually be taken in small things and in great. Thus life begins to take on the imprint of Christ. We may be able to do this only feebly as a beginner. But we learn also that a higher world has patience with us and helps us forward. What is necessary is to be ever saying "yes" to Christ's royal sign upon earth—the Cross. This will to allow oneself to be stretched out and fastened to it must be ever renewed. *That is love.* The Father of the Worlds Himself is the Cross. One sees Him sometimes upon old crucifixes behind Christ. Out of the most high will of the Father of the Worlds

this fact can reach into our daily lives. The more we live in this way, the better we understand Christianity. All that preceded this is but preparation. One can well understand that in this thought a greater Christianity is announced. In two directions Christianity becomes greater. The Cross of Christ is seen on the one hand in all its depths, and on the other it is carried into every single action. In this lies the germ of a new dogmatic as well as of a new ethic.

Buddha wished to overcome in his disciples the clinging to the earthly; in Christ there follows the free fastening of oneself to the Cross of the world. We beg the reader not only to read these thoughts through once, but to let them come slowly to life within him. Ought one to leave them unspoken because they are still strange to many people today? The deepest wisdom speaks from the Cross. Therefore it is the most powerful force in everyday life. It is a miracle which has given us the Cross. Christ has made the divine sign of the material world the symbol of love. Everywhere and always it is our duty to raise the Cross so that it points upward, to bring the earthly things of sense into the upward direction towards the heavenly. The Cross has magical power, as was dimly felt in ancient times. In it lives the will to the redemption of the world. "In this sign thou shalt conquer!"

A man will also learn to treat his body quite differently when he carries it as a cross. He may then feel like a crusader on whose back is the sign of the Cross. The medieval crusaders were like the pictorial representation of a dim idea of what Christian men are. And so we may carry out the meditation upon the Cross in the following way. We place before ourselves Christ on the Cross, in entire historical accuracy as far as we can bear it. Then we let this picture grow spiritually greater, until it becomes the picture of the ultimate secret of the world, until we recognize that it is the revelation of the Father of the Worlds Himself, upon Whom our whole being depends. Then we let this picture impress itself upon us until we become it ourselves. We say "yes" to the fate which crucifies us with Christ, and make it our own will, our own act. We feel that this is the spirit of Christ's own love, which we must now carry into everything. Had we

only the one direction, the direction outward into the breadths of the world, we should lose ourselves through the world, as the *West* so often does.

Had we only the other direction, the direction upwards to the heights, we should lose the world itself, as the *East* has so often done. It is just in the two directions of the Cross that we acknowledge the *ego in love*, that pours itself forth as widely as it raises itself, and raises itself as much as it pours itself forth. With all our strength we must spread out the ego in these two directions, and at the same time fill it with love. These two directions live also in the saying in which Christ sums up the Law and the Prophets: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself.” The ego feels itself to be a radiant cross, that from its safe center strives away in two directions. Into that has matter changed itself. Many, to whom at first not all those cosmic thoughts mentioned above are certain truths, can carry out such meditations. If, at the close of such a meditation, we cross ourselves outwardly also, we shall see that this action can bring us into full living fellowship with Christ.

Again the meditation upon the Cross is essentially strengthened, if we resolve to add to it the meditations which were known in the Middle Ages by the names “Mystic Death” and “Descent into Hell.” Concerning these, Rudolf Steiner says in his Lectures upon St. John’s Gospel: “Through the feelings which the pupil was made to experience at this stage, he experienced something which represented itself to him, as if in one moment a black curtain placed itself before all that was visible physically and as if everything disappeared. This moment is important also for another thing, which one must have experienced if one wishes to press forward really to Christian initiation in the true



Engraving, from *Illustrations for Dante's Inferno*, Gustave Doré (1833-1883)

“Be none of you outrageous”—*Canto XXI, line 70*

The traditional “descent into hell” correlates with the encounter of the Guardian on the Threshold by the candidate for initiation. When one experiences all the evil which exists in the depths of his soul and resolves to redeem it, “then it is as if the black curtain were rent asunder—and one looks into the spiritual world.”

sense of the word. One finds then that one can dive to the very bottom of evil, pain, misery and sorrow. And one can taste to the full all the evil which exists in the depths of man’s soul, when one descends into hell. That is the ‘Descent into Hell.’ If a man has experienced that, then it is as if the black curtain were rent asunder—and one looks into the spiritual world.”

Here the medieval experience is historically described. Only a few will be able to have it in this form today. But it is not our task...to lead men into this experience in the way in which they once could enter into it. That which was then reached by the way of the feelings, we must win again for ourselves out of our consciousness. But a “Descent into Hell” belongs to the higher experience of the soul, to the higher training of the human ego for all time. We already find such Descents into Hell in the pre-Christian mysteries. In the tales of Heracles or of Odysseus, which actually represent inward experiences of initiation in a popular form, we find a “descent into the underworld.” It is especially instructive to follow the transformation of

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this primal experience of humanity in the new age. When Luther sings:

And were the world all devils o'er
And watching to devour us,
a kind of Descent into Hell glimmers out, in the shape of an experience in our consciousness.

Carlyle tells of something similar about himself, under the name of Professor Teufelsdröck: “‘What art thou afraid of? Wherefore, like a coward, dost thou forever pip and whimper and go cowering and trembling? Despicable biped! What is the sum-total of the worst that lies before thee? Death? Well death: and say the pangs of Tophet too, and all that the Devil and Man may, will, or can do against thee! Hast thou not a heart; canst thou not suffer, whatsoever it be and, as a Child of Freedom, though outcast, trample Tophet itself under thy feet, while it consumes thee? Let it come then; I will meet it and defy it!’ And as I so thought, there rushed like a stream of fire over my whole soul and I shook base Fear away from me for ever. I was strong, of unknown strength, a spirit, almost a god. Ever from that time, the temper of my misery was changed, not Fear or whining sorrow was it, but Indignation and grim, fire-eyed Defiance. Thus had the Everlasting No pealed authoritatively through all the recesses of my being, of my ME, and then it was that my whole ME stood up in native, God-created majesty and with emphasis recorded its Protest. Such a Protest, the most important transaction in Life, may that same Indignation and Defiance in a psychological point of view, be fitly called. The Everlasting No had said ‘Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine!’ (the devil’s); to which my whole ME now made answer: ‘I am not thine, but Free and forever hate thee!’ It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New-birth or Baphometric Fire-baptism: perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a Man.” (*Sartor Resartus* Bk. II, Ch. VII, end) Such accounts are evidences of how certain inward experiences of the soul return of inner necessity and how they are transformed. Many similar examples could be found.

But is not “Christ’s Descent into Hell” a legendary picture, which has nothing to do with the Gospels? We need not join battle with such repre-

sentations and we bring against them only Christ’s saying: “Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.” (John xiv, 30.) Out of such a fundamental frame of mind has Christ on the Cross prayed: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Such a frame of mind is sufficient foundation for our meditation. It is of the greatest importance, if we look closely at it, that behind the evil in the world, there are powerful spiritual forces which have taken up arms against the goal of the earth, which is Christ. In our times it is often as if we must come up against this fact violently. Paul also experienced that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph.6:12) Such a point of view makes us lenient towards men. We understand that they are agents in the service of powers whom they themselves do not recognize. We separate them from that which works in them. And we acquire the right will to redeem, the wish to “save,” of which the Bible speaks so often.

And as this consideration gives us the real helper’s frame of mind towards men, it also brings us fully into the seriousness of the world’s situation. There are really, as we see them represented in pictures of the Catalaunian battle, according to old visions, spiritual armies above us, fighting for the earth. Many deviltries which happen would not be understood by us if we did not know that here more than human intelligence, and more than human will is working through men. To win the victory, our own strength could never be enough. But when the victory is won by Christ also, as we can indeed inwardly feel, then we wage the fight with all our strength, “He will keep the field.” To fight with Christ against hell means to stand on the alert in the fight for the world. But then one must see hell. The earth is a stage of a terrible struggle between light and darkness.

Here Durer’s picture can be a help—“The Christian Knight who rides on between Death and the Devil.” A better help is Rudolf Steiner’s statue of Christ, where, under the benignant, upraised left hand of Christ, Lucifer, the self-seeking power,

dashes himself down into the depths, and where, under the spiritually powerful right hand, which is being uplifted, Ahriman, the earthly, sensual power sinks into the abyss. Faust saw Mephistopheles and sought to make him subservient. What we need is something still greater. We redeem the evil powers themselves when we, in the service of the world, prove ourselves unconquerable by them. If we wish to seek for an inner exercise to this end, it may be connected with the Cross upon Golgotha. The sun ceases to shine: it is night. Nothing but night surrounds the Cross; and this night is not only an outward night; supremely powerful forces surround the Cross. But the Cross stands in light, still and strong. As a mighty sign of God it towers into the darkness. The upright Cross points straight up to the heights. Invincibly, there is revealed in it the power which opposes to all the might of the downward-drawing forces the power that draws upwards. He who holds strongly in this world to this direction, overcomes Ahriman. The cross-beam of the Cross points into the widths of space. It stretches itself fearlessly into the darkness. In it is announced the power which opposes to all the forces which strive away from the earth—the power of blessing. He who bears this direction within himself overcomes Lucifer. We see Christ shining upon the Cross. He is the new light of the sun which vanquishes all darkness. If our own spirit cannot penetrate all the darkness around us, yet our ego in Christ is stronger than it. We make the vow—let come what may: let innumerable hosts of the forces of the adversary come against me, and seek to destroy me; I unite my ego to Christ, Who shines upon the Cross. In Him I am conqueror. An unassailable peace from God fills the soul in the face of all that threatens us.

So upon a higher, super-personal, cosmic level we again acquire that which we acquired in the meditation upon the scourging—peace. And we have acquired again in the meditation upon the Cross on a higher super-personal, cosmic level what the meditation upon the Washing of the Feet gave us: Love becomes now great as the world and peace deep as the world. A higher greatness is not possible. After this experience follows the resurrection. It brings upon a higher, superpersonal,



Watercolor, James J. Tissot (1836-1902), Brooklyn Museum

"It Is Finished"

Exalted from the spiritual world by Old Testament prophets who foretold His coming, Christ dies to the body of Jesus to be born in the Earth and in each human who seeks Him.

cosmic level the same as the meditation upon the Crowning with Thorns: the holiness which is spread out over the world. When we unite the resolve to love with the meditation on the Cross, and the victorious power of peace with the meditation on the Descent into Hell; when we see the Cross like a sign from Heaven, which God Himself plants in the darkness of earth; when, in this sense we lay hold of our task upon earth anew and freely, we can crown this two-fold meditation with the words of the Act of Consecration of Man:

For on the Cross will the body bear the new confession.

And from the Cross in the blood will flow the new faith.

Our confession of Christ is the strength which directs our life upwards. Our faith in Christ points

us to the world again. The disciple of Christ is just as much raised above the world as he is devoted to it in sacrifice. The Cross is the sign of Christ, as the wheel is the sign of Buddha. The wheel stands for the doctrine of the self-redemption of man. The Cross speaks of self-sacrifice for the redemption of the world.

Finally, our meditation will pass over into a communion. This may happen in every meditation, but here with especial force. The body in which Christ lived was in itself already the uprising of the earth towards Heaven. In Him lived and worked all the forces which draw the sense-being upwards. When we unite ourselves to this upward-directing power of Christ, those powers enter our body which make it like to Christ. We receive from the Christ-forces a new body, which itself is in a comprehensive way “the new confession” and the victory over Ahriman. And when, in this new body, we feel the stream of love, the power of sacrifice which pours itself abroad, then we become *one blood* with Christ. And this is, in the ultimate divine sense, “the new faith” and the victory over Lucifer.

One can actually feel oneself as a cross shining in the darkness, and all the powers of God united in one. Only when Christ is in us can that truly happen. He holds us, as He Himself is held in old pictures and on old crucifixes by the Father, to the Cross. A mighty strength proceeds from such a meditation. I

It is not that ultimately we “believe in the Cross,” but that we become the Cross. In its earthly existence our life can bear no other character. With full consciousness we place ourselves in the world as a cross upon which Christ shines and conquers. He who has been with Christ upon the Cross—and this which we seek to arouse by meditation may also happen without clear consciousness of it—can hope to rise again with Him. “Follow me I!” said Christ, and by that He did not mean the “life of poverty” nor chiefly the “going into all the world,” but just the Cross. Behind the Cross, behind it alone, waits the resurrection.

In the words of a poet we can let what we have discussed ring out, and penetrate all our thoughts with strong feeling. Christian Morgenstern says

GETHSEMANE

In golden youth when seems the earth,
A summer-land of singing mirth,
When souls are glad and hearts are light,
And not a shadow lurks in sight,
We do not know it, but there lies,
Somewhere veiled under evening skies,
A garden which we all must see—
The Garden of Gethsemane.

With joyous steps we go our ways,
Love lends a halo to our days;
Light sorrows sail like clouds afar,
We laugh and say how glad we are.
We hurry on; and hurrying, go
Close to the borderland of woe,
That waits for you, and waits for me—
Forever waits Gethsemane.

Down shadowy lanes, across strange streams,
Bridged over by our broken dreams;
Behind the misty caps of years,
Beyond the great salt fount of tears,
The garden lies. Strive as you may,
You cannot miss it in your way.
All paths that have been, or shall be,
Pass somewhere through Gethsemane.

All those who journey, soon or late,
Must pass within the garden's gate;
Must kneel alone in darkness there,
And battle with some fierce despair.
God pity those who cannot say,
“Not mine, but thine,” who only pray,
“Let this cup pass,” and cannot see
The purpose in Gethsemane

—Ella Wheeler Wilcox

*The deepest secrets of the human form I've seen
I know this world and that on which 'tis based,
I know that love, yea, love is what they mean,
And that to love I here on earth am placed.
I stretch my arms out wide as He has done of
old,
I would that I, like Him, might all the world
enfold. (Continued)* □