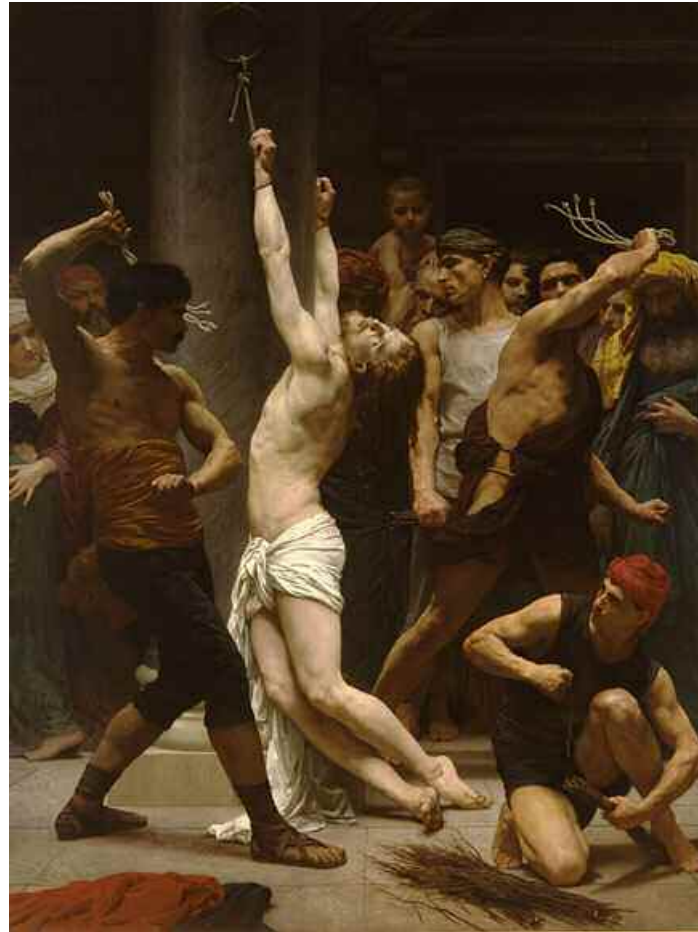


Meditation: Peace and Holiness Through Christ

THE FIRST THING which we have had to discuss is the divine fundamental frame of mind itself, which Christ brought to earth. For only with Christ is it worth while to live upon earth. With Christ we willingly return every day to earth, however little it pleases us to do so. In the Act of Christ, the highest will of the divine Father of the worlds, which lies at the root of all earthly happenings, is mirrored before us. It was a divine necessity that the Father of the worlds should at some time bring a world into being in which He could express His divine will and power, as He has done in the earth; His most loving aid, even from the lowest depths.

But he who wishes to live upon the earth, must take upon himself the fate of the earth; and so we come to the second stage of inward union with Christ. The first object upon which our gaze fell was man, and the fundamental feeling towards man was the first to be awakened. For earth is there for man. But the second thing is to gaze upon the world, which surrounds men. Here we enter the history of the earth. The word which must lead us into this world is the word *peace*. As love to men had led and leads us, so peace enfolds us in the world.

But Christian peace is just as perverted as Christian love, and just as much in need of cleansing. The manner in which the words “love” and “peace” are alive for the most part today in



Oil on canvas. William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1825-1905

The Flagellation of Our Lord Jesus Christ

“The life of Christ was a tying to a pillar of martyrdom and almost everything that came from men was a scourging.”

Christianity, has repelled men like Nietzsche. What, on the contrary, real peace is in the sense of Christ can best be learned from the picture of the Scourging. It is not a medieval peace of the cloister, which withdraws from the world, but just a standing in the midst of the vexations of the world. It is not a Protestant peace of the soul, which lives only in the forgiveness of one’s own sin, but an acceptance of the fate of the world in the strength which comes from above.

Looking still further out into human history, we see that the heroic indifference of the Stoic, and the

This is the eighth in a series of articles taken from Friedrich Rittelmeyer’s Meditation, Guidance of the Inner Life, published by Floris Books, Edinburgh. Reprinted with permission.

spiritually strong absence of desire in the Buddhist, are far behind the picture of heroic Christianity shown in the Scourging.

Here again we think of the Scourging as a figure which sums up all that ever happened to Christ. It is overwhelming to represent to oneself Christ at the pillar of martyrdom, the holy and divine one against whom rough hands directed the blows which lacerated His flesh. Some will doubt whether their “nerves” are trained to stand a serious meditation upon this picture. And yet we enter for the first time into the actual fate of what is divine in the world when this picture becomes alive in us. It is never otherwise with the divine. He who is not willing for this may look after small joys, but not the divine in the world.

Conversely, the truly divine in the world is proved to be so by its making men strong and courageous to share this fate. It is good to call up this picture of Christ again and again clearly before one. For, as Goethe has said, one can best help oneself in the face of the many renunciations which life demands by “resigning oneself once and for all”; and it will be found that, after such a meditation upon Christ, one returns back into ordinary life much stronger and more courageous. One knows what lies before one, one’s resolve has been strengthened and one is then surprised to meet so much good in the world. A new meaning of “redemption through Christ” dawns upon us. At the present day one thinks, if one thinks at all of these words, of the act of death once performed by Christ at Golgotha. But from the individual details also of Christ’s life redemption continually goes forth. He who has really carried out the meditation on the scourging of Christ is “redeemed from all querulous complaining, from all illusions about life, from all false hopes and wishes.” One notices for the first time that one has carried those about with one unconsciously. One has a completely different attitude to life;

When Godlike patience occurs only in the cloister, and there refreshes itself with the “divine life,” it has not reached Christ’s heights. It must stand against the frightful enmity of the world.

one’s attitude now is that, as helper of the divine in the world, one can endure life and master it. Christ has taken our sorrows upon Himself; this old point of view acquires a new meaning. There actually proceeds from the picture of Christ a power by which the sorrows which lie before us, as sorrows, are taken away, and His joys are given us in return. Such a concrete experience of “redemption” through Christ, as we here show it in connection with one point only, is weightier and leads us further than if one carried the old church teaching in one’s head and “believed” in it, as one speaks of “believing” to-day, in the full sense which has no longer much to do with the Biblical meaning.

But from the Scourging one ought to look out at the whole life of Christ. He who, after a meditation upon the Scourging, reads the farewell talk in John’s Gospel, will discover that every word interpolated by the disciples into this revelation of Christ is like a blow from a whip. Not merely a pin-prick—a real stroke of a scourge. Then

let him read back in John’s Gospel how “the Jews”—one must not here think of the Jews by race—receive every word, every act of Christ, and it will dawn upon us that the life of Christ was a tying to a pillar of martyrdom, and everything, almost everything, that came from men was a scourging. One does not notice this only because Christ, for example in His farewell talk, bears it all so greatly that He transforms it into good.

And so, after reading Christ’s farewell talk (John 13-16), when one has especially observed the inward attitude of Christ to the interruptions of His disciples, one may add this inward attitude of Christ, this unassailable greatness of holiness, vividly to our picture of the Scourging. And through this it will begin to dawn upon us gradually that there may be a “becoming worthy of sharing the sufferings of Christ.” For there is nothing which can better help humanity forward and redeem it than that one should bring against the evil attacks

of men this high and noble bearing of Christ, this purity of one who belongs to God.

The old mystics spoke of “the patience of God.” But when this Godlike patience occurs only in the cloister, and there refreshes itself with the “divine life,” it has not reached Christ’s heights. It must stand against the frightful enmity of the world, must be an active “uniting” of oneself with the world’s evolving “which can happen through Christ,” must be a free taking upon oneself of the fate of the divine in human history. One must feel that this patience, this peace, is the very last quality to be gained by the struggle of a strong and fiery man. As one has found that the Greeks valued “Sophrosyne,” quietness of mind, because it was hard for them to attain it, so is Christian peace great, when it is the victory of a strong will *over itself*.

Men have at first spoiled everything which they have taken over from Christ. Thus there was a sentimental sympathy with Christ, an outward imitation of His sufferings, well-meant indeed, but often vain and self-seeking, and even at the best, lacking in ultimate greatness. There was also a slavish putting-up with anything in the name of Christ, and other similar things. The meditation of the Scourging can set us free from all these, if we meditate not only in our feelings, but with our ego awakened to the choice before it. We do not imitate the hair-shirts and self-scourging of the monks of old. But we see Christ, bound of his own free will to the world-tree, smitten by men, opposing to all tortures no outward resistance but only His own divine greatness. Then we think ourselves into His position, take His fate of our own free will upon us, and vow that in this spirit we shall stand fast against whatever may come.

In the lectures on St. John’s Gospel mentioned above, Rudolf Steiner describes how, in connection with their devoted contemplation of Christ’s scourging, the medieval mystics really had the feeling that they were receiving blows. We have heard of similar experiences at the present time more in the form of dreams which occurred after contemplation of the scourging. Here, again, is an occurrence which need in no way be suggestion. If a man fills himself with Christ, if he raises himself above his narrow personal life and unfolds himself

in love to the world, then his finer invisible man actually breaks through the sheath in which it has lived until now. That which has been called the etheric man—not yet the actual spirit-man, but already the more delicate organ of the spirit-man—begins to take part in a greater life. The first thing which then meets man is that he feels the opposition which comes from all sides, the opposing powers which will not endure the divine. This is the more severely felt just because the man is then living in the feeling that he wishes only to bring good, and in the unconscious supposition that other men must as a matter of course recognize that which to himself is great and divine.

For this reason, men who, filled with a great conviction, wished to help their fellow-men, had first to fight against a heightened sensitiveness, when humanity answered them so entirely differently from what they believed they had a right to expect. The experience which we know as “pin-pricks” becomes our experience from the world. These feelings may set in when a man has conscious experience of enmity, and also when he simply feels himself to be a disciple of Christ in the world. They may then be more unconscious or they may be too conscious. They live in a higher spirituality, which can be distinguished well from everyday consciousness.

Thus with a free and loving walking in the world, a scourging is necessarily united. It is verily a sign that a man is growing out of himself upward into a higher life. For this reason Christ appears in Revelation as clothed in the flowing mantle held in by the golden girdle. This picture reveals itself as the opposite picture to the scourging. Only he who knows the sensitiveness described above, which feels itself so helpless in the world, can, by binding his fate, his will, his ego to Christ, Who for His divine ministry was scourged at the world-tree, find security, strength and rest in the face of experiences which lie before him in some form or another. We hold it to be important that we should learn the “peace” of Christ from *the Christ* Whom we see standing at the stake of torture. Again one may drink in this peace at the end of the meditation, like a noble life-sap from a higher world, when we have allowed the

inner picture to lapse. Thus we are ensured against a Luciferic egotistical peace. Thus we can find beforehand “peace” in the right sense, in the face of the fate which we take upon ourselves when we wish to stand for what is divine in the world; in the face of little experiences of everyday life as well as in the face of a final shattering of our outward being.

In these studies we are seeking from Christ himself a purification of Christian qualities, or rather of fundamental Christian frames of mind. We have seen that Christian love is something different from that which men usually understand it to be; so is Christian peace. Now we turn to Christian holiness.

In the Middle Ages...men experienced the crowning with thorns in this way, that this will rose within them: “I will stand upright against all the world’s derision and mocking. I will stand for the holy thing which is entrusted to me. Even if I remain all alone, I will stand undismayed for what is most sacred to me.” The true Christian holiness is something more individual and more active than it seems to the Catholics to be when they think of “sinlessness,” and something deeper and more inward than the Protestants think when they talk of “doing their duty.”

Every man has his own higher ego, which must first be brought down to earth. In this higher ego, divine revelations slumber which it already bears within itself, and over it hover divine revelations which it can still receive. With every human ego an especial divine thought enters into the world, an especial divine charge, an especial divine gift. This is the true holiness in the sense of Christ: to keep faith with this higher ego, to let this higher ego enter as a sacrifice into the world’s evolving; not to imagine for oneself any special mission, but to find out the charge which is given to us as a divine thought in our ego; not to thrust oneself upon men, but to give oneself to humanity.

It is clear that it is not here a question of fulfilling commandments, nor merely of avoiding sins. More inward and more personal, but also more



Die Bibel in Bildern, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1789-1853)

Jesus Crowned with Thorns

Man must weave for himself a crown out of the thorns of the earth. Earth’s pain must become wisdom and suffering will crown man’s humanity.

heroic and more aggressive, is this new holiness. It is the holiness which we see in Christ. He has not spoken of it in words, but has given it by deeds. For Him there was only one single commandment: The Son of Man must not do anything of himself, but fulfill the charge which the Father has given him.

Here we plunge into depths in which holiness and wisdom are one and the same. For not outward knowledge, but divine wisdom is in our higher ego. The thought of God which we ought to be is, rightly understood, our ultimate wisdom. That deed in our life into which this thought of God will change itself is our true holiness.

So that we may lose all pride arising from this mission from God, we need only gaze at Christ as He stands there in the crown of thorns. Our glance sees not only the horrible brutality, but reads also the sublime word of God which is there spoken to us. “Thorns and thistles shall it bear unto thee” (the earthly ground) said the history of the beginning of the world in a prophetic saying. Thorns are the badge of the earth with its sorrow and struggle. But out of the burning thorn-bush, out of this earthly field which is full of struggle and sorrow, Jehovah

reveals Himself to men. And in the crowning with thorns, Christ takes the thorns from the earth and winds them into a new royal crown. Earthly wisdom is born out of earthly sorrow. To know means to suffer. *This* crown is the picture of human kingship.

In ancient times there was seen around the head of wise men the glory of heaven, whose rays went up to the stars. Out of this in earliest time came the king's crown. This crown man has lost. He must weave for himself the new crown out of the thorns of the earth. Earth's pain must become wisdom. Every single pain has found its redemption, when

the thorns of the earth without gaining wisdom from them. Here also man may come to drinking this wisdom with his ego like a draught from the Grail. But it is well that, while doing so, he should never lose from his soul the picture of the thorn-crowned Christ.

...[I]t is told that the men of the Middle Ages, when they experienced the crowning with thorns, really felt sharp, pricking pains in the head. This is connected with the fact that in ancient times man saw the revelation of the circle of the stars before him as if in a ring round his head. The miter still indicates that. For the word "Mithras" in the

Threefold is the world in which man stands. He lives among his fellow men: for this world Christ gives him love. He lives with his fate: for this world Christ gives him peace. He lives before God: for this world Christ gives him holiness. Behold the man!

it has become wisdom.

"I will stand before the world for that holy thing which is given to me! I will expect nothing in return but thorns, but out of the thorns I will make a crown! I will change all my earthly sorrow into humanly-divine wisdom!" Not the appearance of holiness is sought by our new holiness, but the crown of thorns. We stamp into our souls the picture of Christ as He stands there, so that our ego may become like Him. And so the highest fidelity to God unites itself with the greatest clarity of mind concerning the earth.

One will find the meditation upon the crowning of thorns to be especially beneficial because our age has in an especial way entered the earth and sought knowledge in it. Here is *the* human wisdom of the earth. We do not cherish a conception of life which sees in the earth only sorrows, and longs for heaven, but an attitude to life which changes the sorrows of earth into a crown. Nor do we cherish a view of the world which wishes to have a wisdom from heaven above, and despises the earth, but a will for the world which seeks and gathers divine wisdom in the sorrow of earth. Such a Christianity stands right between East and West, between the East, which seeks wisdom while it avoids the thorns of earth, and the West, which experiences

Persian religion, from which the "miter" comes, means a "band" and is connected by learned men today with the light of the Zodiac. Now when man today feels the pains round his head, especially in the middle of his forehead, but not in it alone, also at the back of the head as if a ring were about to burst, then it may be a sign that he is again on the point of breaking through to divine wisdom. For this reason Christ appears in Revelation no longer with the crown of thorns, but with the light of the sun round his head. As in the feet a man's will can unite itself with the forces of the earth, as in the "middle of man" his life of feeling unites itself with the meaning of the cosmos, so in his head his spirit weds itself to wisdom, which has its spiritual home in the kingdom of the heaven of the fixed stars.

"Behold the man!" says Pilate as he leads Christ out in his crown of thorns before the people. And our doubt, whether we can really find this saying significant, passes away when we learn that in the Persian mysteries the initiation proceeded in this way, that the man had to pass through a scourging, then received a royal mantle with a scepter, but also with an acanthus crown. It is the same word acanthus [from Greek *acantha*, thorn] as in the Bible account. The crown of thorns had a thorn in

the middle of the forehead to indicate that the wisdom from sorrow must be conquered in the earthly ego which lives there. Previous to this point in the ceremony of initiation, as always in the mysteries, exercises in self-denial may have taken place, such as we see in the Washing of the Feet.

There is even a direct connection between these mysteries and the scene in Jerusalem. For in the Roman armies the service of Mithras was the favorite religion. When the soldiers heard that Christ was a king without a country, this scene was arranged out of mingled memories of the mysteries and scornful jests. The crown of thorns speaks only too clearly. Certainly the Persian Sakaeen festival was then already well on its way to degeneration into the Roman Saturnalia.

Also the expression of Pilate, "Behold the man!" may have been a saying from the mysteries, that was really spoken on such an occasion when the initiation had come to an end. Pilate may have known this and have used the saying in a cynical sense. If this is so, then the saying of Pilate would become more explicable. More explicable also would be the wrath of the Jews which broke out just at this moment when, according to John's Gospel, they for the first time raised the cry: "crucify him!" for they either guessed or knew something about the background of the mysteries. At that time hardly any occurrence was to be thought of except in relation to such a background and the Jews naturally repudiated this entirely. In this sense also are to be understood the mystical experiences which, in the medieval cloisters, as a necessity for life, were gone through in connection with the individual details of the story of the Passion.

We would, therefore, have this process of evolution before us. In the old mysteries, whose remains are still preserved for us in the Persian Sakaeen feast, man was led out of Primal wisdom and inward knowledge of the laws of the cosmos to a consecration, but without Christ. But they had a premonition of true humanity. In the Middle Ages they experienced Christ in deep sympathy, but without knowledge of the secrets of the cosmos. Yet in their practice they penetrated to these secrets. Here in our exercises both are united. If the



Oil on canvas. Gustave Doré. Private Collection

Behold, the Man (Ecce Homo)

The irony of Pilate's presentation of (Doré's noble) Christ Jesus to the angry, jeering mob is that He is in truth the Man, generic Man, Him in whom Humanity is membered, having made the world and mankind—and they knew Him not.

exercises are performed, not only in a sympathy with Christ which comes from the feelings, but with reference to their meaning for the world, then they can today take place upon a higher level of life.

....[W]hat we actually see before us in the three pictures we have described is the evolving of a higher humanity. One can freely say, in the face of that which we have been considering, that the real qualities of men were not in existence before Christ, or only as in the mysteries, in a picture. Threefold is the world in which man stands. He lives among his fellow men: for this world Christ gives him love. He lives with his fate: for this world Christ gives him peace. He lives before God: for this world Christ gives him holiness. Behold the man!

It is not surprising now if in some readers the feeling arises that, simply because of all these meditations, he no longer knows upon what he

ought to meditate. Let him think that we are here offering him aids for his whole life. If a reader at first stops short at the exercises for the ego, and reads everything else at first as a help to understanding the Bible, it is well. Even in this case the further amplification can be useful to him just exactly for these ego-meditations. He will see the direction in which it proceeds and find some detail important for his basic meditations, for example, the more exact description of love and peace.

Finally, we shall give suggestions as to how the whole organism of the twenty-one exercises can best be brought into corporate life. We should advise first holding fast the two fundamental meditations; from them proceeding further to attempt the ego-meditations, and from time to time the thorough reading of the exercises in the training of the will, which here begin: not merely reading them all through at once, as one reads a newspaper, but remaining at the pictures and allowing them to act upon one. One will thus be able also to come to a better method of reading the Bible.

Whether one simply reads them now and again meditatively, or whether one is able, without neglecting the earlier meditations, to enter more strongly into the meditation of these pictures also; it is always advisable that one should actually feel, not so much the sorrows, as the *full humanity* of these pictures. It is the *real man* into whom we grow, when we “follow Christ.” This man must be ready to take sorrows upon himself. Otherwise he cannot become a man upon the earth. But the sorrows are not what is essential. Deeply may we receive this into ourselves—what a glorious thought of God the man is who bears within himself royal love to all that is below him, heavenly peace towards all that is around him, and divine holiness before all that is above him. Then these three qualities must be purified, as they can be from the picture of Christ.

Through love man unites himself to earth. In peace he walks upon the earth. With the wisdom which is born from holiness, he turns from earth back to heaven. Behold the man! □

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