



Bible Studies Given at the National Christian Council Triennial Assembly,
Shillong, October 1967

1968

J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

National Christian Council Review 88, January, February, March, April: 9-14, 73-77, 125-131,
177-181

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STUDY I

Bible Reading: Heb. 10:1-25; John 17:1-5; 13-19, 24-26.

At the beginning of, our Assembly we turn to that event which is the starting point of the Gospel, that Jesus died and rose again. But we remember now, and we shall consider more fully later, that this is not only the starting point of our Gospel, but also the centre, the focus, the crisis, of all human history – yes, and of cosmic history, for whereas pagan religion and modern scientism make history part of the cosmos; biblical faith sees the cosmos as part of history. And of that history the dying and rising of Jesus is the critical moment.

(1) In the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews contrast is drawn between the repetitive character of the traditional sacrifices and the once-for-all character of what was done on the cross. We draw attention to this contrast every time we repeat the phrase ‘under Pontius Pilate’ in the Creed. This phrase is a reminder of the fact that our faith is anchored in an unrepeatable event of history. The dichotomy of faith and history is one which the Christian must refuse to accept. Our faith is that this historic event is decisive for all history.

The chapter repeatedly makes an abrupt contrast between the cyclical pattern of daily and yearly sacrifice and the non-cyclical,

unrepeatable, once-for-all event of the death of Jesus. The cyclical pattern has immense power over our minds. It is the pattern of nature - day and night, spring and autumn, birth and death, the rise and fall of nations, cultures, and fashions of thought. So powerful is the whole of the cyclical pattern over all our thinking that we easily fall into the naturalist way of thinking, which makes history a part of nature. The dominance of science encourages us in this way of thinking, for science deals essentially with recurrent patterns, with repeatable experiments, with repeated changes.

This is an important point for our theme, of renewal. There is a cyclical pattern of renewal in nature; the renewal of the earth each year after the rains; the renewal of life in each new generation. It is important to be clear that this is *not* the renewal spoken of in this chapter when the writer speaks of the new covenant. The cyclical renewal characteristic of nature is at best a parable of the radical renewal of which this chapter speaks. It is a true parable, as our Lord's use of the Parable of the Corn of Wheat reminds us, but it is not more than a parable.

The Bible firmly places nature within history. Nature, like history, has a beginning and a consummation. At the centre of history, which is both the history of man and the history of nature, stands the pivotal, critical, once-for-all event of the death and resurrection of Jesus. By this event the human situation is irreversibly changed. In particular, the cyclical pattern of daily and yearly sacrifice is now shown to be no longer necessary. The one act by which God's purpose is accomplished has been done once and for all and does not need to be repeated. It has only to be accepted and believed.

(2) This once-for-all act is the act of the *man* Jesus. This is the constantly repeated emphasis of this epistle. The essence of the act is expressed in the words which are quoted from the 40th Psalm: 'Lo, I come to do thy will, O Lord'. The recurrent heresy of the Church has been, to deny the reality of Christ's humanity. This, in effect, denies the real *inhistorisation* of the Word of God. It leaves human history as something other than the place where God's will has been done and will be done. It leaves God in a world apart from the human history in which we have to play our part.

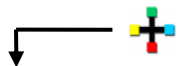
Jesus, who is the Word of God made man, is part of this history of which we are also a part. As a man of flesh and blood He agonised, He was tempted, He prayed, He learned obedience. His dying was the consummation of His living. Through the utter darkness of rejection, hatred, betrayal, torture and death, He went forward, simply trusting His Father. All the temptations to doubt the reality of God's power and God's purpose, all the temptations to doubt; the way that He Himself was travelling, all and far more than all the trials and assaults that we have to bear were heaped upon, Him. Like the boy Isaac who trusted his father's word and went forward to the mountain of sacrifice, Jesus trusted His Father and went forward,
'Lo, I have come to do thy will, O Lord'.

And by this will, adds the writer of this epistle, we have been sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

This human faith and obedience of Jesus, this event of world history, this flesh and blood event, *is* the way through the curtain, the only way. This place of flesh and blood, this piece of human history, *is* the place where the 'way' is 'opened for man into' the holy place'. As Jesus Himself says in St John's Gospel: 'I *am* the way'. We have no direct access to that place. 'No one has ascended into heaven, but he who descended from heaven - the son of man', It is here in Jesus,

the man, Jesus in His flesh and blood, that the decisive event has happened; the way has been opened, the glory of God has been revealed in the midst of the life of the world (John 17 :4). By His obedience Jesus has manifested the glory of God within history.

(3) And this act of obedience is the obedience of a *son*. 'Father, the hour has come'. This word 'Father' is His characteristic word. The glory of Jesus was the glory of an only son. Jesus glorified God as a son. The utterly distinctive thing about Jesus was that He was the son. He spoke of God in terms of the most tender intimacy as 'Abba' my Father. In doing this, He was emphatically not reflecting the religious attitudes of His time. The German scholar Jeremias has shown that there is no parallel to this use of 'Abba' in Jewish devotional literature before the time of Jesus. This word arises from and reveals the deepest secret of His being, that He was the son. His offering of Himself on



the cross was an act of complete trust in His Father, but at the same time it was an act done for the sake of those whom the Father had given Him. It was for their sake that He consecrated Himself, that they should be consecrated in truth (John 17:19). By His death He brought many sons to glory, a truth which is expressed in another way when He said, 'The glory that thou hast given me I have given to them'.

Thus, Jesus speaks about His own death. It is the manifestation of the glory of God, that is to say, the manifestation of what is more real and fundamental, than anything else can ever be. He has granted to His own disciples to be sharers in that same reality, and of that we shall speak tomorrow.

So, as a son utterly trusting his father, He goes forward to defeat, rejection, shame, agony, death and burial. 'He was buried'. That phrase of the Creed coming from the most ancient of all traditions (1 Cor. 15) stands as a reminder of the completeness and finality of His defeat and death. The dead body of Jesus was buried.

(4) The natural conclusion would be that this so-called glory of God was not reality at all, but one man's illusion. That we do not think so is because of what happened on Easter Day. Because of that we believe that it is reality.

But what kind of reality? To put it crudely, is it an other-worldly reality or a this-worldly reality? Is it that (to quote Professor Lampe in his broadcast talk) 'He comes alive again for us and in us' - that is to say, in an inward religious experience which convinces us in spite of the solid denial of the external world? Or is it something which happened in the visible and tangible world, which enables us to believe that this world itself belongs to Jesus and will ultimately be wholly ruled by Him?

For myself I cannot doubt that it is the second. I think we part company with the Bible if we make here a dichotomy between nature and history. The resurrection is a deed, not just an idea, and a deed which carries with it the assurance that all history and all nature will in the end be filled with that glory which Christ received from the Father and gave to His disciples.

That is the clear meaning of the passage which we are studying. All Christ's enemies are to be put under His feet. Jesus has

manifested the glory of God on earth by His dying, and as the first-fruit of that, those who believe will see His glory in the presence of His Father. This is the end to which it all looks. But meanwhile the world does not know.

‘Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name and I will make it known that the love with which thou hast loved may be in them and I in them’.

There is a stark contrast between the faith by which the Church lives and the mind of the world. What is called glory here is just not recognised there. There is no use in trying to blur this contrast. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not apprehend it.

But that text has also a positive meaning: the light goes on shining, and the darkness does not blot it out. ‘I have made known to them thy name and I will make it known’. The mission of the Church goes on, and that mission is to make known the name and the nature of the Father, which is love. We know that love only through the dying and rising of Jesus. Apart from these we have no way of overcoming the blank denial which both nature and history oppose to the very idea of a loving Father. In the dying and rising of Jesus, which are events of history within the world of nature, we are enabled to believe the love of the Father - to know that there is a final sovereignty over all nature and history which is exercised wholly by mercy and patience, by utter self-abandonment and self-oblation.

The dying and rising of Jesus is thus more than what I have just said. It is more than an event within nature and history, for if we have already settled what we think nature and history are, on some other grounds, then we shall find the resurrection totally incredible. The dying and rising of Jesus is that central point from which alone nature and history can be understood for what they are. This is the unveiling of the glory of God. Here in this deed the really real is made manifest, a love which reigns in utter self-abandonment.

I have used the words ‘make manifest’, but I close by reminding you again that this event is not just a sign, it is a deed. It is not just a gesture, but an act. Upon this distinction depends the question whether or not we take history seriously. What we are dealing with in the dying and rising of Jesus is not a symbol of the timeless nature of things, not a symbol of the cyclical renewal of nature like the myths of the dying and rising gods in Greek and Egyptian religions. It is a historic deed which is the turning point of cosmic history, a turning point which cannot be repeated. It is the place at which the victory of the love of God was accomplished once for all. This is the starting point of renewal - radical renewal. It is the beginning of a new creation which involves the death of the old.

Study II

The Dying and Rising of the Christian

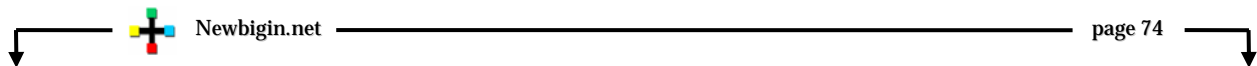
Bible Readings: Gal 2:20; Phil 3:1 to 14

The cross of Jesus is the centre of cosmic history. For him who believes that, it is also the centre of his own personal history. Only so does the believer find that he can live meaningfully as part of the history of his people and the world.

St Paul gives many different accounts of the way in which the Cross of Jesus has become the centre of his own life. We shall begin with one that is the classical statement of the matter (Gal 2:20).

(1) 'I have been crucified With Christ'. In the context Paul is speaking of his old life as a devout disciple of Moses and the Prophets. The death of Jesus is the end of that road. If Jesus is the one whom the resurrection declares him to be then a final judgment has been passed upon the religion of which Paul was so devoted and zealous a disciple. It is - simply - enmity against God. The most godly Church leaders are among those who have become the murderers of the Son of God.

But far more than this is involved. The Cross is the end not only of that road but of every road. The Cross is the



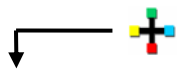
point at which every human idealism is shattered. For it is the place - the one place in all human history - where perfect manhood appeared; and at that place the representatives of the noblest religion and the most civilized statesmanship combined to blot it out. It is the place where ultimate despair seems the only possible option. The suicide of Judas when he saw at he had done is the first authentic commentary of the crucifixion of Jesus. For him who has been revealed as the murderer of God, there can be no future.

When they led him out to be crucified, they put a notice above his head in accordance with custom, to indicate the crime for which he was to suffer. It was a mocking notice, as much as to say. 'This, ladies and gentlemen, is the Jewish Messiah'. From that moment, if you understand who he was, you know that over every man's head there is a notice 'This is one of the murderers of God'.

There is no way on from here. The only thing is to try and find an escape. 'I am crucified with Christ'. When I know, who he is and understand what happened, I know that I am finished. Nothing that I am or could ever be or do could change my status. I am an enemy of God, am one of the wicked husbandmen who have flouted the Lord's just requirements and trampled upon his repeated patience. My life is forfeit. This phenomenon which I call 'me' has no more place to stand. It can only disappear and be forgotten. It can never appear before the face of God.

(2) But, the matter does not end there. The crucifixion of Jesus is a crime, the supreme act of wickedness into which our human wickedness is brought to its ghastly focus. But, here is the miracle and mystery of our salvation, Jesus has taken this act of wickedness and by his own self-obliteration has transmuted it into an act of expiation - 'No man takes my life from me; I lay it down of myself'. The mystery of our salvation is this; that Almighty God, present in Jesus Christ, has taken the supreme act of our wickedness and made of it the supreme act of this love. At the moment when we - the human race in its solidarity of wickedness - are brought under the sentence

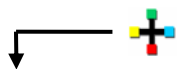
of death, in that same moment he died for us. He took the whole of our *Karma* upon himself, bore it all and burned it all up in a fire of sacrificial love.



He died for us. He died for me. Sometimes I confess that I become weary of the constant repetition of this 'for me'. Sometimes we almost come to think that the whole mystery of God's salvation ends up in this little selfish cry 'for me'. Indeed we must ever remember that the Cross of Christ is the saving of the world and not just my own salvation. And yet there must be a moment when we know that it is not only for the world, not only for us, but also for me.

Christ died for us; for me. The life which he gave is an endless life, the life of God himself. And so St Paul says that the life I live now is not an extension of my old life. It is not that I have had the death sentence but been reprieved; the death sentence has been carried out: I have been crucified with Christ. That old ego has been knocked on the head once for all. The life I now live - what is it then? It is the life of Christ given to me. It is the overflow of what he has so lavishly given. It is not my effort or achievement: it is his gift. It is a different life, not an extension of the old, but a new kind of life starting from different origins and leading to a different goal. Its origins, as St John says, are not the will of the flesh or the will of man (not even the will to do good) but in the overflowing love of God. Its nature is that it is a response to him. And its goal is not that I should at the end stand before Him as a righteous man, but that he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

(3) And - yet something more has to be said: the new life which is the life of Christ in me, is not yet a matter of direct and complete experience; it is known by faith. It is laid hold of by faith. I live still in the flesh, as an ordinary human being subject to the pressures and limitations of my share in the whole of humanity. What I see and feel is the pressure of this common humanity. But by faith I lay hold of the new reality, the life of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me. This new reality is, in one sense, given once for all: in another sense it has to be constantly apprehended afresh. Therefore the Christian life is not something which is, so to say, complete from the moment when Christ is known and accepted. It is a matter of growth, of pressing forward. It is a life of faith which means a life-pilgrimage towards something which is, believed but not yet seen, hoped for; but, not yet-possessed. In two famous passages



St Paul speaks of the Christian life as a race, and of the Christian as an athlete who is running down the track to finish the race, putting everything in the effort to win. To one such passage we now turn (Phil. 3:1-14).

In this famous passage St Paul lists the things that he had once counted among his supreme assets - birth, training, religion, moral achievement. All of these were things that a godly man might well cherish as more precious than gold, or than life itself. But he is prepared to throw them all away to; gain Christ that he may have, as a sure possession, the new life which is the life of the risen Christ himself, within the believer.

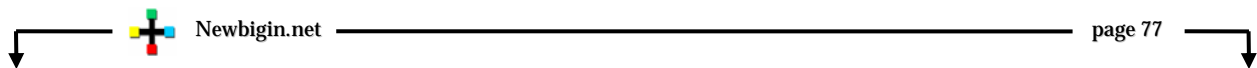
And yet he does not claim to have attained this. He is still on the track, still pressing forward. Not that there is anything lacking in what Christ has done. Christ has made him his own. Christ's work is finished and perfect. But I still have to make it my own. I live by faith which is the conviction of things not yet possessed.

This passage is needed to fill out the meaning of the Galatians text. It helps us to see more concretely what is involved in dying and rising with Christ. There is involved a constantly renewed willingness to throw away things which in their own time were precious. There is an echo here of the parable of the merchant who sells all his accumulated stock of precious jewels for the sake of one pearl of great price. It is a matter of knowing what that supreme treasure is, and of being ready to surrender everything to get it.

Everything that God gives us is given in order to be surrendered. This is true not only of material gifts but also of spiritual. There are things given to us at a certain stage of our journey - experiences, certainties, answers to prayer, clear formulations of belief. Some of these may be taken from us. They may become part of what we have to throw away for the sake of the supreme treasure.

Two things must be said of this:

(a) It can be agonisingly painful. The temptation to hold on to the securities of the past can be overwhelming. Nostalgia for the securities of our childhood is a built-in feature of human nature. But, to look back is the

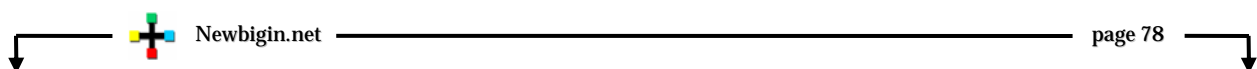


one absolutely fatal mistake. Central to the whole Bible story is the example of the Israelites who in their desert journey hankered after the old securities of Egypt - even though these were the securities of slavery. God requires us to look forward and to surrender even the most precious things if this is required in order to lay hold of the supreme treasure.

I suspect that one of our real temptations in the Church today is a hankering after the securities of the past and a reluctance to face the new and disturbing and, potentially, divisive questions that the modern world and modern India put to us. Yet we are required to face these questions, difficult as they are, and if necessary to abandon old securities for the sake of new truth. If we are going to engage in really serious dialogue with Hindus, Muslims, and others; if we are going to face seriously the questions which modern science puts to our traditional formulations of the faith; and if we are going to face the questions about conduct which are forced upon us by a growing mobile, pluralistic and – in big cities – affluent society we shall have to face the possibility that some of our old certainties and old securities will have to go.

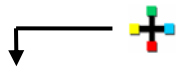
(b) The other thing to be said is this. You need to have a lot of experience or buying and selling pearls before you risk your whole stock on one pearl. You must know both what to keep and what to throw away. And, that knowledge is gained by patiently won experience.

St Paul says that he is governed by one purpose: to know Christ, to know the power of his resurrection, to share his sufferings, to be conformed to his death in order to be a partaker of his resurrection. To know Jesus - that is the supreme thing. If that is our supreme desire then we will be allowed to share, even in a small way, his sufferings; to reproduce in our own experience the self-abandonment which reached its climax in the cry 'My God, my God, why, hast Thou forsaken me?'; and in that total self-abandonment to know also the power of His risen life - the power to go on with new



strength not your own, to go on with a faith, hope and love which are not human achievements, but sheer gifts of his risen life.

And this - remember - is not just a matter of our inward religious experience. It is the way in which the power of Christ's once-and-for-all deed of death and resurrection is carried forward through history until the day when the new creation shines forth in all its splendour and the earth is filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.



STUDY III

The Dying and Rising of the Church

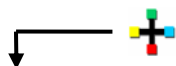
Bible Readings: 2 Cor. 4; 6:1-10; Matt. 10:1-23.

2 Corinthians, Chapter 4

Verses 1-6:

In this chapter the apostle gives a picture of the Mission of the Church in the form given to it by, the dying and rising of Jesus. The mission of the Church is defined here as 'bearing in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be made manifest'.

Let us here dispose of the idea which is given in some expositions of the passage that St Paul is talking about his own peculiar personal experiences, that when he says 'we' he really means 'I'. Paul was quite capable of saying when he meant 'I' and of saying 'we' when he meant 'we'. A study of his letters makes this clear. Here he says 'we' and he is not talking about something peculiar to himself but about something which is proper to the life of the Church as such. Like St John he is



aware that the light shines in the darkness and that the darkness does not apprehend it. But the light has shone in Jesus Christ, and does shine in the Church, and can shine in no other way than it did in Jesus. The glory of God is manifest in self-abandonment to the limit, for the love of the Father, total surrender to the will of the Father as it is disclosed in the circumstances of our lives.

Verses 7-12:

'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you'.

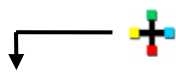
This means that the suffering of Jesus is reproduced in the life of the Church. The glory of God is revealed in the Church's humble acceptance of suffering. The Church has no glory or strength in the ordinary natural sense. It is when it is simply abandoned to the will of God, whatever suffering this may bring, that it becomes the means of life for others.

This presence of the power of the risen Christ made available through the humiliation and suffering of the Church is, of course, a matter of faith and not of direct observation. It is an act of faith for which the resurrection of Jesus is the basis and assurance.

Verses 13-14:

‘Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke", we too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence’.

The suffering of the Church, its humiliation, its failure, will for some be simply an occasion for unbelief. The Church lives by the faith of those humble and often unknown men and women who have learned from Jesus the secret of the alchemy by which suffering and defeat are transmuted into sacrifice; from



Jesus who could say 'no man takes my life from me, I lay it down f myself', who could commit all things into the Father's hands vowing that beyond defeat and death there is resurrection and new life from God. Those who have learned this secret can say with St Paul,

Verses 16-17:

'So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting way, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,'

The same paradox is given in the first part of Chapter 6. When we discuss the ‘marks of the Church’, the famous *Notae ecclesiae*, which have played such a role in the discussions between churches, we have not usually attended to these marks of the Holy Catholic Church given to us by St Paul.

Verses 3-10:

'We put no obstacle in any one's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way, through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, by the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left, in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ; as poor, yet making many rich as having nothing, and yet possessing everything’.

There is an authentic picture of a Church renewed for mission, a Church which is poor yet makes many rich, is dying and yet gives life, has nothing yet possesses everything.

All of this goes back to the teaching of the Lord himself in days of his earthly ministry. When the apostles were called and commissioned and sent out as the nucleus of the Church that was to be, they were at the same time promised the power to heal and to give life and also promised that for themselves there would be suffering and death.



Matthew, Chapter 10

Verses 1-15:

'And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, chase out demons. You received without pay, give without pay. Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the labourer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart: As you enter the house, salute it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town".'

There you have a picture of the church sent out as the bearer of new life, the herald of the kingdom and the bearer of its power. Like Jesus himself the Church will bring into the world the signs of the coming of God's reign and of the dethronement of Satan. These are among the authentic signs which follow the mission of the Church. And let us not, in our present mood of discouragement, under-estimate the power of these works of the Church in its schools, colleges, hospitals and farms. These things have been signs of the breaking into our old world of the new powers of the kingdom. They have brought healing and light and hope, and they have created - as many critical adversaries of the Church will testify - a ferment in the life of the nation which is still at



work and whose ultimate end is beyond our sight. This commission of our Lord, and the promises that go with it, have been honoured and are being honoured in the life of the Church in India.

But we have failed to read the two parts of the chapter together. The Church, like Jesus, must also face rejection.

Verses 16-18:

'Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you tip to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles.'

But it is exactly in this experience of rejection that the Church will become the instrument of the Holy Spirit's witness to the reign of God.

Verses 19-20:

'When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour - for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.'

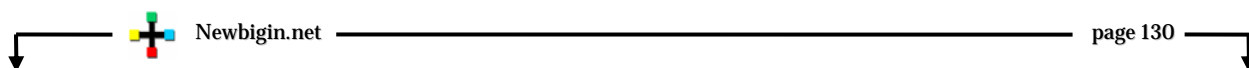
Not in its triumphs and mighty works, but in its humiliation and suffering the Church will become the means by which the Holy Spirit bears his witness to Christ. We know how very often this has proved true in the life of the Church.

Verses 24-25:

'A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master; it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master'.

The mission of the Church is to reproduce the life of Jesus in the life of the world. And the condition of doing this, as St Paul has told us, is that we bear about in the body (the body of Christ), the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest.

What kind of an impression are we trying to make in the world? Are we content to have the image of a servant, or do we aspire to something else?



In the context of these warnings there is also a promise 'have no fear of them'. If we are utterly committed to the Father, as Jesus was, we can go right to the end of that road, as he did, without fear. There is a death which is final death, a defeat which is total defeat. There is that which is described here as the death of both body and soul in hell. The Church must know that there is such a thing as final damnation. But the death and the defeat that are accepted in obedience to the Father, in total surrender to him, have nothing in them for us to fear.

Verses 29-31:

'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all-numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.'

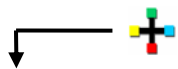
But here also there is a warning to the Church. The temptation to escape persecution by silence must have been almost overwhelming for the generation in which the Gospel of Matthew was written. These words of the Lord must have come to them with special force.

Verses 32-33:

'So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven'.

The presently popular doctrine of 'presence' needs to be watched lest it lead us into this condemnation. What it says positively is wholly true: we do-not fulfill the apostolic commission unless we are truly present, sharing and bearing the life of those to whom we speak. The word must become flesh: it must become part of the life of those to whom it is addressed. Much of our evangelism has been futile because we were merely shouting at people from a distance instead of being one with them, bearing with them and for them the dying of Jesus that the life of Jesus might be manifest to them.

But if presence is taken to mean that we do not speak the name of the Redeemer, trusting that our presence is an adequate substitute for that name, then we are on the way to betrayal.



The separation of the life from the word is an abandonment of the way of the incarnation, whether we choose to have the word without the life, or the life without the word. The mark of a faithful disciple in the New Testament is that he is prepared to pay for his words with his life. Those who went before us in the Church in India took more seriously than we do the words which conclude this passage. They are addressed to us also. That is the law for the Church as for the individual believer. 'He who finds his life will lose it, and who loses his life for my sake will find it'.

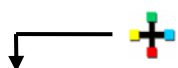
That is the word of our Lord which we have to set against what has been described accurately as the 'maintenance strategy' which marks so much of our work in India today.

But there is a final point which also needs to be made. The laying down of life comes at the point where the Father determines, not at the point of our choice. The Cross was not Jesus' choice: it was his acceptance of the Father's will at the hour and in the way that the Father determined.

So also the scattering of the Church in Jerusalem which was on the one hand the end of the old security they had enjoyed, and on the other hand the beginning of the new Gentile mission, was not a decision of the Church. It was the Church's acceptance of and response to an act of God.

What matters is to be finally confident that the mission is God's and that he is more concerned about it than we are, and therefore to be completely flexible about the outward forms of our lives and ready to reproduce the life of Jesus in the life of the world in whatever form the circumstances of the time dictate.

The fundamental form is always the form of the servant.



STUDY IV

The Dying and Rising of the World

Bible Readings: St Mark 13; 1 Cor. 15, 22, 58.

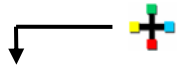
In this final study I want to show how the pattern of dying and rising is seen in the Bible to apply to creation itself. In the first study I emphasised the point that the Cross is the turning point not only of our personal history, but also of human history and of the history of nature itself.

The Bible does not allow us to make a sharp separation between the personal life, the human history of which every personal life is a part, and the whole history of nature of which man is a part.

The phrase 'the history of nature' may seem strange, but it is one which the Bible certainly implies, and which the atomic physicist von Weizsaecker uses as the title of one of his books. Readers of Teilhard de Chardin will understand it at once.

That the Christian church fought so stubbornly against the dynamic view of nature when it appeared in the form of the theory of evolution, was due the long marriage in the middle ages between Christianity and the Graeco-Roman World-view with its static conception of nature.

Today we are able to see that the Bible itself requires us to see nature not as something



static but as something which is within God's unfolding purposes, and therefore part of history. Nature itself, the created world, also looks forward to a consummation. As St Paul says, the whole creation is in travail awaiting the birth of the new humanity, the liberated children of God.

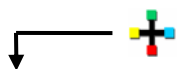
The practical importance of this whole dimension of our faith has been most sharply put, so far as my reading goes, in Teilhard de Chardin little book *Le Milieu Divin*. How do we understand the objective of our daily secular work? What are we really aiming at when we build roads, split atoms, teach students geology, or pass laws for a nation? What is the end of it? Is it that we are really trying to make this world a better place, or is it that we are preparing ourselves and others for a different world? Is our work like a student's exercise where nobody suffers but himself if he gets the sum wrong, or is it like an engineer's calculations where the safety of a whole city depends upon his getting the sum right?

If we cannot answer that question, are we not justly accused by our humanist colleagues of being people who are at bottom double-minded, without a single clear purpose, appearing to be interested in this world but really in the last analysis concerned with another?

Now it is true that there is much in the Bible about the fashion of this world passing away, and it is possible to build on these texts, if we take them alone, a doctrine of the world which is not very different in its practical effects from the Hindu doctrine of Maya. But there are also many, many other texts, which speak of a renewed and glorified nature as part of the consummation of God's purpose. In these texts this world does not disappear at the end; on the contrary it is the scene of the manifestation of God's glory. Let me remind you for example of the following texts in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 11:6, 9

'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.



The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea'.

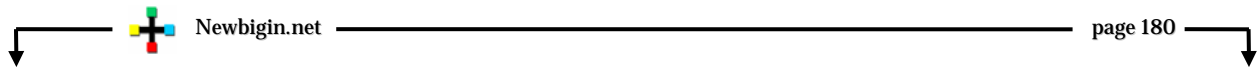
Isaiah 25:6-8

'On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He

will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken'.

Isaiah 35:8-10

'And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not pass over it, and fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'



It is these and similar texts which have inspired nearly all great missionary hymns. Let me remind you only of the best of them all, 'Jesus shall reign wherever the sun does his successive journeys run'. When we see the way that Christian congregations sing these missionary hymns, we are bound to conclude that there is deep in the heart of Christian people some degree of faith that the Kingdom of God is going to manifest itself in this world.

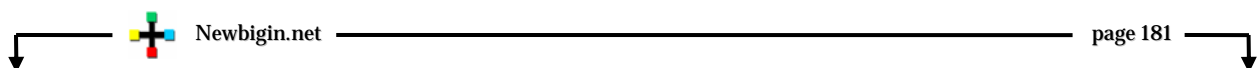
'Oh', you may say, 'but this is part of the materialistic idea the Kingdom which Jesus discarded. In the New Testament, there is something much more spiritual'. But is this so? Take first one of the great apocalyptic passages in which the negative side of the matter is most strongly stressed - St Mark, Chapter 13.

Here is a passage which sets forth in vivid pictorial language that the coming of Jesus means for universal history, for the history of which we are apart:

(a) The coming of Jesus precipitates decision and judgement. just as in the passage we studied yesterday (Matthew 10) the sending out of the Apostles precipitates conflict, suffering and testimony, so - on a much greater scale - the coming of Christ into the world precipitates conflict, suffering and the preaching of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. False messiahs arise; Where the Gospel is preached, messianic movements also follow - movements which promise total welfare on other terms than Christ. This, for example, is why Marxism so often takes hold of those peoples to whom the Gospel has been most fully preached.

(b) This conflict is set in this world. The scenery is of this world - Jerusalem, Judea, this mountain. It is not another world that we are talking about. All nations are to be drawn into this mission, and this universal judgement, because Jesus is Lord of All.

(c) But more than human history is involved. Nature itself is involved in the final conflict - (St Mark 13:24, 25): 'In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken'.



There is a fearful struggle which eventually involves the whole cosmos.

(d) The end of it all is the complete and overwhelming manifestation of the power and glory of Jesus in the midst of a redeemed and glorified humanity. The scene is still this world, but it is a

world changed beyond anything that our imagination can conceive, a world filled with the glory of God as it has been manifested in Jesus.

Here we must note that striking parallel between these similar apocalyptic passages on the one hand, and the sayings of Jesus about his own passion on the other. The same word is used of them both:

The Son of Man must suffer. These things must come to pass.

The parable that is repeatedly used is the parable of child-birth. There must be agony, pain, travail; but the end is joy, a risen Saviour, a liberated humanity, a renewed, creation.

The second passage is one in which the positive side of the matter is put much more strongly - (1 Cor. 15:20-58). We are not told explicitly on what grounds the Corinthians denied the resurrection. From the general indications of the letter we may guess that the idea of the resurrection of the body was a too grossly materialistic idea for the very spiritual Corinthians. The Greeks has a popular saying that the body is a prison. The wise man will concentrate on escaping from the prison. Why should he want to take his prison with him?

Paul's answer is the re-statement of the unanimous apostolic testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus, followed by an exposition of its meaning. The resurrection of Jesus, he says, is the first-fruit of a new age, of a new humanity, of a new cosmos. The stages are carefully marked in the argument:

- (a) There is first the resurrection of Jesus himself – 'Christ the first fruits'.
- (b) Then there is the resurrection of those that are Christ's - the new humanity. The meaning of this new humanity will be discussed later in the chapter.

c) But the matter does not stop there, the whole cosmos is involved. Everything, and finally death itself, is to be put under subjection to Jesus, and so - through Him - to God. As all things were created through Christ, so all things are to be brought to their consummation through Him, who by His death has conquered all hostile powers, and by His resurrection has inaugurated the new creation.

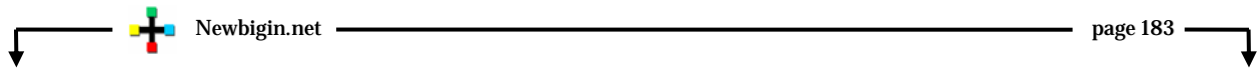
But at once the question arises, in what sense is it new? Is it something totally new, another world quite different from this one? Or is it this world renewed and restored? If we talk of a new creation in which Jesus is all in all, of a new world, what is the relation of the new to the old? What are the elements of continuity, and what of discontinuity?

For his answer here St Paul takes the parable, not of child-birth but of germination of a seed (verses 35-57). Here is the most sustained passage in the New Testament about the continuity and discontinuity between this world and what we call the world to come. There is discontinuity - there is a kind of death. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die. The old nature must perish. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

And yet it is not a total discontinuity. Death is swallowed up in victory. The perishable is covered by the imperishable. Just as the risen Jesus was not a different Jesus but the same Jesus and yet different because of a renewed and glorified body, so the new humanity is the same humanity, not a different one but the glorified one. (1 Cor. 15:51-53)

‘I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature, must put on immortality’.

This picture is confirmed by the hints given in other passages in the New Testament. In 1 Cor. 3, when St Paul speaks of



the work we do as Christians, he uses the metaphor of a building which will be tested by fire. There will be destruction - wood, hay and stubble will go. But what was built of gold, silver and precious stones will stand when that day comes.

The same thought as we have in this chapter is also expressed in Phil. 3:21
‘We await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.’

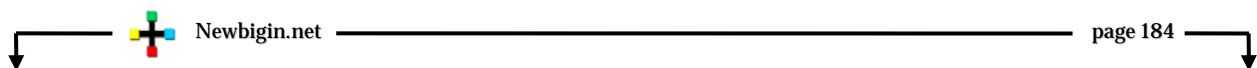
The thought here is not of total discontinuity. Nor is it of a flight to another world. It is of the manifestation of the presence and power and glory of Jesus in this world, a manifestation by which even our physical nature itself will be transformed into the new nature of the new creation. The consequence of this faith is expressed in the last verse of the great chapter we are studying.

‘Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain’.

With this faith we know that our labour in the Lord is not vain. Somehow, at a time which God the Father alone knows, and in a way which we can only express in parables and pictures, our works themselves will find their place in that glorified new creation which is God's determined consummation of all things.

Like these mortal bodies of ours, so also all our works, the smallest personal deeds and the vastest labours in the history of human statecraft, culture, science and techniques - all have to fall into the ground and die like a corn of wheat. But the end is not that they perish - it is that they are caught up into that mighty movement of renewal of which the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the first fruit and the sign.

So it is that throughout the New Testament the vision of the future is dominated not by the thought of our escape from this unreal world into another, but by the vision of Jesus returning in glory to this earth, to reign forever. Of course this is parabolic



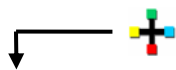
language. Jesus has never left the world. He has promised to be with us even to the end of the age. But the essential truth which this picture conveys is that the end to which we look is the complete and perfect manifestation, in this world which we know, of that glory which was revealed in the world when Jesus lived, died and rose again as a man, as part of our humanity, as part of nature.

Thus it is that the glorious vision with which the Bible ends is the vision of a perfect city whose origin is in heaven, but whose location is here on earth. This city is the symbol of man's ultimate

achievement in culture, in science, in techniques and in all the arts of human community. It is the utter perfection of all that man has ever dreamed of in his endless quest to master nature and to enjoy the fathomless riches and beauty of God's creation. The end of this story is not 'Paradise regained'. It is not that we return to the garden of Eden. The way back to the garden is guarded by an angel with a flaming sword. There is no way back. The way is forward to that city which is both the perfection of all men's labours and also at the same time the gift of God coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. For no labour of man is good enough to be built directly into the stonework of that Holy City. All man's labour must be tested by fire. There is fire, judgement, destruction, death. But these are not the end. The end is the Holy City.

And into that city - will you note this remarkable fact? - the kings of the earth shall bring their glory. The glory and honour of the nations, the heathen, will be brought into that city. The nations, those who are not the people of God but *ta ethne*, shall bring their glory into that city. Not their uncleanness and wickedness, for nothing unclean shall enter there, but their glory and honour. The glory and honour of India - not just of the Christian Church in India but of India - will be brought into that city, and in its light the nations shall walk.

We are dealing here with what necessarily passes beyond articulate speech. We can speak only the language of picture and parable. But the meaning of the picture is clear. The dying and rising of Jesus is not just an event in the private interior spiritual life of each of us. It is the turning point in the history of the cosmos. It is the beginning of a new creation; It is the first gleam of a glory that shall fill the universe, this world and



whatever other worlds there may be. But the way to that glory is the way of the cross.

As Jesus suffered and was buried, as the believer must be crucified with Christ, as the Church must bear about in the body the dying of Jesus, so also the cosmos itself has been subject to vanity, death, corruption and decay. These things must be - not only wars and rumours of wars, not only false Messiahs, but also the death of the body and the decay of the physical universe itself. But death and decay are not the end. The end is a new creation in which the glory of God fills all.

Therefore - beloved brethren - your labour in the Lord is not vain. Whether you are building roads or running a hospital or revising a Church constitution or bringing comfort to a dying man, your work is to be committed to the Lord as His was committed to the Father. It must go down to the dust. It must be tested by fire. But the end is that death is swallowed up in victory, the perishable puts on the imperishable, and all that we have committed to him is found purged, renewed and glorified in the perfect city which is the end of that history which God began when He first said 'Let there be light and there was light'.

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