

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI

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THE PARUSIA

The end of the god-killing people, the partial and local ending, had taken place. According to the sentence of Christ, the statues of the Temple were scattered among the ruined walls and the faithful of the Temple had met their death by torture or were scattered among other nations.

The second prophecy is left. When shall the Son of Man come on the clouds of Heaven, preceded by darkness, announced by angels' trumpets? Jesus says that no one can be sure of the day of His coming. The Son of Man is likened to lightning which flashes suddenly in the east, to a thief who comes by stealth in the night, to a master who has gone far away and returns suddenly to take his servants by surprise. We must be vigilant and ready. Purify your hearts, because you do not know when He may come; and woe to him who is not ready to appear before Him. Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life; and so that day come upon you unawares, for as a snare shall it come upon all that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

But if Jesus does not announce the day, He tells us what things must be fulfilled before that day. These things are two: the Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached to all the nations and the Gentiles shall no longer tread down Jerusalem. These two conditions are fulfilled in our own time and, perhaps the great day approaches. There are no longer in the world any civilized nations or barbarous tribes where the descendants of the Apostles had not preached the Gospel: since 1918 the Moslems have no longer trodden down Jerusalem and there is talk of a reestablishment of the Jewish State. According to the words of Hosea, the end of the time shall be near when the sons of Israel, left so long without altar and without King, shall be converted to the Son of David and shall turn, trembling, towards God's goodness.

If the words of the second prophecy are true, as the words of the first prophecy were shown to be true, the Second Coming may be far distant. Once again in these years nations have risen against nations, the earth has quaked, destroying many lives, and pestilences, famines and seditions have decimated nations. For more than a century the words of Christ have been translated and preached in all languages. Soldiers who believe in Christ, although they are not all faithful to the heirs of Peter, are in command over that city, which after its downfall was in the power of the Romans, the Persians, the Egyptians and the Turks. And still men do not think of Jesus and His promise. They live as if the world were always going to continue as it has been, and they work and mortify themselves only for their earthly and carnal interests.

"For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away: so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Likewise also, as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed."

The same thing happens in our day in spite of the wars and the pestilences which have cut down millions of lives in a few years. People eat and drink, marry and have children, buy and sell, write and play. And no one thinks of the Divine Thief who will come suddenly in the night, no one waits for the Real Master, who will return unexpectedly, no one looks at the sky to see if lightning is flashing from the east.

The apparent life of the living is like the delirious dream of a fatal fever. They seem awake because they hurry about without rest, occupied by those possessions which are clay and poison. They never look up to Heaven—they fear only their brothers. Perhaps they are waiting to be awakened in the last hour by those dead of old, who will rise up at the approach of the Resurrected Christ.

UNWELCOME

While Jesus was condemning the Temple and Jerusalem, those maintained by the Temple and the lords of Jerusalem were preparing His condemnation.

All those who possessed, taught and commanded were waiting only for the right moment to assassinate Him, without danger to themselves.

Every man who had a name, dignity, a school, a shop, a sacred office, a little authority was against Him. He came to oppose them and they opposed Him. With the idiotic natural to those in power they believed that they would save themselves by putting Him to death, and they did not know it was exactly His death which was needed as the beginning of their punishment. To have an idea of the hatred

which the upper classes of Jerusalem felt towards Jesus, priestly hatred, scholastic hatred and commercial hatred, we must remember that the Holy City apparently lived by faith, but in reality on the Faithful. Only in the Jewish metropolis could valid and acceptable offerings be made to the Old God, and therefore every year, especially on great feast days, streams of Israelites poured in there from the Tetrarchates of Palestine and from all the provinces of the Empire. The Temple was not only the one legitimate sanctuary of the Jews, but for those who were attached to it and for all the others who lived at its feet, it was the great nourishing breast which fed the Capital with the products of the victims, the offerings, the tithes and, above all, with the profits accompanying the continual influx of visitors. Josephus says that at Jerusalem on special occasions there were gathered together as many as three million pilgrims.

The stationary population depended all the year round on the Temple: business for the animal-sellers, dealers in victuals, money-changers, inn-keepers, and even artisans depended on the fortunes of the Temple. The priestly caste, which without the Levites (and there were a great crowd of them) numbered a Christian's lifetime twenty thousand descendants of Aaron—got their living from the tithes in kind, from the taxes of the Temple, from the payments for the first-born—even the first-born of men paid five shekels a head!—and got their food from the flesh of the sacrificial animals, of which only the fat was burned. They were the ones who had the pick of herds and crops; even their bread was given them by the people, for the head of every Jewish family was obliged to hand over to the priests the twenty-fourth part of the bread which was baked in his house. Many of them, as we have seen, made money on the raising of the animals which the Faithful were obliged to buy for their offerings; others were associated with money-changers and it is not impossible that some of them were really bankers, because people readily deposited their savings in the strong boxes of the Temple.

A network of self-interest thus bound to the Herodian edifice all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, down to the vendors at fairs and the sandal-makers. The priests lived on the Temple and many of them were merchants and rich men: the rich needed the Temple to increase their profits and keep the common people respectful: the merchants did business with the rich people who had money to spend, with the priests who were their associates and with the pilgrims from every part of the world drawn towards the Temple: the working men and the poor lived from the scraps and leavings which fell from the tables of the rich, the priests, the merchants and the pilgrims.

Religion was thus the greatest and perhaps the only business in Jerusalem: any one who attacked religion, its representatives, its visible monument (which was the most famous and fruitful seat of religion), was necessarily considered an enemy of the people of Jerusalem, and especially of the prosperous and well-to-do.

Jesus with His Gospel threatened directly the positions and fees of these classes. If all the prescriptions of the Law were to be reduced to the practice of love, there would be no more place for the Scribes and Doctors of the Law who made their living out of their teachings. If God did not wish animal sacrifices and asked only for purity of soul and secret prayer, the priests might as well shut the doors of the Sanctuary and learn a new profession: those who did business in oxen and calves and sheep and lambs and kids and doves and sparrows would have seen their business slacken and perhaps disappear. If to be loved by God you needed to transform your life, if it were not enough to wash your drinking cups and punctually pay your tithes, and doctrine and the authority of the Pharisees would be reduced to nothing. If in short the Messiah had come and had declared the Primacy of the Temple fallen and sacrifices useless, the capital of the cult would, from one day to the next, have lost its prestige and with the passage of time would have become an obscure settlement of impoverished men.

As a matter of course, Jesus, who preferred fishermen, if they were pure and loving, to members of the Sanhedrin; who took the part of the poor against the rich, who valued ignorant children more than Scribes, bear-eyed over the mysteries of the Scriptures, drew down on His head the hatred of the Levites, the merchants and the Doctors. The Temple, the Academy and the Bank were against Him: when the victim was ready they would call the somewhat reluctant, but nevertheless acquiescent Roman sword, to sacrifice Him to their peace of mind.

For some time the life of Jesus had not been safe. The Pharisees said that Herod had sought to kill Him from the days of His last sojourn in Galilee. Perhaps it was the knowledge of this that sent Him into Caesarea Philippi, outside Galilee, where He predicted His passion.

When He came back to Jerusalem the High Priests, the Pharisees and the Scribes gathered about Him to

lay traps for Him and take down His words. The uneasy and ambitious crowd set on His track spies, destined to become false witnesses in a few days. If we are to believe John, the order was given to certain guards to capture Him, but they were afraid to lay their hands upon Him. The attack with the whips on the animal-sellers and money-changers, the loud invectives against the Scribes and Pharisees, the allusion to the ruin of the Temple, made the cup run over. Time pressed; Jerusalem was full of foreigners and many were listening to Him. Some disorder, some confusion might easily spring up, perhaps an uprising of the provincial crowds who were less attached to the privileges and interests of the metropolis. The contagion must be stopped at the beginning and there seemed to be no better way than to make away with the blasphemer. The wolves of the Altar and of business arranged a meeting of the Sanhedrin to reconcile law with assassination.

THE HIGH PRIEST CAIAPHAS

The Sanhedrin was the assembly of the chiefs, the supreme council of the aristocracy which ruled the capital. It was composed of the priests jealous of the clientele of the Temple which gave them their power and their stipend; of the Scribes responsible for preserving the purity of the law and of tradition; of the Elders who represented the interests of the moderate, moneyed middle-class.

They were all in accord that it was essential to take Jesus on false pretenses and to have Him killed as a blasphemer against the Sabbath and the Lord. Only Nicodemus attempted a defense, but they were able quickly to silence him. "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." It is the Reason of State, the Salvation of the Fatherland which political cliques always bring out to screen with legality and idealty the defense of their particular profit.

Caiaphas, who that year was High Priest, settled their doubts with the maxim which has always justified in the eyes of the world the immolation of the innocent. "Ye know nothing at all nor consider that it is expedient that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perish not." This maxim in Caiaphas' mouth, and on this occasion, and for what it meant, was infamous, and hypocritical. Like all the speeches made by the Sanhedrin. But transferred into a higher meaning and transferred into the Absolute, changing nation into humanity, the President of the circumcised patriate was expounding a principle which Jesus Himself had accepted and which has become under another form the crucial mystery of Christianity. Caiaphas did not know, he who had to enter alone into the Holy of Holies to offer up to Jehovah the sins of the people—how much his words, coarse in expression and cynical in sentiment as they were in accord with his victim's thought.

The thought that only the righteous can pay for injustice, that only the perfect can discount the crimes of the brute, that only the pure can cancel the debts of the ignoble, that only God in His infinite magnificence can expiate the sins which man has committed against Him; this thought, which seems to man the height of madness exactly because it is the height of divine wisdom, certainly did not flash out in the corrupt soul of the Sadducee when he threw to his sixty accomplices the sophism destined to silence their last remorse. Caiaphas, who together with the crown of thorns and the sponge of vinegar was to be one of the instruments of Passion, did not imagine in that moment that he was bearing witness solemnly, though involuntarily, to the divine tragedy about to begin.

And yet the principle that the innocent can pay for the guilty, that the death of one man can be salvation for all, was not foreign to the consciousness of ancient peoples. The heroic myths of the pagans recognize and celebrate voluntary sacrifices of the innocent. They record the example of Pilatus, who offered himself to be punished in place of the guilty Orestes; Macaria of the blood of Hercules, who saved her brother's life with her own; Alcestis, who died that she might avert from her Admetus the vengeance of Artemis; the daughters of Erechtheus, who sacrificed themselves that their father might escape Neptune's blows. The old King Codrus, who threw himself into the Iliissus, in order that his Athenians might be victorious; and Decius Mus and his sons, who consecrated themselves to the Manes that the Romans might triumph over the Samnites; and Curtius, who, fully armed, cast himself into the gulf for the salvation of his country; and Iphigenia, who offered her throat to the knife that Agamemnon's fleet might sail safely towards Troy. At Athens during the Thargelion feast two men were killed to save the city from divine wrath; Epimenides of Wise, to purify Athens, profaned by the assassination of the followers of Cylon, had recourse to human sacrifice over the tombs at Curium, in Cyprus, at Terracina, at Marselles, every year a man threw himself into the sea as payment for the crimes of the community, a man regarded as the Saviour of the people.

But these sacrifices, when they were spontaneous, were for the salvation of one being alone, or of a restricted group of men; when they were enforced they added a new crime to those they were intended to expiate; they were examples of individual affection or of superstitious crimes.

No man had yet appeared who would take upon his head all the sins of men, a God who would imprison Himself in the abject wretchedness of flesh to save all the human race and to give it the power to ascend from bestiality to sanctity, from earthly humiliation to the Kingdom of Heaven. The perfect man, who takes upon himself all imperfections, the pure man who burdens himself with all infamies, the righteous man who shoulders the unrighteousness of all men, had appeared under the aspect of the poor fugitive from justice in the day of Caiaphas. He who was to die for all, the Galilean workman who was disquieting the rich and the priests of Jerusalem, was there on the Mount of Olives only a short distance from the Sanhedrin. The Seventy, who knew not what they did, who did not know that they were obeying the will of the very man they were persecuting, decided to have Him captured before the Passover; but because they were cowardly, like all men of possessions, one thing restrained them: the fear of the people who loved Jesus. They consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill Him. But they said, "Not on the feast day lest there be an uproar among the people." To solve their difficulty, by good fortune, there came to them the day after one of the Twelve, he who held the purse, Judas Iscariot.

TO BE CONTINUED

IRISH IMMIGRANTS

Dublin, Ireland.—Considerable notice has been taken in Ireland of facts supplied to the Cork Branch of the International Girls' Protection Society by Bruce M. Mohler, Director of the N. C. W. C. Bureau of Immigration. Mr. Mohler has described the plight of European immigrants who have tried to gain entry into the United States by way of Mexico. He mentions that as a rule the immigrants themselves have not wilfully tried to circumvent the American immigration laws, but they have been deceived by members of smuggling rings and unscrupulous steamship agents into the belief that admission by way of Mexico is an easy matter.

As far as can be ascertained on this side, Irish persons have not adopted such a method of seeking entrance, and after Mr. Mohler's warning it is less probable than ever that any attempt of the kind will be made by intending Irish voyagers. It appears that Canada is at the moment trying to attract Irish Catholic settlers. A Canadian priest, Father Quilty, has for some time been inquiring here as to suitable settlers for fruit farming in the Dominion. He states that experience has shown that the Irish after one generation become the best colonists in Canada. So far from being afflicted with prejudices, their progeny are, he observes, preeminent for their judicial sense, which explains their prominence in law and politics. Contrary to what is sometimes believed, they show aptitude for high commerce also.

Father Quilty is not advising Irish people to leave their homes. He declares, however, that economic conditions as far as he has seen will for many years make a degree of emigration indispensable, and he recommends the rural parts of Canada as best for such emigrants and best for the interests of the Church, which is trying to foster a Catholic stock in those regions.

PRESIDENT MASARYK AND THE CHURCH

By V. Myslivec  
(Prague Correspondent, N. C. W. C.)

Prague, March 20.—The Slovak, a daily, issued this week a sensational article in which Mr. J. K. Matejov described an interview with President Masaryk.

It said that old age and the death of his consort wrought a great change in the great revolutionary and especially in his conception of religion and regard for the Catholic Church.

The interviewer found the President meditating upon religion. The religious question, said Masaryk, should be handled very carefully. "I am now busy studying Catholicism," he said.

"I realize," continued the President, "that the development of the whole world declines from Protestantism and inclines to Catholicism. It is no use hiding that from one's self. All my studies have revealed it."

These statements of President Masaryk, who is a Protestant, are causing much surprise and admiration amongst the Catholics, since he left the Church when still a young man. His activity when a professor in the University of Prague was marked with strong antagonism toward the Catholic Church, and also his conception of the Czech history was utterly Protestant.

Mr. Matejov writes in the Slovak that he admires Masaryk for his courage in announcing what he found out to be the truth. He wrote with scathing sarcasm about

those who call themselves Masaryk's followers and preach the ideals which he himself had already discarded.

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