

## “Redeeming Love Has Been my Theme”

Poor William. Poor 18<sup>th</sup> century William Cowper. He was so sensitive- so sensitive to “the slings and arrows” of this outrageous life- that he suffered- suffered fits of depression. He saw so clearly he endangered his family- to see too, too well , can tip you over the brink- bring you a little too close to the Satanic, to Hell. To be altogether satisfied in this life, one must be altogether stupid. But to see the sights of man’s Broadway, and be sensitive to the human plight, is to know stark fear in all its toughest forms, and the paths of hate which fails so to protect it, and the loneliness which is life without God. In a word, it is to see man’s sin---- especially one’s own. This stark, ugly cross stamped on human life, Cowper saw, this silhouette of evil ever raised in sharp relief against the world’s horizon Cowper saw too well. Saw man’s compulsion to crucify himself, his fellow man- and the sight disturbed poor Cowper’s family- for his too sensitive soul shuddered before him- and set his mind a strange cross angles to those whose vision was limited to pleasure. Pleasure he knew too- but also pain- and the pain of the world branded this poor man, seared his soul with a vision of reality, all reality, in the shape of a cross. All life history in the shape of a cross- what a maddening vision- what an ugly, honest, tragic vision! So we brand the saints who have been seared with the sight of it as psychotic, sick, lacking in common sense, oddlings- too odd to bother with. If they are God’s oddlings- and they are, from Isaiah and Paul on down- then give us other odds, other Gods. Give us lasting laughter and the hot liquors of Real life- let us live it up, big, man, a ball and keep it cool, man cool—no looking at life in any cruciform shape- don’t show us reality like bloody cross- whew!- we can’t take it- one teeny, weeny nip of tragedy, one short right jab of pain, one sharp rebuke and “I’m all to pieces; I can’t stand it; I’m so frustrated; O my God I didn’t believe in, give me a tranquilizer, a trip, anything but get me out of here!!”

You see we don’t want life in the shape of a cross, a bloody cross. We want life in the shape of – of what? A Diamond? Oh yes, yes! Give us life in the shape of a diamond—that is, give us life that is 1. bright, 2. Gaudy, 3. Expensive, above all 4. In destructible. “Yeah, yeah, that’s it- a diamond existence. Let life twinkle, on and on, till mean old death do us part. “

So twinkle, twinkle little life,

Up above the world of strife

I don’t wonder – if you are

I just drink- and shoot for par.....

So we want life to have a diamond cut – but does it have? In spite of all our bright, gaudy, expensive ventures into space and time, the ancient destruction still looms at noonday and the resilience of fear and hate and loneliness still swell the starving poor and set the idle rich at one another’s thought to pass the time away. So not to see as the saints have man’s sin apart from God, is to lack common sight, one’s sanity, to be more odd than all the oddling saints who at least saw life marked real.

Come on now, might as well admit it- life is not all a twinkle. The stark, ugly, honest fact is – a cross looms large on the horizon of every age (primitive, classical, reminiscent, and rational) - nor all your piety, or [redacted] or scientific wit can lure it down or cancel it. To put it simply- life is all classed up and that is that. Face the fact or be a pretender – take your choice.

The church has always faced the fact- the cross of life- man's crucifixion compulsion- his mania to destroy- to crucify himself, his fellow man, even seeking to destiny, to crucify God Almighty Himself, even seeking to nail the creator to the cross, declare him dead and gone, so man can be his own creator- God and dance death's dance as he dammed please. Dance the ancient, pagan dance macabre, be it in Roman Crosses, inquisitions, [redacted] ovens, Hiroshima, race hate orgies or outer space- man's will to cripple – coupled with his fantastically increased medium capacity so to do – his ability to destroy wholesale his new found neighbors and his own new found genes—if that isn't the [redacted] cake around the foot of the cross, what is? The story of Calvary, in which man attacks God to kill him, raises the ole cry "God is dead! We've crucified him! Man is now God! Let's get on with the raising of hell."

The church – the Christian- Is not surprised at man's depravity- it is a part of the open-eyed faith. Man is sinner, against God, Rebel without a Cause. So idiot cruelty- whether in ancient Rome or the deep south or Wall Street or Capitol Hill or Red Square or where-ever- be it next door, next bed, next pew- comes as no shock, causes no hysteria. We nations believe in original sin—that is it's there- gross ugly- bloody ugly and we're very lost one open, exposed, libel to it.

But Xly doesn't stop here. For this much is perfectly clear to any intelligent pagan- though he may not plumb deep enough to call the cross in life "sin"- he may seek simpler answers: call it sickness, ignorance, maladjustment social ills, economic injustice, etc- oh yes, he sees the cross though he does not call it by its Christian name and tries to pull it down too and gets it part way down by education, by adjustment, by renewal, by serenity plans, et. al. but always up the cross bobs- up to shadow his best efforts to legislate and administer and impose healthy happiness upon [redacted] man. In spite of all our social planning, man is soon on the loose again, out to crucify again, God included if he could get to him, trying at any route to kill him on the analysts couch, nail him dead on the lab table, blast him away in a launching pad, philosophize him into the existential void. Oh yes, better social planning than no society- but it never yet had taken the cross out of life. So social planners lament, accuse one another or monstrous blunders and despair and humanity keeps on nailing itself (and God it thinks) to the cross.

Xty- however- is not thrown into a hypothetical fit by this fact. It's an old faith fact for us- this doctrine of original sin. Paul, poor William, and all the rest had the good spiritual sense to see us for what we really are: a pack of sinners, vile as any thief- in revolt against God- pretenders to be his holy throne.

But, as I said- the N.T. doesn't stop here.

It says- in effect, to us sinners- "You need not keep on trying to crucify God. It will get you nowhere- for it had already been tried- when certain man nailed Jesus of Nazareth to the cross- their attempt to be rid of him did not work – and do you know why! Because "In Christ God was \_\_\_\_\_ the world unto himself- God was in the Christ- the Christ on the cross was God and man could not destroy him- suffer he did for the sins of the whole world- his pain man's pain- blood of men's blood- the forsaken sense "my God, Why?" decent into hell. After death so God suffered with us- yes- one with us in agony- Yet there was a beyond in it – a dawning light ahead- no longer entombed in fear, hate, loneliness, but set free- a resurrected life- a life of redeeming love- the Christians resounding theme- "has been" "and will be till I die. "

Such reconciliation to God is man's basic need. Strong, posing strong indeed that the cross of Christ should accomplish this. The old cross still remains and sin and death with it- but it had lost its victory, its sting. Yes it is stronger- strong dogma- As Paul wrote to the Corinthians;" it may be we are beside ourselves but it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you (II Cor. 5:13 ENT.) This strong dogma is for us. As Paul explained, "his purpose in dying for all was that men, while still in life, should cease to live for themselves, and should for him who for their sake died and was raised to life. With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man. When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order had gone and a new order had already begun. From first to last this had been the work of God." (15-18)

Actually to banish the old order of things- to do away with fear and hate and greed- to live in the brave new world of trust and unselfish love- this obviously must be the work of the God. For this is far, far beyond the ability of the social scientist, the technologists, the Politian, the economists, the physician, the psychiatrist, and the parson. To straighten out the crossed up motives, the cross purposes of mankind- takes the redeeming love of God. When man is no longer nailed to fear and hate and greed because God in Cross has already been crucified by these sins- taken then upon himself- that we need not suffer their punishment any longer. This is truly miracle. It is not mathematics.

If as Paul said in his Corinthian letter- these things "just don't make sense" to you (1 Cor 2:14 Phillips)- I would say to you as Paul said to them- you really cannot see the religious dissemination without religion- it takes faith to understand the facts of the faith.

Xty is not a matter of common sense. Its assertions are most uncommon- God incarnate in a \_\_\_\_\_, the savior in a cross, love of enemies, the forgiveness of sins. Such things are not to weigh and \_\_\_\_\_ like common matters. They are to make us wonder- wonder- and lift our common lives to challenging new dimensions. "it may be we are beside ourselves" as Paul said, "but it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you" – for we are now ambassadors of this gospel, this good news, that in all power and wisdom, the eternal God was in X reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding men's misdeeds against them."