

Reconciled through Him

By DONALD GRAY

The death of Jesus on the cross is an event of reconciliation. "For God was truly in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). But, we may ask, who exactly is it who is reconciled? The text of Paul speaks of the world's being reconciled to God through the agency of his Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. Is it not also the case, however, that God is reconciled to us and precisely through this same agency? We may feel spontaneously inclined to answer this question affirmatively if we think back for a moment on the notion of atonement (or reconciliation) with which most of us are most familiar.

This particular understanding of the atoning, reconciling death of Jesus is usually called the satisfaction theory and derives in its essentials from the work of St. Anselm, writing in the 11th and 12th centuries. Anselm reasoned that man was totally incapable of adequately satisfying the justice of God inasmuch as his sin represented an infinite offense against the infinite God. Consequently, God himself became man and died our death in order to settle the irreparable debt contracted by man. The death of Jesus in this context, then, is to be understood as an infinitely satisfactory sacrifice propitiating the justice of God and in this way bringing about reconciliation.

Anselm's approach to the question contains many fine insights, but it possesses several decisive weaknesses which have caused it to be increasingly criticized in recent theological writing on the subject. The satisfaction theory depends upon a very delicately balanced understanding of the relationship between the unyielding justice and the merciful love of God. Many popular presentations, however, dissolve this delicate balance in favor of a too great emphasis on God's justice, which tends to suggest to many Christians that a basically angry and hostile God has been reconciled to man through a placating act of sacrificial death.

It is worth noting the fact that the New Testament never speaks of God's being reconciled to man, but only of man's being reconciled to God. It is man who has created the

breach between himself and God; it is man who has broken faith with God; hence, it is man who stands in need of being reconciled. Contrary to our own almost instinctive expectations, God does not react to this breaking of relationship by withdrawing from man in sullen hostility or by moving against man to punish him. Rather, the God who reveals himself in Jesus shows himself to be essentially a healing God, a reconciling God whose unflinching loyalty to man leads always to the renewal of relationship.

To many of us it may have seemed that God is gracious towards us because of the death of Jesus and that without this death God would have been forever locked into an attitude of rejection. However, the death of Jesus on the cross is not the cause of God's special favor towards us, but rather the effect and sign of his favoring love in our regard.

The death of Jesus is the revelation of our own estrangement from God, not of God's estrangement from us. This death is indeed an event of judgment against our own infidelity, but at the same time it is an event of grace revealing in a climactic and definitive way the unconditional faithfulness of God to men.

The death of Jesus is the death of a faithful and obedient and caring man at the hands of unfaithful and disobedient and callous men. This death shows forth within the manifold evils of human history that a faithful and caring God ceaselessly reaches out to break down the walls we have erected and to build community with men where men have refused fellowship.

Jesus is truly Emmanuel in history, God with us and for us, Jesus is the presence of God on our behalf reconciling the world to himself. The reconciling ministry of God in the life of Jesus is not negated by the death but rather is brought to its finest expression. Reconciling fidelity and care even unto and beyond death—that is the message and meaning of the cross. "All things are from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Cor. 5:18).

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Q. I was always taught that when Our Lord died on the Cross on Good Friday, he paid off a debt which we human beings had incurred by the sins of our first parents. Is this explanation still being offered by theologians and catechists? If not, what can be put in its place?

A. For almost a thousand years Catholics and Protestants alike have generally accepted, without too much question, a theological opinion of St. Anselm. He argued that God became man (Incarnation) because man had committed an infinite offense against God (Original Sin), and only an infinite being could repair such damage (Redemption). Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, died on the cross to pay off mankind's "debt" to the Father.

We did not often stop to ask: What kind of God is it that would demand anyone's death in payment for an offense committed against him? What kind of God would send his only Son to die in "reparation"? Is it really satisfying to call it all a "mystery"?

Significantly, St. Anselm's theory about the Redemption does not enjoy the same wide appeal today as it once did in the past. Some contemporary Christian theologians, however, seem to have gone to the opposite extreme and have reduced the Redemption to a matter of "good example." Jesus came to show us how to live as authentic human beings. If we imitate him, we can be "saved," i.e., we, too, can attain full manhood.

We do not have to embrace either view. The former tends to exaggerate the objectivity of the Redemption; the latter appears to exaggerate its subjectivity or its existential dimension.

A more balanced view will recognize that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has definitely broken into our history; He is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). Fundamentally, the Redemption is something that God has done, and is doing, on our behalf.

But the Redemption is not solely objective. It also includes and demands our personal response. Through the ministry of Jesus, God is showing us that we need not be enslaved by the principalities and the powers of this world: money, power, superstition, fear, greed, anxiety, etc. Man is liberated in Christ unto the fullness of humanity. Christ has disclosed and released for us the limitless possibilities of the human spirit. To know what this freedom means and then to exercise it is to have been redeemed.

Q. In what sense therefore, was the Crucifixion a "sacrifice"?

A. In Sacred Scripture, and particularly in the Old Testament, we can find two fundamentally different ideas of sacrifice: cultic (i.e., having reference to worship) and prophetic. The first was prevalent in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) and more specifically in Exodus. In this view of sacrifice a victim is handed over and destroyed as an act of homage to God. Many Catholics probably have this cultic idea in mind when they hear or use the term "sacrifice."

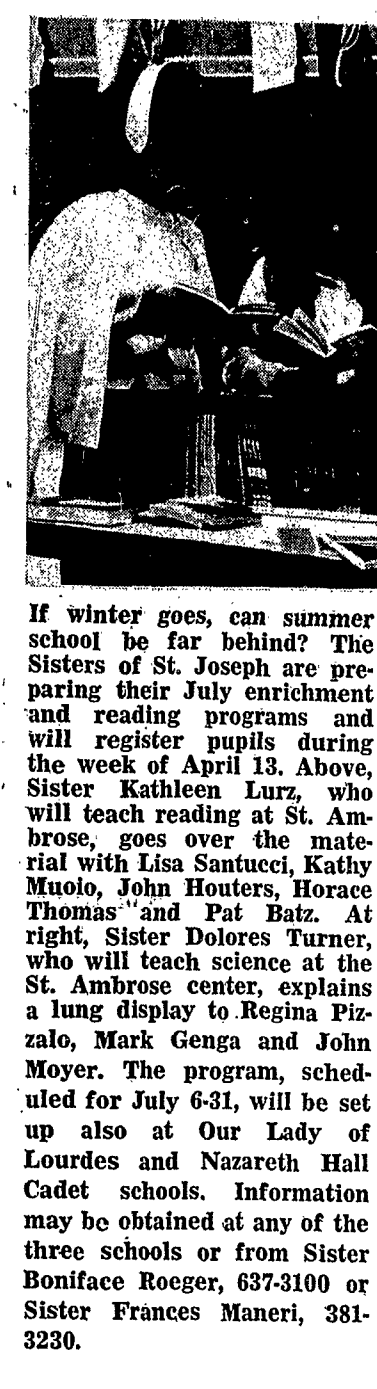
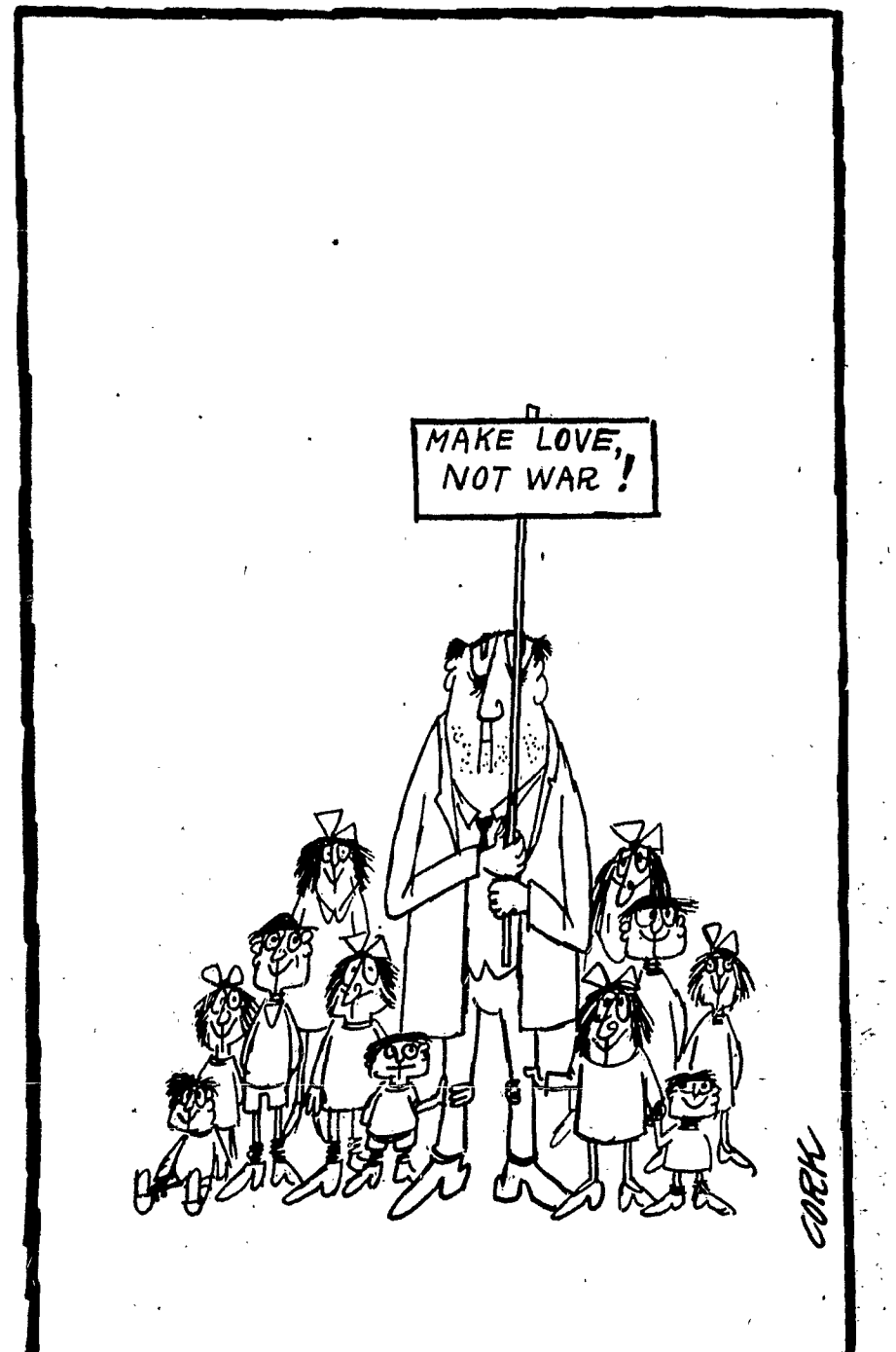
But this cultic concept was superseded by the prophetic idea of sacrifice as martyrdom, or as witnessing. When Jesus characterized himself as the Suffering Servant of God, it was the prophetic idea that was uppermost in his understanding, particularly the notion outlined by the prophet Isaiah.

And this seems to be the way in which the Lord interpreted his whole ministry: "Sacrifice and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body thou hast prepared for me. . . . Lo, I have come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:5 ff.). The author of the epistle concludes: "He abolishes the first (i.e., cultic sacrifice) in order to establish the second (i.e., sacrifice of the heart)."

Christ's death on the cross exemplifies the true meaning and aim of the cultic sacrifices of the Old Law. It is to reestablish harmony between God and man, and such harmony exists wherever the will of God and the moral life of man are one. This is what the Redemption accomplishes: an at-onement.

Jesus went to the cross because his teachings, his activities, and his very personality put him at odds with the religious establishment of his day. He was a threat to its very existence. He announced the coming of the Kingdom of love, joy, peace, justice, and freedom, while many of the religious leaders continued to offer a program of fear, of legal prescriptions, of slavish fidelity to ritual and custom. The clash between Jesus and the leadership was inevitable, and Jesus paid the price of his convictions.

His death on the cross was an act of supreme obedience to the Kingdom of God. Jesus did not embrace the cross for its own sake, nor because the Father was pushing him relentlessly along the way to Calvary. Rather, he saw the cross as the inevitable consequence of his life and work. He could not avoid it without compromising his integrity and without retreating from his solemn mission. (See especially the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 38, para. 3).



If winter goes, can summer school be far behind? The Sisters of St. Joseph are preparing their July enrichment and reading programs and will register pupils during the week of April 13. Above: Sister Kathleen Lurz, who will teach reading at St. Ambrose, goes over the material with Lisa Santucci, Kathy Muelo, John Houters, Horace Thomas and Pat Batz. At right: Sister Dolores Turner, who will teach science at the St. Ambrose center, explains a lung display to Regina Pizzalo, Mark Genga and John Moyer. The program, scheduled for July 6-31, will be set up also at Our Lady of Lourdes and Nazareth Hall Cadet schools. Information may be obtained at any of the three schools or from Sister Boniface Roeper, 637-3100 or Sister Frances Maneri, 381-3230.



We search the world around us. There is a promise there, a promise for our whole human community, our whole selves, our whole cosmos. It is a promise that all things can be made new.

Jesus as Servant and Messiah

By FR. WALTER M. ABBOTT, S.J.

When Jesus rises from death on Easter Sunday, Luke's account presents angels reminding the women who come to the tomb that Jesus had said he "must be handed over to sinful men, be nailed to the Cross and be raised to life on the third day" (24:7). Then Jesus himself is presented explaining to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus "what was said about him in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets" (24:27).

If only Luke, in the last chapter of his Gospel, had given us exactly what Jesus said when he taught his 11 apostles and others to understand how things had been written about him in the Law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the Psalms. The only thing he gives is that Jesus said: "This is what is written: that the Messiah must suffer and be raised from death on the third day, and that in his name the message about repentance and the forgiveness of sins must be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem" (24:46-47).

Now look back to Luke's Chapter 3 where John the Baptist begins his preaching with "Turn away from your sins" (TEV — in older translations the expression is "Repent" but TEV gives you the meaning of the phrase in everyday words). Luke puts in right away there the passage we have already seen from the prophet Isaiah. This is the kind of thing Jesus must have taught the disciples to do.

Now look at Luke's Chapter 4 where Jesus himself reads a passage of Isaiah to the synagogue congregation in Nazareth and tells the people it "has come true today, as you heard it being read." That passage presents a servant of the Lord God engaged in a mission to the poor people, captives, the blind, the oppressed, and it announces the Lord "will save his people."

Notice that when Jesus teaches on the Sabbath in the synagogue of the bigger town of Capernaum the people are "all amazed at the way he taught, for his words had authority" (4:31). But notice that the "teachers of the Law and the Pharisees" have trouble accepting what Jesus says when he goes so far as to forgive sins. They say to themselves, "no man can forgive sins; God alone can!" (5:21).

In Chapter 7 you read how John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he was "the one John said was going to come" or if they should "expect someone else" (7:19). Some commentators think this means John had begun to have doubts about Jesus being the Messiah, but I'm with those who think what John is doing is simply putting pressure on Jesus to come out as the Messiah in a bigger and quicker way.

The answer Jesus gives is equivalently that he is doing all the things indicated by the prophecies about the Messiah: miracles, even the raising of the dead to life (Luke had just recounted the raising from death of the widow's son in Nain), and the preaching of the Good News to the poor. It is as if Jesus says to John, "Man, what more do you want?"

It must have been a great shock to the apostles when Jesus first revealed to them that he had to "suffer much, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law" and "be put to death" (9:22).

Luke presents Jesus making this revelation immediately after his account of Peter acknowledging Jesus as "God's Messiah." He tells us that Jesus also added here that he would "be raised to life on the third day." Jesus asked the disciples to keep quiet about his Messiahship, and it is

Scripture in the Life of the Church Today

obvious that they just didn't grasp what he was saying about dying and rising from the dead.

Recall how those two disciples of Jesus on the road to Emmaus were completely confounded by his death: "and we had hoped that he would be the one who was going to redeem Israel" (24:21).

And notice how Jesus fairly explodes at them: "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said!" Even in what later theologians would describe as the "glorified" state, Jesus can show very human traits.

In all of this Luke is carefully putting on the record what he found in the early Christian accounts about Jesus. This was the material the Christians of his time had to explain: how the expected King and Messiah was actually a suffering servant kind of King and Messiah, how the expected kingdom was not a temporal one but something spiritual, how the King and Messiah actually was destined to die and why. All this and the rising of the King in victory over death was to be shown as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

Love Rejected

By REV. MR. PETER SCHINELLER, S.J.

"Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was." —John 13, 1.

With these words, John the Evangelist begins his account of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Love becomes the dominant theme and only from the viewpoint of love can we understand these events and their significance.

It was because Christ dared to love that he was put to death, and the depth and extent of this love is manifested in his willingness to die for us. We often think abstractly that Christ had to die to redeem us, that his death was destined from eternity to be the means of salvation for us. But in thinking this way we fail to see that the immediate cause of his death was the fact that he proclaimed the good news of God's love for men. In doing this he offended both the religious and government leaders of his time, and eventually was executed.

The gospel of Luke describes Jesus' understanding of his mission in these words:

"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me, he has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, and set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor." (Luke 4, 18-19).

For three years, Christ went about, preaching, teaching, curing people of spiritual and physical ailments. "I came that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness" (John 10, 10). But this love and this life

was not easy for the disciples of Jesus to understand. In fact, before his death and resurrection they just didn't understand. It was still less easy for the Pharisees and teachers of the Law to understand. In fact, they didn't have a glimmer of it. The general expectation of the people was, and for some time had been, so different that we might well feel inclined to absolve Pharisees, teachers and people of any blame in failing to recognize the true nature of Jesus' Kingship and Messiahship.

Yet Jesus himself thought and spoke quite differently. Look at Luke 12:54-56, for example, where he reminds the people how they can tell what the weather will be and then says: "why, then, don't you know the meaning of this present time? It is as if he were saying: 'I've given you all the signs and clues you need. Why don't you recognize the fulfillment of the prophecies in me?'"

The Jerome Biblical Commentary has an interesting sentence about that verse: "Men are not asked to be clever but just to correspond to the preferred aid." The same commentary at 13:8 says: "Jesus does not believe that Israel's final answer to him will be a 'no.'"

We now have to deal with the question of what Jesus himself understood about his Kingship and Messiahship and what his demands on his hearers really meant.

Love Rejected

were rejected by so many of Christ's contemporaries.

With this perspective of rejected love, we can better understand the meaning of the events of Holy Week. Christ's death did not only come about because of the will and purpose of God, but also because he proclaimed the freedom and love of God's kingdom, and thus became a dangerous element in both religious and civil society. He dared to call Herod, the civil leader, a fox, and he called many of the religious leaders hypocrites, and whitened sepulchers.

As he went about proclaiming the kingdom of God, he had to warn his followers that they too would be persecuted. He shared with them his fears about his own suffering and death.

It is no different today for Christians who dare to love and proclaim justice. Those who spoke out against Nazism, those who call our attention to racism and those in Brazil and Paraguay who speak out against the oppressive government — these Christians suffer persecution, imprisonment and often death.

If we look at the sufferings of Christ, we can begin to see that a triumphant love becomes manifest. We must look beyond the hill of the cross to the power of his resurrection. Then it becomes apparent that even in his suffering and death, Christ was not separated from the love of God. Stronger than the forces of death and oppression, is the liberating power of God, as manifest in the resurrection of Christ.

Thus for the Christian, the symbol and reality of the crucifix become more than a sign of defeat and death. In the light of God's overpowering love, revealed in the resurrection of Christ, the cross serves to remind us that even in our own suffering and rejected love, the love of God is present to sustain us.

Worship and The World

By FR. JOSEPH M. CHAMPLIN

"Why do we now recite the 'Lord, I am not worthy' only once at Communion time?"

Vatican II's Liturgy Constitution decreed the reformed rite "should be distinguished by a noble simplicity; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by needless repetitions." Article 34. The mentality of medieval times multiplied words and repeated gestures (bows, crosses, genuflections), judging that somehow the intensity of value of our worship increased with the length or frequency of our prayers. We feel differently today. Say it once, but with meaning and care might be a general norm for worship in the modern world.

"If this is true, why do we still repeat six times 'Lord, have mercy' at the beginning of Mass?"

This portion of the introductory rites actually represents a residue from litany of the past. These included a long list of different petitions or invocations with a standard response to each by the entire congregation. Even now when the "Lord, have mercy" is incorporated within the third form of our revised penitential service it assumes the nature of a litany. "You were sent to heal the contrite: Lord, have mercy." The people respond: "Lord, have mercy."

"Does that explain the repetitious 'Lamb of God' before Communion?"

Partially, perhaps. A more significant point here, however, is the larger host suggested for use in our Eucharist and the time required to break this sacred bread into smaller particles for communicants. The rubric states: "This may be repeated until the breaking of the bread is finished, but the last phrase is always 'Grant us peace.'"

"Why have they changed the wording of 'Lord, I am not worthy'?"

We grow constantly in our understanding of the Mass. Theologians today commonly hold the Lord's Body and Blood in Communion heals and helps not just the soul of an individual, but his total being, his entire person. Thus we now express our faith in the fact that "it" shall be healed through the Eucharist rather than saying only "my soul" will be nourished by Holy Communion.

"The priest in our church inserts an additional sentence, 'Happy are those who are called to his supper,' as he holds the host before us. What is the significance of that?"

The Mass is a special, sacred, holy banquet. The General Instruction to the Roman Missal indicates this quite clearly: "Since the eucharistic celebration is a paschal meal, the body and blood of the Lord should be received as spiritual food in accord with his command." Paragraph 56. The inclusion of this reference to God's supper focuses our attention on the following truth (General Instruction, par. 8): "The table of the Lord is the table of God's word and of Christ's body, and from it the faithful are instructed and refreshed." It also connects the here and now eucharistic banquet with the still to come heavenly supper.

"Does that mean we no longer believe in the Mass as a sacrifice?"

Not at all. The Mass is both sacrifice and sacrament, a sacrificial meal, the memorial of his death and resurrection which Jesus instituted at the Last Supper. It seems strange that present critics of the reformed liturgy maintain this new rite destroys or at least minimizes the sacrifice notion.

"GO HEAD" Co
Father EVE

FATHER TORNEY

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