

AN ENIGMA OF THE GOSPEL

In speaking of the Last Supper, the Gospel relates an enigmatic and even disturbing incident: Christ gives Judas a sop of bread to eat and tells him, "That thou doest, do quickly"; and at that moment, Satan enters into Judas, who then leaves the room. This gives the impression that Christ took upon himself the responsibility for the betrayal, *quod absit*.

The explanation of the enigma is as follows: nothing can happen counter to the Will of God; the fact that something happens means that God has "willed" it. Now God cannot expressly will a particular evil, but He must tolerate in a certain fashion evil as such, since this is included in the — partly paradoxical — limitlessness of the Divine All-Possibility. For this reason, God cannot not allow some particular evil, but it should be said that He "permits" it and not that He "wills" it; and He permits it, not inasmuch as it is an evil, but inasmuch as it is an indirect and inevitable contribution to a good. Christ willed, certainly not the betrayal in itself, but the Redemption.¹

It remains to be known why Christ acted as mentioned above, for his acceptance of the evil could have been silent; now it could have been so in principle, but not in fact, and that is the root of the problem. It was necessary to show the world that the devil has no power over God, that he can only apparently oppose God and thanks to a Divine Will; that nothing can be done outside the Will of the Sovereign Good; that if the powers of evil oppose — or believe they can oppose — the Divinity, this can only be in virtue of a Divine decision; whence the injunction "That thou doest, do quickly." Thus, the devil does not even have the power to betray without a Divine causation, metaphysically speaking; in the Gospel account, this power escapes him, therefore he could not triumph. And if, in this account, the devil enters into Judas, that is because he obtained the freedom to do so — a subtle entanglement of causes, but ontologically plausible. What is ill-sounding in the salvific drama of Christianity is that the Redemption seems to depend on a traitor; it was necessary to deprive the adversary of this satisfaction. Be that as it may, the fact that Christianity had need of Judas implies — and this seems to be the height of paradox — that this traitor could not be a fundamentally bad man, as the popular belief

¹ Let us recall here that Saint Augustine, speaking of the sin of Adam and Eve, exclaimed: "*felix culpa!*" since, he thought, this sin was the cause of the Redemption.

would have it; and in fact, he was not, as is proven by his repentance and his despair.² Neither were the other two accused, Caiphas and Pilate, as black as they are painted; for the former, the extenuating circumstance was his orthodoxy, and for the latter, his good will. We would even go so far as to say that their necessary cooperation in the Redemption implies that in the final analysis all three were forgiven; only this conclusion, so it seems to us, can protect Christianity from the possible blame for depending upon criminal causes and, so to speak, for being founded upon them. And we think here of this prayer of Christ: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"; now it is impossible to assume, in good logic, that a prayer of Christ would not have been granted.

It would have been a kind of victory if the Church had instituted a feast of the three great Pardons, but it could not — for moral reasons — "allow itself this luxury," because it would have given *carte blanche* to all evildoers; de facto, not de jure, of course. It is for this reason that Christ had to say, speaking of Judas, that "it had been good for that man if he had not been born"; this does not mean that Judas is in the eternal hell that Christian theology imagines, but it may mean that Judas, while not being damned, must remain in purgatory until the end of the world.

Caiphas could be blamed for not having been sensitive to the divine nature of Christ, but besides his Mosaic orthodoxy, he had also as an extenuating circumstance the fact that Christ was never concerned with making himself understood. In addition, Christ was not interested in the "prescriptions of men," even if they were plausible; what mattered to him was solely the sincerity of our love for God. This is not exactly the perspective of Moses, and the Pharisees cannot be blamed for not adhering to it at the level that was theirs, any more than one can blame the authorities of Brahmanism for not having converted to the Buddha's perspective.

It could be argued that the Jews have had to suffer as heirs of Judas and Caiphas, but it could as well be argued that the Christians as heirs of Pilate³ — through the Renaissance — have had, and still have, to suffer by undergoing the consequences of the "humanist" but finally inhuman world they created

² If Judas had been what is thought, he would on the contrary have been proud of his crime. At the very moment of the betrayal, Jesus called him "my friend"; in this expression there was perhaps a glimmer of the Divine pardon.

³ That is to say that Pilate was the representative of Tiberius, of whom Charlemagne as well as Constantine were the heirs; it is worth noting that for the Moslem, the Christian is "rumi," that is, "Roman."

at the time of the Borgias and which they continue to create in our day;⁴ incontestably, the Renaissance was a betrayal, although it also comprised some positive elements, which however could not compensate for its comprehensive error.

In order to understand Christ's attitude towards "the scribes and the pharisees," one has to keep in mind the following: at that time, Judaism was undergoing a phase of "ossification" comparable to that of Brahmanism at the time of the Buddha, and this was providential in both cases. The history of mankind is a *lilâ*, a "divine play": possibilities in turn have to manifest and exhaust themselves. Be that as it may, Caiphas and his partisans can be blamed for not wanting to acknowledge the decadence of their surroundings which was incontestable, otherwise Christ would not have stigmatized it; and it is certainly not for the first time in the history of Israel that a prophet hurls thunderbolts at a corrupted and hypocritical clergy.

Like Al-Hallaj — that "Christly" manifestation in the midst of Islam — Christ manifested his celestial nature without being concerned with making it intelligible; he incarnated his destiny and he wished to be that which he had to be in the economy of religious and mystical possibilities. A founder of religion personifies a spiritual perspective and a path of salvation; he expresses himself in a direct and quasi-absolute fashion and need not make the commentaries which theologians and wise men will make later.

"And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." This concerns not only the Jews and the pagans, but also the Christians, as history proves.⁵ Christ, like Moses, put God above man; the Renaissance, like Tiberius, put man in the place of God; whereas Christ had said: "Thy kingdom come!"

⁴ It could be objected that the Eastern Church was not responsible for the Renaissance, which is true, but the Orthodox countries were dragged into its orbit by Peter the Great. In fact, Eastern Europe is part of the modern world, mentally as well as materially; Greece was speedily brought to heel after the departure of the Turks.

⁵ Let us remark that there are orthodox Jews who, while rejecting Christianity, and in flagrant opposition to the Talmud, admit that Jesus was a misunderstood prophet, of Eliatic and Essenian type.