

# CHRISTIAN JOY

By PAUL EDWARDS

THERE were others who said mockingly, "They have had their fill of new wine".<sup>1</sup> When after the descent of the Holy Ghost the Church made its first public appearance and proclaimed its message for the first time, the response of many of its hearers was, as so often since, one of incredulity and cynicism. The cynics, as always, found an easy formula with which to deflate the admiration of the more ingenuous: this noisy enthusiasm had come out of the wine pot.

There we have what contemporary jargon might call the 'image' projected by the first Christians before the disdainful eyes of their contemporaries. They appeared, not as wan followers of the 'pale Galilean', but as men possessed by an uninhibited exhilaration. Nor did this quality speedily evaporate. Throughout the deeds and writings of the Apostles it bubbles to the surface continually. The first Christians 'took their share of food with gladness'.<sup>2</sup> They spoke, whether to the people or to the Sanhedrin, with 'boldness' and an irrepressible enthusiasm. 'It is impossible for us to refrain from speaking of what we have seen and heard'.<sup>3</sup> Persecution only enhanced their already high morale. 'They left the presence of the Council rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer'.<sup>4</sup> The sermons of St. Peter in the first chapters of the Acts, the conduct and words of Stephen, the whirlwind apostolate of St. Paul are inspired with the same *élan*.

The Apostles' letters breathe the same spirit. So often in the Epistles, after they have written their first salutation, the note of joyful confidence rings out like a trumpet-call. Thus Peter: 'See how all the gifts that make for life and holiness in us belong to his divine power, come to us through fuller knowledge of him, whose own glory and sovereignty have drawn us to himself! Through him God has bestowed on us high and treasured promises; you are to share the divine nature . . .'.<sup>5</sup> St. Paul: 'I give thanks to my God for all my memories of you, happy at all times in the prayer I offer for all of you . . . Nor am I less confident that he who has inspired this

<sup>1</sup> Acts 2,13.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2,47.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 4,20.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 5,41.

<sup>5</sup> Pet 1,3-4.

generosity in you will bring it to perfection, ready for the day when Jesus Christ comes.'<sup>1</sup> St. John: 'Our message concerns that Word, who is life...'<sup>2</sup> These examples are chosen almost literally at random. The Apostles are flushed, not with wine, but with triumphant conviction.

Often our reflections on the early Church afford us much matter for self criticism. The alacrity with which those early Christians accepted the gospel, the eagerness with which they endeavoured to recast their lives on a Christian model, the courage which faced not only bitter unpopularity, but martyrdom: all these heroic achievements reproach our own faintheartedness and tepidity. 'They have had their fill of good wine'. Is this the image Christians still project? Or do our humanist contemporaries receive the impression that the grapes of Christianity are sour, that its austere doctrine and exacting precepts have set our teeth permanently on edge? To ponder the exultant confidence of the Apostles, to examine its roots and weigh its causes may help us not only to understand what the gospel of Christ meant to them, but to attune our own selves more accurately and more receptively to the Christian message.

To appreciate Christian joy we must survey its Old Testament origins. Christianity is a flower which burst into bloom in the sunshine of the Incarnation, but whose roots are deeply embedded in the rich soil of the Old Testament, reaching down to the book of Genesis. In the account of creation, God's sublime pleasure in his work is impressed upon us by the regular reiteration 'God saw it and found it Good'. This joy is expressed also in mysterious fashion by the Book of Proverbs. 'I was at his side, a master workman, my delight increasing with each day.'<sup>3</sup> The vast, complex, harmonised work of God culminates in the formation of man. Man is part of the world but is appointed its Master. 'Let us put him in command'.<sup>4</sup> Man is part of the world but made in the image of God. Himself part of creation, by privilege of his Godlike nature he stands apart from it, can understand, appreciate and dominate it: 'The Lord God brought them to Adam to see what he would call them.' Indeed, Adam dwelt in a 'garden of delight.'

The story then takes the sombre turn we know so well. Adam himself destroyed the harmonious relations he had enjoyed with God and the rest of creation. Of the two pictures of Adam, the first of Adam in the 'garden of delight' and then of Adam parted from

<sup>1</sup> Phil 1,3-6.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Jn 1,1.

<sup>3</sup> Prov 8,31.

<sup>4</sup> Gen 1,26.

the garden by a sword of fire, it is frequently the latter which seems more typical of the Old Testament. The book tells a grim story. Adam falls; Cain murders his brother; the universal iniquity of man provokes the flood. There are the incredible murmurings and misdeeds of the Israelites in the desert, 'They must needs give way to their cravings in the wilderness, challenge God's power there in the desert.'<sup>1</sup> There is the political and religious confusion of the era of the judges 'when men lived by the best light they had'.<sup>2</sup> Saul disintegrates morally. The wise Solomon lapses into idolatry. The kingdom splits into two, of which the Northern Kingdom practises idolatry, founders politically and disappears into exile: 'Such was their doom, who had no sooner escaped from Egypt and from the power of Pharaoh, than they wronged the God who had rescued them by worshipping alien gods instead'.<sup>3</sup> The Southern Kingdom subjected to a similar wave of domestic idolatry, and foreign conquest sees its capital razed, its Temple desecrated and its people transported: 'Enemy hands had set fire to the Lord's house, pulled down Jerusalem's walls, burnt its towers to the ground, destroyed all that was of price. Those who escaped massacre were carried off to Babylon, where they must live as slaves to the king and his heirs . . .'<sup>4</sup> The Jews barely manage against odds to preserve their faith and to survive as a political and religious entity. From this point of view the story is that of the victory of the serpent.

But the scriptures opened with a picture of God in the exercise of His omnipotence. 'Naught that is but God made it; he, the source of all right, the king that reigns for ever unconquerable.'<sup>5</sup> Was such as He to be defeated by the serpent? In the moment of its passing victory the serpent's everlasting degradation is decreed, 'thou shall crawl on thy belly and eat dust all thy life long.'<sup>6</sup> The serpent shall be crushed – and by a human heel. Man, buoyed up by the loving power of God can look forward to his victory over evil. 'No means would thou neglect, Lord, to magnify thy people and win thee renown; never wouldst thou leave them unregarded, but *always and everywhere* camest to their side.'<sup>7</sup>

By the flood evil men are destroyed and the world given to Noe, 'the man who was accepted as faultless in that generation.'<sup>8</sup> As the generations pass, it is Abraham who is selected to be the founder of a race that shall be peculiarly God's people and shall bring a great

<sup>1</sup> Ps 105,14.

<sup>2</sup> Jg 21,14.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kg 17,7.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Chr 36,19-20.

<sup>5</sup> Sir 18,1.

<sup>6</sup> Gen 3,14.

<sup>7</sup> Wis 19,20.

<sup>8</sup> Gen 6,9.

blessing to all mankind. The story of the Old Testament is the history of this people, of its selection by God, its protection by God, the mighty favours heaped upon it by God and its confident expectation of the culminating blessing of the Messiah. The Israelites fall into slavery but they are rescued by God: 'sheltered by thy hand, they passed on their way, a whole nation of them, strange marvels seen in their passage; lighthearted as horse at pasture or frisking lamb, they chanted praises to thee, Lord, their rescuer.'<sup>1</sup> In the promised land they fall into political and religious confusion and are rescued by God's anointed kings. David leads them to unity, power, prosperity and a steadfast fidelity to God, of which Solomon's temple is the symbol. When they fall once more into idolatry God purifies them in the fire of the Babylonian invasion and captivity and then restores them to their country. 'When the Lord gave back Sion her banished sons, we walked like men in a dream; in every mouth was laughter, joy was on every tongue.'<sup>2</sup>

Vividly aware of these manifest blessings of their past, expecting greater blessings still to come, the Jews practised a joyful religion. 'I will go to the altar of God, the giver of triumphant happiness'.<sup>3</sup> No matter what might befall them, God's mercy and power would protect them. 'What though the fig tree never bud, the vine yield no fruit . . . still will I make my boast in the Lord, triumph in the deliverance God sends me'.<sup>4</sup> That they are God's chosen people is the foundation of their confidence and the psalmists ecstatically hymn the fact. 'Learn that it is the Lord, no other, who is God, his we are, he it was who made us; we are his own people'.<sup>5</sup>

Because God has so cherished them Israel felt an obligation to rejoice; their joy in their God was a due they owed Him. 'Pay to the Lord the homage of your rejoicing'.<sup>6</sup> Not to do so was a punishable offence. 'Because thou wouldst not obey the Lord thy God in happiness and content . . . thou must learn now to obey those enemies the Lord will send to conquer thee'.<sup>7</sup> The joyfulness of the religion of Israel is plainly apparent from even the most hasty perusal of Israel's hymn-book, the psalms. Some of them are paeans of joy. 'Come, friends, rejoice we in the Lord's honour; cry we out merrily to God'.<sup>8</sup> 'The Lord reigns as king; let the earth be glad in it, let the isles, the many isles, rejoice'.<sup>9</sup> Even the pitiful cry for help which

<sup>1</sup> Wis 19,8.<sup>2</sup> Ps 125,1.<sup>3</sup> Ps 42,4.<sup>4</sup> Hab 3,17-18.<sup>5</sup> Ps 99,3. Cf. Isai 42,23.<sup>6</sup> Ps 99,2.<sup>7</sup> Deut 28,17. Cf. Ps. 80,1.<sup>8</sup> Ps 94.<sup>9</sup> Ps 96.

some of them contain is eventually resolved into a glad confidence in God. Thus the 21st psalm, *'My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'* with its prophecy of the Passion, ends with eleven verses of glad anticipation of God's help and describes the undying fame that God's intervention shall find.

Nor were the thoughts of Israel wholly on the past. Greater things lay in the future. The rich promises of the prophets were yet to be fulfilled. 'See where I create new heavens and a new earth; old things shall be remembered no longer, have no place in men's thoughts. Joy of yours, pride of yours, this new creation shall be; joy of mine, pride of mine, Jerusalem and her folk create anew'.<sup>1</sup> The great King was still to come: 'Ever wider shall his dominion spread, endlessly at peace; he will sit on David's kingly throne, to give it lasting foundations of justice and right'.<sup>2</sup> Israel rejoiced not only in the recollection of God's benefits, but in the anticipation of yet greater benefits which would arrive with the Messiah.

From its roots in Genesis the flower of Christian joy has pushed its way into the air and light of the New Testament. There it buds, expands and blooms: 'Joy and gladness shall be thine'<sup>3</sup>, says the angel to Zachary, telling of the conception of the forerunner. 'My spirit has found joy in God', cries the Mother of the Messiah when the conception of the Messiah himself is announced. 'I bring you good news of a great rejoicing' says the angel heralding his birth.<sup>4</sup> The Magi led by His star to his dwelling place are 'glad beyond measure'.<sup>5</sup>

Joy in the advent of the Messiah is the keynote of Luke's Infancy narrative. It is adorned with three canticles, hymns of praise which burst from the lips of Mary, Zachary and Simeon, as they see Israel's hopes moving to fulfilment and greet the 'Son of the most High', the 'sceptre of salvation' and the 'light which shall give revelation to the gentiles'. This note of joy in the coming of Christ, which dominates the first chapters of St. Luke recurs throughout his gospel: 'The whole multitude rejoiced over the marvellous works he did'.<sup>6</sup>

Zacheus 'came down with all haste and gladly made him welcome'<sup>7</sup>; and the Apostles 'went back full of joy to Jerusalem'.<sup>8</sup>

The other Synoptists made it equally clear that the Gospel is the 'tidings of great joy'. The essential message of St. Matthew is that

<sup>1</sup> Isai 65,17.

<sup>2</sup> Isai 9,7. Cf. Jer 39,21.

<sup>3</sup> Lk 1,14.

<sup>4</sup> Lk 2,10.

<sup>5</sup> Mt 2,10.

<sup>6</sup> Lk 13,17.

<sup>7</sup> Lk 19,6.

<sup>8</sup> Lk 24,52.

the Messiah has established the Kingdom of heaven on earth, and that its citizenship is available to all nations. The last verses of his gospel give lucid expression to this triumphant accomplishment of the Kingdom and its unshakeable permanence. 'All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me . . . and behold I am with you all the days that are coming until the consummation of the world'.

The gospel of St. Mark is especially the gospel of the miracles of Christ. These miracles, like the deeds of God in the Old Testament, bear witness to His presence, His power and His love. Their narration is intended to produce a joy in the hearer which echoes the joy of those who were healed by Christ.

St. John presents the Saviour in terms of light and life. The aura of joy that Christ brings with Him is rendered explicit by the Baptist, 'the bridegroom's friend who stands by and listens to him, rejoices too, rejoices at hearing the bridegroom's voice; and this joy is now mine in full measure'.<sup>1</sup> Permanent joy is promised by Christ. 'One day I shall see you again, and then your hearts shall be glad, and your gladness will be one which nobody can take away from you'.<sup>2</sup> Here it is revealed that we are to share Christ's own joy. 'All this I have told you, so that my joy may be yours, and the measure of your joy may be filled up'.<sup>3</sup>

The Acts of the Apostles show us this promise implemented. Exhilarated by the Resurrection and the descent of the Holy Ghost the Apostles and their converts pass their days with 'gladness and simplicity of heart'.<sup>4</sup> Even the rigours of a scourging cannot extinguish their joy. Their message when accepted always brings joy with it. Philip's mission to 'one of the cities of Samaria' evokes 'great rejoicing in that city'.<sup>5</sup> The eunuch from Ethiopia encounters Philip, is instructed and baptized and goes 'on his way rejoicing.'

The Apostles in their letters recognise it as their mission to bring joy. 'If we are writing to you now,' says John, 'it is so that joy may be yours in full measure'.<sup>6</sup> St. Paul is vehement in his wish that his Christians should rejoice. 'Joy to you in the Lord at all times; once again I wish you joy'.<sup>7</sup> Joy St. Paul considers to be an indispensable element in the effects of Christian faith. 'The kingdom of God . . . means rightness of heart, finding our peace and joy in the Holy Spirit'.<sup>8</sup> 'May God . . . fill you with all joy and peace in believing'.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jn 3,29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 16,22.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 15,11.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2,46.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 8,9.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Jn 1,4.

<sup>7</sup> Phil 3,1.

<sup>8</sup> Rom 14,17.

<sup>9</sup> Rom 15,13.

When he enumerates the characteristics of the Christian, joy springs to his mind as one of the first.<sup>1</sup>

To appreciate the insistence of the Apostles upon the joy of the Christian, we must recollect as vividly as we can the harshness of their circumstances. Whether they were Jews or pagans, their conversion had often cut them off from their families and friends. Ostracism often gave way to persecution. 'Remember those early days . . . and the hard probation of suffering you went through,' says the Epistle to the Hebrews; 'There were times when you yourselves were publicly exposed to calumny and persecution . . . You showed your sympathy with those who were in bonds; and when you were robbed of your goods you took it cheerfully.'<sup>2</sup> 'The sufferings of Christ overflow into our own lives', says St. Paul to the Corinthians;<sup>3</sup> 'You know well enough', echoes St. Peter, 'that the brotherhood you belong to pays all the world over the same tribute of suffering';<sup>4</sup> and St. John says to the Churches in Asia, 'I share your ill-usage, your royal dignity and your endurance'.<sup>5</sup>

The sufferings of the Apostles' lives are described at length by St. Paul in 2 Cor 11, 23-33. He rehearses them more briefly in Chapter VI. 'We have to show great patience, in times of affliction, of need, of difficulty, under the lash, in prison, in the midst of tumult, when we are tired out, sleepless and fasting.' But they are sad men 'that rejoice continually.' As St. Peter and St. John had returned rejoicing from their scourging, so St. Paul travelled his *via dolorosa* in the same spirit. 'I am glad of my sufferings'.<sup>6</sup> 'I am full of encouragement, nay, I cannot contain myself for happiness, in the midst of all these trials of mine'.<sup>7</sup> It is the same spirit that they ask of their followers. 'Rather rejoice when you share in some measure the sufferings of Christ',<sup>8</sup> says St. Peter. 'Consider yourselves happy indeed, my brethren, when you encounter trials of every sort',<sup>9</sup> urges St. James.

But what is all this joy about? Why do the Apostles expect joy to be an important and obvious part of their response to their message? We examined earlier the joy in God which was a part of the Jewish religion. This is the foundation. But on that foundation God had swiftly erected an edifice whose splendour had surpassed even the great expectations of the Old Testament. The Messiah has come and has declared himself in the triumph of the Resurrection. He offers

<sup>1</sup> Gal 5,22.

<sup>2</sup> Heb 10,32-34.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor 1,5; I. 5,9.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Pet 5,9.

<sup>5</sup> Apoc 1,9.

<sup>6</sup> Col 1,24.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Cor 7,4.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Pet 4,13.

<sup>9</sup> Jas 1,2.

us deliverance from sin and the gift of the Holy Ghost. 'It is God who has raised him up to His own right hand, as the prince and Saviour, who is to bring Israel repentance and remission of sins'.<sup>1</sup> This is the heart of the gospel, the good tidings, as we see it condensed in the early sermons of the Acts of the Apostles. 'God has raised up this man, Jesus, from the dead; we are all witnesses of it. And now exalted at God's right hand, he has claimed from his Father his promise to bestow the Holy Spirit, and he has poured out that Spirit'.<sup>2</sup>

The minds of the Apostles are dominated by the events of Easter, the Ascension and Pentecost. They have their vivid memories of their years with Christ, 'how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, so that he went about doing good, and curing all those who were under the Devil's tyranny, with God at his side'.<sup>3</sup> But those were their schooldays. They had graduated in the shattering experience of the Passion and the Resurrection. Their master had shown himself, as He said, able to lay down His life and take it up again. Israel's joy in God rested on traditional recollections of the demonstrations of God's love for his people. The experiences of the Apostles were immediate and direct. They had known Christ intimately, had been harrowed by His arrest and death and had been personal witnesses of the triumph of the Resurrection. The radiant light of Easter Day illuminated their minds and hearts permanently. To them, Christ was not only the Master who had risen from the dead sometime in the past, but the Lord already reigning in Heaven and sending his Holy Spirit upon them. Moved by that Spirit, they begin to proclaim the great mysteries in which they have participated. Their purpose is to instil into their converts a lively sense of these events; or rather, not of the events, but of the Person of Christ, who has risen and is reigning, and transforms the lives of his followers.

This last point needs heavy emphasis. The story of Christ and the significance of His life for ours are two aspects of the Apostles' message which they present together in a concrete unity. When the Apostles proclaim Christ the Saviour, Christ our Teacher, Christ as reigning in Heaven, they are announcing that we are saved, that the Divine wisdom is offering to guide us, that the freedom of the city of God is open to us. They are proclaiming that the Divine light has come into our lives, that Divine life is offered to us,

<sup>1</sup> Acts 5,31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 2,32-34.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 10,38.



that the Holy Spirit is given to us, that we are the children of God.

It is the significance of Christ's life for our lives that should inspire our joy. The Jew is to rejoice because the Messiah has come; the Gentile, because faith in Christ renders him equally with the Jew the object of God's love; the woman, because the grace of eternal life belongs to both male and female;<sup>1</sup> the slave because in common with his master, he has a 'Master in Heaven, who makes no distinction between man and man'.<sup>2</sup> The gospel is good news to all men.

It will be argued, of course, that there is a radical objection to our thesis. The gospels show a Messiah rejected by the chosen people; and the Christian must himself follow the path to Calvary.<sup>3</sup> The life of a Christian is a warfare, a warfare of attrition, in which he must wearily throw back assault after assault from the Devil, the World and the Flesh. In this world he is an outcast and an exile, and can only cling on manfully to the hope of joy hereafter. Is not this sombre picture a much more realistic presentation of the actual condition of the Christian?

The answer to this objection is the perspective in which the Church and Christ himself view the Crucifixion. Our Lord's prediction of the Passion looks beyond the crucifixion to the resurrection.<sup>4</sup> They foretell the Passion as leading to the Resurrection. Whenever the shadow of the cross looms up there is immediately apparent behind it the shining certainty of the resurrection. The liturgy sets the crucifixion in the same perspective. On Maundy Thursday we pray in the collect, 'grant us the fruits of thy mercy, so that Our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his passion gave to each the recompense they deserved, may free us from the guilt of past sin and bestow on us the grace of His resurrection'. And the same prayer is used again in the Liturgy of Good Friday. At Mass the Passion is linked not only to the Resurrection but also to the Ascension, 'in memory of the passion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ'. In the canon it is explicitly stated that we hold the three mysteries together in our mind, 'calling to mind His blessed Passion and His resurrection from the place of the dead, as well as His Ascension into the glory of Heaven'.

The Apostles seem not to have grasped Our Lord's prediction of His death and resurrection. In spite of His warnings, His arrest and crucifixion seem to have thrown them into complete mental and

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet 3,7.

<sup>2</sup> Eph 6,9.

<sup>3</sup> Lk 14,27; 1 Cor 1,23; Gal 5,14.

<sup>4</sup> Mt 16,21; 17,20; 20,19.

emotional disarray. 'We had hoped that it was he who was to deliver Israel'.<sup>1</sup> How bewildered they sound. To dwell on the thought of Our Lord's passion divorced from the Resurrection is to cultivate in ourselves the same confusion as existed among the Apostles between Our Lord's death and His resurrection. It is to see the Saviour of the World a rejected and defeated man, to think that he failed to save the world. The same faulty focus will show us Christ's message steadily rejected in each generation, His Church persecuted and 'the scanty triumphs grace has won'. Are not these things true? They are true, and misleading as truth can be when it is not the whole truth.

St. Paul thought of the cross as something of which he could make a proud display. To Jew and Gentile the cross may be discouraging and nonsensical, 'but to us who have been called, Jew and Gentile alike, Christ the power of God, Christ the wisdom of God'.<sup>2</sup> The cross is a banner, a symbol of victory, under which the Christian takes a proud and confident stand. 'It was God's pleasure . . . through him to win back all things whether on earth or in heaven, into union with himself, making peace with them through his blood, shed on the cross'.<sup>3</sup>

In the passion narrative, Christ is the hero dominating each scene, overcoming the weakness of His human nature in the garden, putting the Sanhedrin, Pilate and Herod in their place by His aloof silence. He breaks that silence to announce to Caiaphas His Divine nature, to Pilate His Kingship. On the road to Calvary He is too weak to carry His cross, but He re-directs the pity of the women onlookers to themselves. On the cross He promises His fellow victim entry into Paradise and exercises His royal rights as King of Heaven.

The earliest representations of the crucifixion depict Christ on the cross, in the words of Sir Kenneth Clark, 'standing erect and frontal, with no indication of pain or death'. They present 'the Incarnate Word upright and free from pain'. It is often conjectured that the early Christians did not illustrate the sufferings of Christ because they could not bear the thought of them. Comparison with the liturgy would suggest that the reason is their preoccupation with Christ victorious on the cross rather than suffering on the cross. Calvary was a victory. The Preface of the Cross takes a cheerful satisfaction in the fact that the Devil having used a tree for Adam's fall should then be hoist with his own petard, 'he who conquered

<sup>1</sup> Lk 24,21.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 1,14.

<sup>3</sup> Col 1,19.

through the tree, on the tree also might be conquered'. During the Good Friday ceremonies the choir chants of 'the glorious battle . . . telling how the World's Redeemer slain as a victim won the Day'. Calvary was a triumph. It accomplished our redemption. It is the ineffable proof of God's love for us. It demonstrates the irresistible power of Christ, who surrendered Himself into the hands of His enemies, allowed them to do their worst, and then confounded them by reappearing from the tomb, possessed of His living body. Unless we see Calvary in this light, we are seeing it as the demoralised disciples saw it before Easter Day.

This is also true of the history of the Church and our own difficulties in leading a Christian life. If we are dismayed by the apparently small success of the Church in winning men to belief in Him, or by scandals within, then we are perpetuating the mistake of the Apostles. 'Was it not to be expected that the Christ should undergo these sufferings and enter too into his glory'?<sup>1</sup>, the risen Christ rebuked them. The Church is Christ's and we are Christ's. 'They will pay the same attention to your words as to mine'.<sup>2</sup> 'You shall indeed drink of my cup',<sup>3</sup> he says to James and John. The Church must tread the same hard path as its Master, but this path is really a royal highroad laid down by God, leading to enthronement with Christ, which was what James and John sought.

There is a whole book of the scripture devoted to this subject. It is the final book, the Apocalypse. The seven churches to whom it is addressed are under assault. They suffer from various kinds of persecution from without, from false teachers within and their own mortal weakness. The vision of Christ is sent to rally them. He comes with a message to each church, and each message concludes with words of victory. Then, in a series of tableaux is presented the triumph of the Church and the destruction of her enemies. The elders of the Church are seen crowned with gold around the throne of God. The faithful who have endured stand in the Lamb's presence in white robes hymning the eternal power of God. The destruction of the enemies of God is fearsomely depicted as the breaking of the seals bring war, famine, and death, and the sounding of the trumpets let loose plagues far, far worse than those that afflicted Egypt. The great city of Babylon in all its splendour is wiped out. The emphasis here on death and destruction and its detailed elaboration in so many fearful forms may appear to us as ominous threats. But

<sup>1</sup> Lk 24,26.

<sup>2</sup> Jn 15,20.

<sup>3</sup> Mt 20,23.

they are not. They are reassurances. They illustrate the irresistible power of God to accomplish his designs, and the inevitable and crushing defeat of the forces of evil. Having beheld the new heaven and the new earth and the new Jerusalem, the seer receives Christ's final message. It is 'I am coming soon'. The Christian should have a sense of the inevitability and even imminence of Christ's total triumph, a triumph in which we shall share. At the time of His death the Apostles could not see Christ's death as leading to the glory of the Resurrection. But it did. We may not now be able to see in the limited successes and many apparent defeats of the Church of Christ, the approach of its resounding victory. But it is on the way.

The life of the Christian is a warfare, but war with total victory in sight. Among the many gifts and privileges bestowed upon us by Christ is that of helping to bring the victory about. In the mysterious economy of salvation, although the issue is decided and Christ has prevailed, we do not take part only in His victory parade, but in the battle. We fight and endure and shall overcome. 'We face death at every moment . . . Yet in all this we are conquerors, through him who has granted us his love'.<sup>1</sup>

The devotion of the Christian to the cross does not mean that Christianity is a sorrowful cult. The truth is precisely the opposite. The Christian has the soundest of reasons for rejoicing. That reason is Christ. Israel saw God's loving kindness in the deeds He had performed for them. We see God's love expressed in Christ who is God become one of us out of love for us. He has lived among us. He has taught us His truth. He has died for us. He has demonstrated His power by submitting to death and triumphing over it in His resurrection. He has taken possession of the Kingdom of Heaven, whose citizenship He has already conferred upon us. We are His by baptism, by our membership of His Church. We are set apart and sanctified by the reception of His sacraments and protected by His sovereign power. 'Neither death nor life, no angels or principalities or powers, neither what is present nor what is to come, no force whatever . . . will be able to separate us from the Love of God which comes to us in Christ Jesus, Our Lord'.<sup>2</sup>

It is the last evidence of the joyfulness of Christianity that even suffering is a source of joy. So powerful is this flame that what might be thought capable of dimming it, is but fuel added to the fire. The Sanhedrin tried to dampen the ardour of the Apostles with a scour-

<sup>1</sup> Rom 8,37.

<sup>2</sup> Rom 8,38-39.

ging and 'they left the Council rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer'. An attempt to deprive the Christian of joy gives him a greater share in Christ's victorious battle and therefore a greater share in His triumph. To deprive us of anything is to increase our wellbeing. That is why 'we are sad men that rejoice continually, beggars that bring riches to many, disinherited and the world is ours'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor 6,10.