

Christ of the Whole World

Matthew the poor

LET US BEGIN the message of the new birth this year with the psalm of Paul the Apostle, theological in its construction, deeply human in its import, rising up to increase our knowledge of Christ and set it on a new lofty foundation, divine yet human, extending limitlessly to heaven and throughout the earth. Here the Apostle Paul describes Christ in such a way that he surpasses all our traditional knowledge and all the familiar phrases, which we sometimes find so satisfying in themselves that we go without the Christ who was born in Bethlehem. We need the words of the Apostle here at this time to shake the foundations of logical thought and awaken the Christian to a greater knowledge of his Christ, born in Bethlehem, Christ of the whole world.

The Epistle to the Colossians 1:15-20:

*15 He is the image of the invisible God,
the first-born of all creation;(1)*

*16 for in Him all things were created,
in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities,(2)
all things were created through Him and for Him.(3)*

17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.(4)

*18 He is the head of the body, the Church;
He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead,(5)
that in everything He might be pre-eminent.*

19 For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,(6)

*20 and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven,
making peace by the blood of His cross.(7)*

Let all who hear awake! We are here in the presence of the whole human race and its new head, the second Adam, whose life has neither beginning nor end, under whose fatherhood the first Adam fades into insignificance and bows down with all his descendants. And the whole creation goes to drink from the spring of His compassionate fatherhood till the end of time.

The time has come for us to know the Christ of the whole world.

We all know the Christ of the loving family gathered around the pious mother and father.

We all know the Christ of the charitable organizations and the Christ of the church congregation gathered around a fine priest.

But now is the time for us to discover the Christ of the street, the people's Christ, the Christ of all the people, both those who have come to know Him and those who know Him not, the Christ of

the wicked and the righteous, the good and the evil, in every city and village, in every people and nation, in every part of the world—the Christ of the whole world.

Christ is greater than the corner of the house where you pray, greater than the meeting hall, and the church building, and all the churches.

Christ is satisfied with nothing less than the whole world.

Christ refused to be the prisoner of a family: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And stretching out His hand towards His disciples, He said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” (Mt. 12:48-49).

Christ refused to be the prisoner of His disciples and the private possession of His followers: “Master, we saw a man casting out demons in Your Name, and we forbade him, because he does not follow with us.” But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid him; for he that is not against us is for us”.

Christ refused to be the prisoner of principles, ideas, opinions and names: “Each one of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:12-13).

Christ refused to be the prisoner of places or sacred rites: “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. . . . The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:20, 21, 23).

Christ refused to be the prisoner of a sect or community, as He showed in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:30-36).

Christ refused to be the prisoner of a land or people or to be restricted by the limits of nation, race or colour: “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Go and make disciples of all nations!” (Acts 1:8; Mt. 28:19).

So we know already the Christ of Bethlehem, the Christ of Judaism and Jerusalem. Has the time now come for us to know the Christ of all the countries of the world? The whole Christ, the Christ of all the nations, without exception, distinction or partiality between one sect and another, one community and another, or between peoples, borders, races or colours? “Here there cannot be Jew or Greek (difference of race), circumcised or uncircumcised (difference of religious practice), barbarian, Scythian (difference of culture), slave, free man (social and class differences), male and female (difference of sex), but Christ is all in all” (Col. 3:11).

The Christ of the whole world was born for the sake of the whole world because He loved the whole world. And He shed His blood for the whole world. “He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2), for His blood cannot be

worth less than the whole world. So why do we limit and restrict the love of Christ, and judge Him to be sufficient only for us and those who follow us? Why do we make the blood of Christ our private possession and forbid it to others who do not belong to us, as if we had bought it with our piety, our principles and our wisdom? Why do we see our own sins being freely and simply washed away in the blood of Christ, and deny the same washing and purification to others with such repeated obstinacy? Christ has not set us up to defend the honour of His blood. We have done no more than be washed, and it is said with striking and ample clarity that it is expiation “not for our sins only but for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2).

We know already the Christ of those who consider themselves “the children of the Kingdom”, the official guests at Christ’s supper table, those who laboured from the first hour of the morning. We know already the Christ of the catechism, the texts, the laws and the prescribed restrictions. Has the time now come for us to know too the Christ of the ignorant of this world, the peoples of the earth who are oblivious and those who stray in the streets and alleys of this earth? They live within no limits or restrictions and have no one to remember them or convert them.

Has the time come for us to get to know the Christ of the materialists and atheists and the irresponsible youth of the world? When they could not find their Christ in a church or in a good father or a good example, although He is the good Christ who lives for and among them and bears their sins, they began to search for Him in nature or in instinctive passions or in some drug, hoping to find their lost peace!

Has the time now come for us to get to know the Christ of such as these? The suffering, rejected, despised Christ, wandering in the streets and alleys of the city. “Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame” (Lk. 14:22).

The Christ of those rejected in accordance with the law and the prevailing systems and legislations, those counted as being out of bounds and outside the demarcating hedgerows. “Go out to the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled” (Lk. 12:23).

The Christ of the tax gatherers and adulterers. “The tax collectors and harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you” (Mt. 21:31)).

The Christ of the evil and the good. “ ‘Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests” (Mt. 22:9-10).

The Christ of sinners: “He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner” (Lk. 19:7).

Has the time now come for us to go on over the rest of the members of Christ who are despised and humiliated in every part of the world, who have been stricken by sin and injustice and the works of the human mind? The church has washed her hands of them, although they are part of the church, for they are her vocation whether she like it or not. They are part of Christ and so He cannot despise or abandon them, for they are part of His suffering, His cross and His glory!

Has the time now come for us to come to full knowledge of the true face of Christ, who gathers together all these human beings in Himself, especially those who are ugly to our eyes, those whom we see as delinquent, unclean, repugnant? In spite of their presence in Him, Christ remains as beautiful, pure and holy as ever! Was He not crucified for all? Did He not “bear our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24)? Did He not wash away the sins of the whole world with His blood when His own body was stained with it? For we and the whole of humanity are His body. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). For the crucifixion took place before we came into existence, before we had faith, and the blood that was shed was the price for the redemption of all and was paid in full in advance before any man understood or accepted or asked for it.

So now, if we believe in the whole Christ, he is the Christ of the whole world, the Father of the new human race, Who adopted human nature as a whole so that it should be specially His. He was born with it to reveal Himself in it and was sacrificed in it to sanctify it and offer it as a sacrifice to the Father. Thus through Him it became a new creation, adopted, reconciled and accepted by the Father. And through it He became the Christ of the whole world, the Christ of the entire human race, “For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things” (Col. 1:19-20). If we believe in Him in this way and believe that we are united in Him, this very faith of ours makes us responsible for the unity of human nature, which is in Christ with all its peoples and nationalities, languages and religions, doctrines and communities. We are responsible for maintaining its unity in our hearts, in our feelings, in faith and trust, in our very being as Christians. This is how it must be if we are truly in Christ and Christ in us.

The attitude of all these people to Christ is not our concern. What concerns us is His attitude to them, for we must be exactly like Him since we are one with Him. Now Christ was crucified for every man, and consequently for the whole world, and we, “crucified with Christ”, must in the same way be crucified for the whole world.

Christ died at the hands of people who bore Him a murderous enmity and whose hatred brought about His death, but Christ did not hate them, for they were part of Him. That is why He was glad to die to redeem them and the whole world from death and the curse of enmity and deadly hatred. This was, and still is, the highest understanding of practical love for the world and the finest way to gather scattered humanity into one whole. Christ’s willing death at the hands of his enemies and for their sake was the culmination of His consecration for the love of God, for by His death He drew out the poison of enmity and washed away the sin of the world. And our consecration to the world now will remain handicapped and powerless until the moment when we accept that we die, and our blood be shed with the blood of Christ, not for the sake of those we love, but for our enemies and those who are strangers to us and our beliefs, and for all those who hate us and the whole world. In this way we share with Christ the renewing work of dying for the world every day, to put enmity to death and break the grip of sin, and gather together those who are scattered apart. “For Thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered” (Rom. 8:36).

This is the highest form of consecration to the Christ of the whole world for the unity of all the peoples and nations of the earth. This is the first and greatest vocation of Christianity in the

world: that we should die for the world, making no distinction between one man and another. This is the message that has been hampered and restricted by iron chains of selfishness, sectarianism, racism, and religious and national prejudice.

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Every year we have celebrated the birth of Christ, but up till now He has been the Christ of our own family, the Christ of a creed shut up in itself, the Christ of the virtuous and pious, the Christ of the white races. Brethren, is it now the time to celebrate the birth of the Christ of the whole world? The Christ of every clan that is named on earth and in heaven, of every nation and tongue, of every colour—black, yellow and red? The Christ of every man who calls upon the name of the Lord, even without knowing Him? The Christ of the poor of the earth, who do not know their left from their right? The Christ of the lost sheep of the world and of the rebellious young men and women, the Christ of the sinners, the tax collectors and harlots and all who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death waiting for the dawn of the light of salvation.

This is the true Christ, Who was born in Bethlehem and crucified on Golgotha, the Christ of the whole world.

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(*) This article was published in Arabic in **St. Mark** Monthly Review in January 1970, and was translated into English in January 1982.

1 That is begotten, not created, before all created beings and greater than them all, including all the ranks of angels.

2 The names of the ranks of angels.

3 Every creature owes its existence and subsistence to Christ, and the purpose of its creation is also attained in Him, for He is the source and the end, the cause and purpose of every life and system.

4 Ibid.

5 That is, the source of and reason for eternal life, for He is the first who rose from the dead, and there is no resurrection except through Him.

6 In the sense of the fullness of divinity that dwelt in the body.

7 That is, He perfected reconciliation and harmony between created beings and between creatures and God. Thus heavenly and earthly beings were reconciled together and both were reconciled with God. This reconciliation on the comprehensive scale covers all natures and kinds in preparation for the individual reconciliation which must take place through the obedience of each person to Christ, and his washing in the blood of salvation, redemption and purification.

