

make this their most important meal, to enjoy it often, for it was to become not only a meal but part of a complete sacrifice. The meal, fulfilled in Christ's crucifixion, became the fulfilment of man's striving to unite himself with his God in the sacrifice he offered. Our every meal is, in a way, a sacramental where we join with our family or with friends to nourish ourselves. The Mass should also be seen in this way, for we should strive to unite ourselves with our fellow men in eating the Eucharist and finding our nourishment in Christ. A man can nourish his body with food and drink and nourish his soul in prayer, but only in the fulness of the Eucharist can he be wholly nourished.

The bread of the sacred host is made from the same corn as the bread we eat at our own tables. It is primarily a food, suited to man as a being made up of body and spirit. It is a food which, when taken together in the Mass, can become for each and every one of us a power to live and a source of energy and love.



## THE MYSTICAL LIFE OF ISAIAS: II

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**B**EFORE Sennacherib, that new and still more powerful king, the policy of Judah fluctuated between restless schemes for alliances, especially with Egypt, and the firm independence of all but the power of God which Isaias taught, and which ultimately prevailed. It was then that he saw with clarity the mystery of creation, and was enabled to vest with reality in his mind that which faith, without sight, imposes. He expresses it under the humble image of a potter making pots as he will; the analogy becomes a permanent tradition in the Scriptures. It has a triple significance. It shows the emergence into the certitudes of the reason of the fact of substance, the independence of one's existence of any but the divine Being. Substance is the immediate term of creation, upon which all else in the creature as being accident, depends mediately. It thus involves the dependence of the soul on God and its independence before men. This is the strength of the saint against the powerful of the world. It imposes, too, as a

correlative which only sanctity can comply with, the total submission of will to the total cause of one's being, and permits no man to say to his Maker, Why dost thou use me thus? What Isaias learns he teaches, and ch. 29, 16 can be safely taken as the record of Isaias's own realization of this truth as well as his use of it to rebuke the incredulous. It synchronizes with his later obscure prophecy of the Incarnation (ch. 28: 16).

Spirituality and prophecy proceed organically from the sanctified soul. The latter has its own laws, and cannot here be taken into account, but must be touched on in so far as there is a correspondence: the inferior reason which knows particular things, and the superior which sees universal truths, minister respectively to Isaias's thought as the repositories of contemporary predictions and counsel, and of eternal revelation of the coming and reign of Christ. That which his 'conversion' withdrew him from remained still as the instrument of contingent knowledge, supernaturally infused, for it had never been strictly sensual. But his higher reason was the seat of eternal truths and revelations, in such a way that the multiple meanings which belong to all Scripture find in Isaias a psychological foundation. Other prophets shows this phenomenon, but it is outstanding in Isaias; and there is thus in his prophecies a harmony between prophetic and inspired writing, which by no means holds for all Scripture or for all prophecy. Nor, it should be pointed out, is the line between the natural and the supernatural in abnormal cognition easily drawn. A comparison may be suggested with the power recorded of Julius Caesar, in the natural order, and St Thomas Aquinas, in the supernatural, of dictating to several secretaries simultaneously—recalling, however, that *omnis comparatio claudicat*.

Isaias now saw that some time in the future the fall of Judah though inevitable was merely awaiting God's time, but not at the hands of Assyria. Even then, because it lived for and in God and truth, and for the Messianic coming, it would survive even the wildest of self-seeking imperialisms. When king Hezekias showed to the emissaries of Babylon the treasures of Jerusalem, Isaias had his fullest illumination on this matter. He saw in the subtle duplicity of the Babylonian character an astuteness before which both Assyria and Judah would some day bow. His natural perspicacity was utilized by the Holy Ghost for the fulness of prophetic revelation. He saw in a vision across the centuries to the

very physical and bodily entity of the Incarnate Messias, as by a shaft of light thrown from his own place in time to that of the Child to be born. In the passage of that shaft he beheld, as at hand, the deliverance of Judah from Senharib, its later fall to Babylon, that of Babylon itself to Persia, the restoration of Judah, even its colony in Egypt. In Christ, predestined and known by revelation, he foresaw these future events as ordered to their end, the historic Christ, the lesser included in the greater. Critics attempt to explain away so remarkable a series of predictions, and deny that they are really from Isaias or his age. But the voice of the Church does not encourage the rejection of a position neither impossible or improbable. That such foreknowledge is not impossible stands alike in the nature of knowledge and God's power over knowledge, as well as in instances of prognostication, for which no supernatural claim is made, and for which natural explanation must be forthcoming, which establish for the most sceptical a reason for assenting to the reality of this example. That it is probable is because so great an event as the Incarnation may be expected to be heralded by the most remarkable demonstration of God's power to give to men foreknowledge. Isaias's prophecy is certainly this.

The mature doctrine of Isaias may be outlined thus: there is a God of justice who will come in judgment to reward men according to their works, Israelite and Gentile alike, and the end will be eternal joy with him and eternal pain in separation from him. He comes to the soul of each, and this coming is an indwelling which to those who accept it and meditate on it breeds an inner life of the spirit and leads them to a new world centred upon that Presence, which is Messianic, and is the meaning of the ancient belief of the Israelites about a King to come. A society of renovated and spiritualized men is to be founded on this foundation, and since body and soul are inseparable in man, save at the expense of their humanity itself, this Messianic presence will also be an external and bodily presence of God on earth—the Incarnate. Enclosed within the doctrine of God as Judge is thus to be found that of God as Redeemer, of Christ as man.

Secondary to this interpretation of traditional prophecy in so revolutionary a mode was the personal or moral element of the faith of Isaias himself in it and the Deity who reveals it. Faith comes to mean something of what it is for the Catholic, but there is no explicit distinction between trust and confidence as moral

and mystical gifts and faith as truth outside oneself. The popular and protestant error on this point is a reversion to the immature spirituality of Israel, valid for its time, because the objective anchorage of such faith in providence was in the extraneous facts of contemporary history that only madness could or would ignore. Therefore Isaias and his disciples for generations observed the present as well as the future for guidance in faith; and the fulfilment of predictions looms large in his work because of its significance to his immediate hearers. And what in fact issued from the hand of providence was an 'apologetic miracle', testifying to the truth of his revelation, the climax of his life and work.

After years of perilous independence and intrigue, the gravest of all the Assyrian invasions burst upon Judah. But by this time Hezekias had learnt from long tutelage the spirit of Isaias, and the two, prophet and king, led a corporate act of national trust in Jahweh which, as all the world knows, was answered by what seemed a miracle. The 185,000 men of Sennacherib were mysteriously disabled and Jerusalem saved. Precisely what occurred is not known with certitude, but Egyptian as well as Israelite record attributes this frustration to divine intervention. The most probable explanation is a natural but unusual cause, such as a plague, which, suddenly arising, would seem miraculous to a simple-minded people. Since the days of Moses no such marvel had been known, and this providential miracle sealed the divine origins of Isaias's prophetic teaching of the Incarnation, and gave him his primacy among the prophets. His prediction of Christ imperceptibly permeated the soul of the nation, and the truth that God's hand was ever more ready to spare than condemn, served as groundwork for the hopes that in the exile worked a national conversion. It was then that the Isaian tradition fully elaborated in superb literary expression. Deutero-Isaias (cc. 40-66) contains little that is not derived from the personal work of Isaias, and announces how divine love issues in a grace and a salvation through a human and also divine deliverer, who saves by suffering.

It may be objected that there is nothing of this suffering in Isaias's works in chapters 1-39 (save for the people of Judah). But if he has nothing to say of the atoning death of Christ, it is because his work must be completed by applying to him the principle that truth is taught more in acts than words, and that Scripture teaches by what is narrated as well as the narrative itself. Now it is

arguable that the reference in Hebrews II, 37 to martyrs 'cut asunder' is to Isaias, of whom this kind of death is traditionally related; there is no other figure in the Bible to whom it can apply. If, then, he died a martyr's death at the hands of Manasses, Hezekias's unworthy successor, he presented more forcibly than by words that factor in the Messianic scheme of salvation.

However, the last stage in Isaias's spirituality and prophetic development was a revelation on the final judgment, the theme which stood primary in his first years. But now it was after the Messianic coming; and in it was included as precisely formulated as the idiom of his thought could permit, the resurrection of the body to enjoy God for ever or to suffer for ever the privation of his vision. The resurrection was of mankind, and therefore implied that of the Messiah as man, as it sprang, like all men's abstractions, from the knowledge of his own physical being. This process was thus a defining emphasis on the mode in which Messianic truth was psychologically possible to him at all, if nature co-operates with grace in the formation of revealed conceptions. By the same integral quality in his infused knowledge, the separation of this from the preceding elements in the whole left the Incarnation, the first Advent, by implication anterior to the Second Advent, an aspect of the future events rarely given explicitation in the whole *corpus propheticum*.

The inadequacy of this analysis will be only too patent to any one who turns from such a sketch to the prophet himself. The inexhaustible riches of his words are a pasture-land for faith, spirituality and devotion which it would be presumptuous to pretend could be expounded worthily; for it is a mark of divine inspiration that its products surpass human comprehension, and they are given not for our criticism, but 'for our learning'.