

"What Happened to Innocence and Wisdom?"

Lessons:
Deuteronomy 24:14-17
John 11:45-54
True Christian Religion 340

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And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not...Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put Him to death. - John 11:49, 50, 53

It is recorded in the eleventh chapter of John that, relying on the testimony of their spies, the chief priests and the Pharisees were deeply disturbed by the news of the Lord's two recent miracles, the cure of the blind man, and the resurrection of Lazarus. Wherefore they wondered: "What do we? for this Man doeth many miracles."

The chief priests were afraid that the Lord would be universally acknowledged as the Messiah, that people would proclaim Him a king to lead them against the Romans, but that the Romans would prevail and in retaliation destroy the Temple, ruin Hierosolyma and enslave and scatter the nation. The Pharisees were concerned about the preservation of their status as great religious authorities, as much as the chief priests were concerned about remaining in their offices. The Pharisees were known for strict and formal observance of the rites and ceremonies of the written Law. Their insistence on the validity of the traditions of the elders, and pretensions to superior sanctity separated them from other Jews. Blinded by concerns for their own status, both the chief priests and the Pharisees wrongly assumed that the Lord would become a king. Determined to prevent this at any cost, they resolved to put Him to death, disregarding the Divine Commandment which explicitly forbids an innocent man to be punished: "every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16).

The chief priests, in their role as the representatives of the Lord, were obliged to uphold Divine law, protect the holiness of their office and thereby maintain order, but they found it more convenient first to promote and protect their own interests. Since they had already desecrated their office by allowing the Roman governors and Herod to promote or humiliate priests

regardless of their true quality, without attending to any rule except that of personal favor in exchange for personal loyalty, it is not surprising that in the end they concluded it is allowable to sacrifice the Lord Himself--the Innocence incarnated--than to sacrifice their own interests. This they did under the pretext of taking care of the people. Even in the world this would be dishonest, but in the Church, such conclusion was in violation of every spiritual law and principle ever revealed to man.

Thus, under the pretense of caring for the public good, allegedly protecting ecclesiastical and civil order, the Pharisees and the chief priests resolved to put the Lord to death. Corrupted to the core by their wild proprial loves, blameless in their own eyes, filled with arrogance, and totally oblivious of the spiritual uses, they raised their hand against Innocence itself, in order to secure their positions. To justify their action, the chief priests and the Pharisees had to bring people to their side by sounding the false alarm of immanent danger to the nation: "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

Listening to these remarkable words of the high priest Caiaphas, we cannot but look at ourselves, each person at herself or himself, and examine our hearts; we can ask whether we too are ready to do injustice or any other evil by promoting our own interests under the pretext of protecting good? The question is whether we too are eager to protect ourselves at any cost, especially when our selfish loves are about to be exposed. There is nothing that the natural man resists more than to have his evil tendencies, deeds and thoughts exposed. At the same time, to expose these things is what makes spiritual growth and development possible.

Of this the wise man once said: "The Lord, having put off all merely natural human affection for the Jewish Church in which He was brought up, by exposing [her] evils and hypocrisy...so offended the Church that He was persecuted and finally crucified.... The Lord said: 'I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done' (John 13:15). If a man follows the example of the Lord and condemns most harshly the counterfeit, the self-righteous and the false; pride parading as humility; vanity in the guise of piety; ambition posing as charity and service; sophistication palmed off as erudition, especially in those in high places, will he not be condemned? Will he not be accused of lacking 'Christian charity'? To condemn hypocrisy is a work of a real charity, for if there is no exposure of the hypocritical, the false, the pretended,

there can be no cure, no health; it will be like new skin covering a hidden abscess.... The Lord said 'As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise' (Luke 6:31). These words of the Lord can be badly misunderstood. Most people like to be flattered, to be praised and patted on the back, whether it is meant sincerely or not; they desire that their faults remain hidden or ignored; they do not desire their just reward. In turn, they flatter and praise others, they manifest an appearance of friendship, mildness and gentleness in order to be liked or spoken well of by others. Thus they think they do unto others as they wish others to do unto them. But this is a mockery of the Lord's words. The Lord addresses the earnest, the sincere - those who wish to change their lives. Such are glad when their faults are shown to them. They do not resent a reprimand but value it if it is just and constructive; they appreciate the value of being disciplined. They therefore appreciate any words or actions of others in relation to themselves which are useful, whether pleasant or unpleasant. It is only to such that the words of the Lord quoted above apply. One who speaks the truth without fear or favor knows that many will not like him. Yet do not most people, even those called Christians, including their ministers, wish to be liked above everything else? How many Christians take seriously the words of the Lord: 'Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets' (Luke 6:26)" (T. Pitcairn, My Lord and My God, 157-161).

Unless we allow the light of truth to shine upon the evils that manifest themselves, we remain in the state of imaginary heaven. It is a duty of every person in the Church to do everything in his or her power to prevent the formation of an imaginary heaven by leading a life which opens the mind to genuine Heaven. Some would argue that imaginary heaven is better than hell, to which we ought to reply by saying that imaginary heaven, like imaginary lunch, offers nothing substantial.

The Pharisees and the chief priests not only hated the Lord for exposing their utter ignorance of the essential spiritual laws and principles, but also did everything to turn the people against their Savior. The Pharisees and the chief priests studied the Word all their lives; they undoubtedly knew many passages and stories from it, they were the teachers, they observed the rituals, conducted worship, and most of them must have led, for the most part, outwardly decent, civil and moral lives. However, they lacked one thing: they had no innocence. And because they had no innocence, the essence of all good, their minds were closed to heaven. And because their minds were closed to heaven, they loved themselves more than anyone, and were protecting their

own interests by manipulating and poisoning the minds of people. They were selfish and cruel when it served their purpose, and justified their selfishness and cruelty by calling it caring for the Church and the nation. Spiritually they were degenerated, and were a burden to themselves, to the Church and to heaven itself, wherefore the Lord said of them: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Luke 11:52). It may be of interest to note that immediately after the Lord uttered these words "the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge Him vehemently, and to provoke Him to speak of many things: laying wait for Him, and seeking to catch something out of His mouth, that they might accuse Him" (ibid. 53, 54).

When a person reads the Word without desire to be led by the Lord, he will be tempted to use his knowledge of spiritual things to justify evil and thus to promote his own ends. To be armed with the new knowledge and yet remain enslaved by the old loves has nothing to do with spiritual progress. Because progress does not consist of the mere knowledge of many spiritual things, it is obedience to a few spiritual laws and principles. If there is no desire to follow what is known from childhood to be true from the Word, the Lord is not present and there is no Church. It is true that any person can soar towards heaven by thinking and speaking from the Word, but if he regards life as of no account, he will soar indeed, but like a flying serpent, or a dragon, concerning which much is written in the Latin Word. In one place we read: "Of the dragon it is said that he is extremely slippery. When he is undergoing punishment and is frightened he promises all things, and admits the truth, but from fear as well as from the habit of lying. It is his nature to take notice of all and the least things, so that he does not let anything, either inward or outward, pass him by. Thus he keeps his eyes alert, mixing into every single thing, and then covers up the trails by every means he knows, including denials, so it will not appear that anything came from him-except when he breaks out in overt anger" (Spiritual Experiences 505).

When the Lord invited the rich man to become His disciple, He demanded total submission (Mark 10:21). Observing that the rich man was unable to follow, the Lord said to the disciples that it would be easier to put a camel through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved (10:23-27). When Peter said "Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee," disciples received Divine assurance that they would be rewarded, but were also told: "many that are first shall be last; and the last first." (10:31). In Mark it is recorded that James and John ignored this teaching, (10:32-34), and asked for positions of high honor in Heaven, to which the Lord replied that the

honor, among His disciples, must be sought through love, charity and innocence (ibid. 10:35-45). "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister" (ibid. 10:43-45). This is in sharp contrast to how the chief priests and the Pharisees understood their role.

In the Church, in all of her forms, at this day the main difference between the chief priests and the Pharisees on the one hand, and the Lord's disciples on the other, consists of the way in which we understand the Divine commandment: "to love one's neighbor as oneself" (Matthew 22:39). In an attempt to create the impression of our obedience to this commandment we may chose to focus on external conduct only. For example, we may try to realize our ambitions by trying to manipulate others, while pretending to be good. The danger of such an approach consists in losing all innocence, without gaining a grain of wisdom, "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). Alternatively, we may choose to keep the light of truth alive by shunning evils as sins in mind and heart. When this is done, the conduct takes care of itself, and we need not deceive anyone in order to achieve personal goals. Thus, no longer guided by expediency or self-interest, for the first time in his life a person becomes truly useful to the Lord and His Kingdom. May the Church and every member become such embodiment of spiritual use.

Amen.