The Cross The Measure of Life

"For many walk, of whom I have told you often and now tell you [weeping] that they are enemies of the Cross of Christ"  
Philippians III.18. St. Paul is here speaking neither of [...] nor of heathens, but of Christians. These enemies of the Cross were not blasphemers, or persecutors of the Lord of Glory, but baptized sinners; Men who bore the sign and name of Christ; but by their sins crucified the Son of God [...] unto themselves. They were partly false Apostles, who began even then to divide the Church; men of unsound doctrine and of impure life; together with those who followed them; they were partly also the sinful members of the Philippian Church, who had fallen from their first faith, and lived in the lusts of the world and of the flesh, still professing Christianity. No doubt, St. Paul is Speaking of gross sinners, but not of gross sinners only. He here lays down a principle, which applies to all sin, of every kind and of every measure, whether great or small. He says of such men, that “they are enemies of the Cross of Christ." This is the special guilt of sin in Christians. Let us, therefore, see more fully what he means. He does not mean, that sinful Christians, openly and in words, deny or blaspheme the Gospel; nor that they use force to persecute the Church and body of Christ. For it often happens that Christians as they go deeper in sin, all the more profess faith in the [freeness] of God's [peace], the [fullness] of Christ's forgiveness, the perfection of His own sacrifice, the sufficiency of His atonement: that is they become [...] and all the more boast of faith in words, as they are enemies of the Christ in deed and in truth. How is it then, that every sin, even the very least makes men enemies of the Cross of Christ?

I. First because it was sin, that, so to speak, created the Cross; sin made a Redeemer necessary. It opened some deep breach in the order of life and in the unity of God's Kingdom, which could be no way healed but by the atonement "As by our man sin entered into this world and by sin death: And so death passed upon all men in whom all have sinned": A new dominion was set upon, where, before, God reigned alone. Out of the abyss of the Eternal world arose up some awful power, some strong necessity- the [...] of God. One act of one man, the disobedience of our will, called up a whole world of rebellion, and let in all the powers of death upon the works of God. When we speak of these things, we speak of what we cannot understand. The depth is too dark for us. The voice which issues out of the eternal throne has said "For in what day [...] thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death." "The wages of sin is death"; "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This is all we can know until we are beyond the grave. Then, it may be, the powers of death will be revealed to those over whom it has no more dominion. For the present time, it is enough to know, that there could be no life in the world, when fallen, except by the atonement of the Son of God. And He of His free choice and eternal love, gave Himself to die in our behalf. The Cross broke through these absolute and awful

necessities, and henceforth "hell and death" are "cast into the pool of fire. This is the second death." ¹ Here we may see then [...] of sin. If there had been no sin in the world until now, the sin we have committed, each one of us, this day would have demanded the sacrifice of reconciliation. Such is the intensity of our offence; such its infinity of guilt. We may say, one by our, "Though there had been no dinner upon earth but myself, I should have created the necessity which nailed the Son of God upon the Tree. Though sufficient to redeem all the world, yet nothing less than His blood could redeem man alone. Infinite in price, His death is needed to blot out my sin alone, which is infinite in guilt." And, again, not only does sin both create and multiply this necessity, but so to speak, it continues to frustrate the work of the Cross ¹ Rev XX.14. and Passion of the Son of God. It demands His death, and it defeats its virtues: it first makes it necessary, and then would make it fruitless. For the blood of the Son of God was shed to blot out the sin of the world; but sin blots out again, from the soul that commits it, the blood of sprinkling "wherewith it was sanctified." It plucks away, one by one, the souls for whom Christ died; and gives the key to those fearful words "Many are called but few chosen". "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that
find it. "1 This is a mystery we can only refer to the mystery of the fall and to the origin of evil. The Lamb of God hath taken away the sin ¹ St. Matt VII.14.

of the world, yet the elect alone are saved; and "the whole world is seated in wickedness. In every soul, sin is still striving to tear it away from the life to which through the Cross it is united. In every one of us this whole mystery is at work.: St. Michael and his angels fighting against the devil and his angels; a fearful conflict between spiritual hosts contending for our eternal destiny. And in all the earth the same warfare is [ ]; the world wrestling against the Church; and worst of all, the regenerate, who have made themselves again servants of sin, against the spirit of their [...] from which is given to us by our crucified Redeemer. And, once more, sin makes men enemies of the Cross, because it is, in virtue and Spirit, a renewal of the Crucifixion. Therefore

St. Paul says, "It is impossible for those, who were once illuminated, have tasted also the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, have moreover tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, and are fallen away; to be [renewed] again to penance, crucifying again to themselves the Son of God and making Him a Mockery."¹ It acts the crucifixion over again. And therefore our Lord, though He was already in the bliss and glory of the Father cried saying "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" In like manner to every one of us He stretches forth His pierced hands and saith, "See what I bare for thee, and woundedst thou Me again?" St. John also writes

¹ Heb VI. 4-6

"Behold He cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him. "¹ He does not only mean Pilate and Herod, the priest and His crucifiers on Mount Calvary, but all Sinners, both before and since His Passion, the whole conspiracy of sinful and rebellious wills, by whom He has been betrayed and bound, buffeted and wounded, from the beginning until His coming again. In truth it was not the hammer and nails which crucified Him, nor the Roman soldiers who wielded the weapons of His passion nor the arm and the hand which smote the sharp iron into the wood; these were but the [blind] material instruments of His agony. His true crucifiers were our sins,- and we, ourselves the sinners ¹[Apec]. I. [7].

for whom He died. This was the real power of darkness which set in motion all the array of death. Wilful sins renew, in virtue and by implication, the wounds that were suffered on Mount Calvary. And this reveals in us the true depth and measure of our guilt. By our offences we not only create the necessity for an atonement while we frustrate its effects, but we wound Him again, who, while we were yet sinners, died for us. The chief guilt of sin is its ingratitude- the unthankfulness of heart which endures to act over again the Passion of our Redeemer. The very instincts of nature would shrink from such unfeeling hardness. Let us but

put it to ourselves: let us call to mind the sufferings of any one whom we have loved and tended in [pain]: then lights and the sounds of those dark hours in which we saw them [bowing] under the burden of mortal agony,- all these things are fixed in our souls as thorns which can never be plucked out. Every remembrance of them pierces to the quick; Even sudden and transient recollections thrill through us. The visions of sorrow, which a tone or a strain of music, or the first lights of morning waken in our memories, break up fountains of tears, and make our hearts to flow with emotion. Would we bring all these back again? Would

we [receive] all these sorrows and pains once more? Do our hearts so much as willingly consent to the mere passing thought of their enduring afresh the last struggles of distress? Would you do what they forbade, or looked upon [even] in silence, with sad and loving reproof? And yet, when we sin what else do we towards Him who for us hung upon the Cross? The ingratitude of our sin [renews], as far as can be, the very act of
crucifixion. It is, then, no mere figure of speech, but a very deep and appalling reality, that sin makes every soul that wilfully offends an [enemy] of the Cross of Christ, by converting it into a direct spiritual antagonist of the will and intent of our merciful Lord in the mystery of His Passion. And yet, how little do we lay this to heart. Therefore

we shall do well to go somewhat into detail, and to bring this subject to bear upon the particulars of our life. Hence we may see, first, the exceeding sinfulness of every single act of wilful sin. We deceive ourselves by dealing with our sins in a heap. If we would weigh them by a just measure, we must treat them singly. Each one, taken slow, contains the whole principle of rebellion against God, and is united to the necessity of the Crucifixion. Our whole will, that is, our whole moral power and being, is in every deliberate act. We all acknowledge this in the greater sins such as bloodshed, blasphemy, hypocrisy, and the like. Of these there is no question. But what was the sin by which the world fell, and mankind died upon the earth? Was that first transgression, according to the measures which we have invented for the Eternal Judge, a great sin or a small? Was it a sin of the spirit or of the flesh? A [...] or a gross sin? A sin implying corruption of the heart, or consistent with purity, and the benevolence in which men place their perfection? What was that sin in its life and reality? It was a willing variance with the will of God; a consent of the heart to what God had forbidden. And what, then, is pride, vanity, anger, worldliness, self-love, ill-temper, falsehood, insincerity? What are thee, of which men make such little count? Are they not everyone, as they are committed, even in simple acts, sins of a high and guilty character? Is not every consent of the will to sin, a deliberate participation in the wilful rebellion against the will of God, which pierced the Son of God? Shall we say, "I did not think of this!" Can we say in the day of His Coming "Lord I did not know, or I did not remember, or I did not intend," and the like? Will He not answer, "And why did you not think and remember? Was it as hard to remember the Cross for My sake, as it was to die upon it for yours? Will you clear yourselves by pleading insincerity? To be forgetful of My agony, is it not to be ungrateful? And in a redeemed soul, what sin is greater? Shall we, then, dare to say now what we shall not dare to plead at that day? No; let us believe it: the Cross is the only true measure of our sin. Let us not weight it in the false balances of sinners, or by the double weight of our own self-love. Let us try it by this true and only measure. The sins of our whole life, manhood, youth, and childhood, [... we must bring them, one by one, to the foot of the Cross, and there learn their true meaning, which is nothing less than the death and passion of our Lord. 2 Another practical truth we may learn is, the sinfulness of every habitual state or temper of mind contrary to the Spirit of our Saviour. I have hitherto spoken of acts, in which the consent of the will is given. There is a still more subtle danger which betrays us. When a man's conscience is awakened, he leaves off by degrees his outward acts of sin. And yet the inward sins of the spirit are often fondly cherished in secret. A great amount of concealed mental sinfulness may be hid under a life which is outwardly without blame. The soul may consent to itself in its own images and thoughts of evil: and to keep up the virulence of sin, though never suffered to betray itself in acts. This needs but little illustration; at least in some of its chief forms. There are, however, a few examples we may take, not without advantage. For instance, how common a sin is secret pride. It may seldom betray itself, and yet it may be intense. Worldly pride, [... whether of birth, [...], riches, or what is still more inward and unbending, pride of intellectual power, [... is often the true governing spirit of the heart, when least suspected. Pride is, so to speak, too proud to expose itself. It would be offended, if it were to become notorious and censured. It therefore dwells apart, bracing itself up in secret, and giving to all the affection of the soul a high and supercilious tone. What is more at [enmity] with the spirit of the Cross? Perhaps nothing, unless we except spiritual pride. And this [friend] of pride, also, shows itself in many ways. Sometimes in the pride of strictness, that is, in rigour of observance and regularity; is a sort of Christian Pharisaism, which leads to want of tenderness, and of condescension towards the weak, [... and poor; to uncharitable
judgments, and separation from brethren; though this, perhaps, is the least injurious sort of spiritual pride: because it is the most open and visible; the most human and material, if I may so say. There is a far worse kind, which, instead of building itself upon regularity, sets itself up upon disobedience. It does not take a [system] out of itself for its support; but rears itself upon itself; upon the conceit of its own sufficient strength. It is its own centre, and its own foundation. This is the pride which owns no rule of interpretation but its own judgment, or its own private spirit; or what is more dangerous, its own supposed illumination. Such spirits make it a point of piety to be superior to legal appointments and casual ordinances; to Catholic tradition, general councils, the visible Church, the Christian priesthood, the order of Divine worship, the matter of the Holy Sacraments. In a word, they will be found, at last, to own no revelation but their own thoughts of God, no Church but themselves. Little as such people think it, they claim to be inspired; to be prophets, except that their predictions are not verified; to be apostles, except that they neither labour nor suffer for the Gospel of Christ. It may be said, that this is an [overcharged] picture. Granted that it is a full-length exposure of the spirit which relies upon itself, conformed to the Church as a thing indifferent, and calls the Holy Sacrament an ordinance. But it is the same spirit differing only, in degree. The common forces of it are, of course, fainter and less pronounced. Outward conformity to the order of the Church arising from custom or private relations, masks this fault in many characters. In them it shows itself chiefly by slighting the grace of God in humbler souls, and by esteeming obedience to the Church, formality; fast, self-righteousness; and faith, superstition. What fellowship has such a temper with Him who received a sinner's baptism in Jordan, and washed His disciples' feet? Take again the mental sins of [levity], personal vanity, frivolous conversation, love of dress, glitter, and festivities. Is not the indulgence of these faults an habitual provocation of that Divine zeal which consumed our Master in the sacrifice of Himself? What was the fervour of His ardent, burning Love? Of His heart all on fire for us? Can we be all lukewarm and languid in return, and be held guiltless? What then shall we be, if, through lack of love, we sink into softness, self-indulgence, self-pampering, and love of ourselves; into a delicate self-considering carefulness which fixes all our thoughts upon our own pleasures, comforts, health, happiness and the like? A love of self is, in truth the very soul of sin. All sins are but as circles issuing out from this our productive centre, expanding, ever more, ever less widely, enclosing a narrower or larger field of our spiritual life. And what is such a [temper] but a deliberate contradiction of the Cross and Character of Him who "did not please Himself" 1; who gave His body to the strikers and His cheeks to them that plucked them" 2: and when He could give no more, "by the Holy Ghost offered Himself unspotted unto God". 3 Such sins as we now speak of are the more dangerous, because they 1Rom.XV.3. 2Isaiah.I.6 3Heb.IX.14 are less gross; because they do not issue in startling acts, but are wrought into the sate and texture of the mind itself. They have so little that is sensual about them, and are so refined; they are so free from outward transgressions of the second table of the law; they wear so much of the array of light. But, nevertheless they concentrate themselves with a fatal intensity against the spirit of humiliation; against humility self-denial, self-abasement, compassion, and love. To bring this home to our own case: how does our past life appear, seen thus under the light of the Crucifixion? How will our sins bear to be measured by this rule? What is the secret-temper of our spirit now at this present time?

Is it humbled, broke, mortified; or fearless, self-supported, and erect? These are questions we must ask; and answer with sincerity and Godly fear: for they will be asked in the day when we shall see our Redeemer in the judgment. Let us clearly discover now what we must confess at that day. If we be living in a high-minded, selfish, loveless spirit, let us lose no time to lay down the areas of our rebellion at the foot of the Cross; let us
there break the weapons of our pride in [...], and bow down our will beneath His pierced feet. And as a part of our submission, let us take two very simple practical rules.

One is: when we are tempted by any approach of evil, to fix our eyes inwardly upon Him, handing upon the Cross. Let us then call to mind His five wounds, and His crown of thorns. This will abate our pride, break our will, and cast out our evil thoughts. If the temptation be strong and abiding, keep your eyes upon Him until you are delivered. Look upon Him, as upon the true Serpent of brass, till the fear and the poison of your sin be healed. Go, if you can, into some secret place, and kneel down in His sight; and, there, stay upon your knees till the sting of sin is allayed, and the temptation passes away. The other rule is: to pray, day by day, that our will may be crucified with Him. This prayer, if we persevere, will, by His Grace, slay the [enmity] that is in us, and make us, not enemies but lovers of His Cross. St. Paul says, "They that are Christ's, have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences:"1 and again he says still more, "with Christ I am nailed to the Cross."2 This shall be [even] our state at last. Happy, and blessed are they who are dead to themselves, alive to Him alone. Let us therefore pray [Him as] to unite us to the spirit of His Crucifixion, that we may die to sin, to the world, to our own will; to all that flatters, fosters, strengthens the love of ourselves. As in Baptism we were signed with His life-giving sign, and charged to fight [manfully] under His [power]. So let us pray, that in life and in death we may be under the shadow of His Cross. Howsoever He may fulfil this prayer, be not afraid. It may be He will send 1 Gal V.24 2 [lb].II.19.

you sickness, or sorrow, or contradiction of sinners, or suffering of some kind For your prayer is an appeal to His Passion. He may suffer you to receive the stigmas which the world printed on Him. Be it so. Let come what may, if only we have upon us, the marks of our Crucified Master at that day when the sign of the Son of Man shall appear, and the Angels "shall gather together His elect from the four winds."

[Transcription developed by Pauline Holloway]