



01-C-04

CHRIST'S CHALLENGING CHOICE

The poor, the despised of this world, the troublesome, those on the fringe of society, the sick, the handicapped, the victims of segregation — one is almost led to believe that the Gospel is for them alone.

1. THE LIFE OF JESUS

To start with, His parents are poor, unknown, from a forgotten village. He is born in poverty and because of this He endures all the disadvantages of the poor.

From infancy He experiences emigration — the curse of our time — and He experiences it again at the age of seven. During His public life He has nowhere to lay His head.

Occasionally, He has nothing to eat: He has to "steal" ears of wheat or find fish by a miracle.

He dies, nailed to a cross, despised, outcast, without a supporter.

He hasn't even a tomb of His own to receive His mortal remains.

2. HIS DOCTRINE

His beatitudes are not exactly for the rich and powerful: they talk of the poor, of those persecuted for justice sake, of those who mourn...

He does not choose His disciples from among the rich and powerful. He tells them to carry nothing with them, not even a scrip nor a spare tunic.

As for us, Christians, who are His disciples, He wants us to be detached and free as the lilies of the field (who do not spin to make clothes) and as the birds of the air who do not store up provisions...

He tells us clearly, "Do not store up treasures for the moths to destroy."

"Give and it shall be given you."

He utters terrible reproaches and maledictions against the rich and powerful of the world, against those who use "religion" to live in comfort.

He will judge us on our generosity, on our love — a love which is effective — "I was hungry... I was naked..."

3. HIS PARABLES

The Lost Sheep — we must leave all to find it.

The Rich Man and Lazarus.

The Prodigal Son — the wastrel who wants to leave home.

The Good Samaritan...

4. HIS ACTIONS

★ All His miracles are worked in response to needs, to difficulties, to sickness, to the misfortunes which befall people. One could say that He suffered constantly from seeing others suffer.

★ He defends the woman taken in adultery when they wanted to stone her.

★ He heals lepers and paralytics...

★ He helps the paralytic who hasn't the strength to get to the pool.

★ He shows a special predilection for the blind.

★ He frees those possessed by the devil.

★ He has pity on the crowd who followed Him and have nothing to eat. He multiplies the loaves.

I have quoted only a few examples. One could find many more in the Gospel. From all this the conclusion is clear:

- ★ A marked preference for those on the fringe of society.
- ★ Denunciation of injustice and struggle against it.
- ★ Dignity of the person, of the individual — before property, honours.
- ★ The law must be made to serve the person.
- ★ Greed, riches etc. make it difficult for the Christian to enter the kingdom.
- ★ We shall be judged solely on our relations with others — with the unfortunate.
- ★ Can one be a Christian without sharing, without loving those in need — even to the ultimate consequences?

5. A TESTIMONY

The Lord, who has this disconcerting preference, often enlightens, through His Spirit, the marginalised, the forgotten, the oppressed.

The light comes slowly, as if by stealth, and young people, who have no education and who are totally oppressed, gradually come to know Life and express it joyfully in their own way.

I quote from a letter received from Teodoro a few days ago.

Teodoro is twenty years of age. He has already done two years of an eight year sentence in a very tough prison. He was sent to gaol at the age of eighteen for carrying arms and using threats — all under the influence of drugs — Here is what he says. You may interpret it as you wish:

"The Word of God is very beautiful but It is also a two edged sword which penetrates the heart and leaves it bare.

To begin with, I want to tell you that I have found God in prison. There is no doubt but that 90% of people have a wrong idea of Him. Life has taught me that one is punished in the same way he made others suffer. The person who has been unjust is punished by life to make him realise that injustice is not the road to follow. The person who does wrong and knows it ends by having to pay for his wrongdoing, and how!

Even in prison, the man who takes delight in exploiting the weak, robbing his fellow prisoners while threatening them with a knife, bullying others because his heart is filled with pride, is hated by the other prisoners.

O.K. One day he runs across someone stronger than himself, who gives him what he deserves and makes him pay for all the evil and injustice he has committed. He ends up in the most humiliating condition on earth — conquered, beaten, and what is worse, despised for his cowardice.

A man worthy of the name, a human being, does not exploit the weak or rob his fellows. He respects his neighbours as he wants them to respect him. He treats his companions as he wishes to be treated. He despises hypocrisy and injustice...

As for myself, I neither believe nor disbelieve as yet. I feel great respect for Holy Scripture. There is no doubt but that the message it contains is the truth. Christ, too, had a wonderful message but they killed Him because He spoke the Truth and Truth is Love. With love there are no wars; there is justice and goodness instead of wickedness; understanding instead of jealousy. Yes, it's true that love is peace...

Life is very different from that, it's quite the opposite. And from all the ruin, misery, suffering, and sorrow that one sees I have come to the conclusion that life is a school which helps to perfect man because man will never be perfect until he learns to know evil.

I feel certain, not because of my own ideals, but rather because of the Scriptures that "God is eternally good and just." For that reason as I understand it, I firmly believe that there is no eternal fire because God could not be as cruel as man... It could be that man judges himself. Can you image anyone as severe as oneself in judging his actions?

I know that what is more important is to be rich in spirit rather than in material goods... To be rich in spirit is to be in possession of the whole world. He who is rich in worldly goods and poor in spirit is like a tiny atom in the midst of the universe.

NOTES

- ★ Teodoro has little education. He spent a few years in primary school.
- ★ He wrote the above in his prison cell. He reads, writes and thinks though he can only send one letter a week, alternately to his mother and to the Brother who befriended him.
- ★ I think his testimony should make us all think, whoever we are.

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