

GOD INTERVENES IN OUR EXISTENCE*

BY CARDINAL DANIELOU

Faith is believing that God intervenes in our existence. And it is certain that this is the essential and the most difficult aspect. For, as we have often said, that God is God and that man is man, goes without saying; but that God is man and that man is God, is just what is more difficult to admit. Now, this is the whole of faith, in view of this gulf separating God from man, which man cannot bridge. Faith is believing that God has bridged this gulf, that He came in search of our flesh, this poor flesh of ours, having taken it in Mary's womb, having purified it in the blood of his cross, brought it into the Father's life by his Resurrection and his Ascension.

THE PROMISE AND THE TOKEN

Now there is a piece of this very flesh of ours, this poor flesh so near to animal life in many respects, which is today already, immersed in God's depths. And which is, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, the promise and the token of what we are destined for. What was accomplished in Christ's flesh can be accomplished in our flesh.

The fact, then, that God intervenes in human history is the very object of the faith of the whole of the Old Testament, of the whole of the Church. And, here, the Jews are with us: the fact that it was Yahweh who created the world, chose Abraham, took up his abode in the Temple of Jerusalem, governed his people through his Bible, that is, that there is a path of salvation in human history, laid out by God's great works, this fact links the faith of the Jews with ours.

These works of God, moreover, are just what God alone can do, what the Spirit of God, expressing his irresistible

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power, can alone accomplish. And that is why these works of God constitute a field of their own. What are they? It is possible to enumerate them, they can be held, so to speak, in the hollow of one's hand. They can be reduced to a few ways of acting which are the manners of the living God and which are the very things in which we believe throughout the whole of this history.

God alone creates, that is, God alone can bring something into existence where there was nothing. God, Kirkegaard told us, is: "everything is possible". That is, God does not need something that pre-exists. His action is not conditioned by anything. That is true of the very creation of the universe, and also of the creation of a new heart in us.

This explains that the action of God in our lives is not conditioned by anything and that, however hard the heart is, however alien to love, alien to humility, alien to faith, God has the power of bringing forth paradises in the deserts, of putting a heart of flesh where there was a heart of stone. There is no obstacle to God's power in any heart: everything is possible for him who believes. One can never say: "It is impossible for me to have faith"; "That is alien to my nature"; or "I cannot love, I am too deeply and too radically selfish". God can always bring about faith and bring about love provided we trust Him and believe that He has this very power of bringing forth something where there was nothing.

God is He who saves, that is, He who can rescue man from absolutely desperate situations.

"OH DEATH, WHERE IS THY VICTORY?"

For there are, it is true, some desperate situations of man in which man can rescue man. We have a margin — and it is still a very large one — to save mankind from want, hunger, war; there are things that depend on us. But there are things that do not depend on us. There are depths of misery from which no man can rescue man. There are depths of spiritual misery, there are depths of sin that man is powerless to cure.

It is a lie to say that it would be enough for men to be willing to agree to put an end to spiritual misery. The Christian view is more clear-sighted and it knows that man's heart

is the slave of slaveries from which he is powerless to escape by himself.

Christ alone went down into these depths when He descended into hell. He destroyed the evil at its root, the evil of the soul, sin; the evil of the body, death. There, too, no one had descended into this abyss. Christ alone, prisoner of death on Holy Friday, shattered the prisons of this captivity in which every man was held. And on Easter morning, He can exclaim as St. Paul makes Him say: "Oh death, where is thy victory?"

In the presence of this, all the rest is superficial because all the rest does not reach these ultimate depths to which God alone can penetrate. The only response to evil, the only possible response, is to destroy it, and that is the meaning of the Resurrection; it is the destruction of evil at its very root. Evil is destroyed for those who believe in the action of the risen Christ.

God remains, God makes himself present in a stable, permanent way. God makes himself present in the temple of Jerusalem. He was present in the midst of his people and there was a unique mystery there, a mystery that did not exist in any other sanctuary in the world.

GOD IS PRESENT

God is present in the body of the risen Christ. God is present in the heart of those who believe and have been baptized. "If some one loves me, we will come unto him and we will make our abode in him."

We believe that the heart of a baptized child is the sanctuary where the Trinity abides.

We believe that to pray is to return to the sanctuary of our heart to talk with the Father like sons, with Christ like brothers, being deified by the Spirit.

There are permanent realities, already foreshadowed in the Old Testament, fully accomplished in Jesus Christ. God's dwelling place was realized in Christ, and is continued in the sacraments of the Church, continued, finally, in the soul of each of us. That is what we believe in. We believe that God acts in these ways.