



Paragraph 2. JESUS DIED CRUCIFIED

I. THE TRIAL OF JESUS

Divisions among the Jewish authorities concerning Jesus

595 Among the religious authorities of Jerusalem, not only were the Pharisee Nicodemus and the prominent Joseph of Arimathea both secret disciples of Jesus, but there was also long-standing dissension about him, so much so that St. John says of these authorities on the very eve of Christ's Passion, "many.. . believed in him", though very imperfectly.³⁷⁸ This is not surprising, if one recalls that on the day after Pentecost "a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" and "some believers. . . belonged to the party of the Pharisees", to the point that St. James could tell St. Paul, "How many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; and they are all zealous for the Law."³⁷⁹

596 The religious authorities in Jerusalem were not unanimous about what stance to take towards Jesus.³⁸⁰ The Pharisees threatened to excommunicate his followers.³⁸¹ To those who feared that "everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation", the high priest Caiaphas replied by prophesying: "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."³⁸² The Sanhedrin, having declared Jesus deserving of death as a blasphemer but having lost the right to put anyone to death, hands him over to the Romans, accusing him of political revolt, a charge that puts him in the same category as Barabbas who had been accused of sedition.³⁸³ The chief priests also threatened Pilate politically so that he would condemn Jesus to death.³⁸⁴

Jews are not collectively responsible for Jesus' death

597 The historical complexity of Jesus' trial is apparent in the Gospel accounts. the personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) is known to God alone. Hence we cannot lay responsibility for the trial on the Jews in Jerusalem as a whole, despite the outcry of a manipulated crowd and the global reproaches contained in the apostles' calls to conversion after Pentecost.³⁸⁵ Jesus himself, in forgiving them on the cross, and Peter in following suit, both accept "the ignorance" of the Jews of Jerusalem and even of their leaders.³⁸⁶ Still less can we extend responsibility to other Jews of different times and places, based merely on

the crowd's cry: "His blood be on us and on our children!", a formula for ratifying a judicial sentence.³⁸⁷ As the Church declared at the Second Vatican Council: . . .

Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his Passion. . . the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy Scripture.³⁸⁸

All sinners were the authors of Christ's Passion

598 In her Magisterial teaching of the faith and in the witness of her saints, the Church has never forgotten that "sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine Redeemer endured."³⁸⁹ Taking into account the fact that our sins affect Christ himself,³⁹⁰ The Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone:

We must regard as guilty all those who continue to relapse into their sins. Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts (for he is in them) and hold him up to contempt. and it can be seen that our crime in this case is greater in us than in the Jews. As for them, according to the witness of the Apostle, "None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." We, however, profess to know him. and when we deny him by our deeds, we in some way seem to lay violent hands on him.³⁹¹

Nor did demons crucify him; it is you who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins.³⁹²

II. CHRIST'S REDEMPTIVE DEATH IN GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

"Jesus handed over according to the definite plan of God"

599 Jesus' violent death was not the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but is part of the mystery of God's plan, as St. Peter explains to the Jews of Jerusalem in his first sermon on Pentecost: "This Jesus (was) delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God."³⁹³ This Biblical language does not mean that those who handed him over were merely passive players in a scenario written in advance by God.³⁹⁴

600 To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy. When therefore he establishes his eternal plan of "predestination", he includes in it each person's free response to his grace: "In this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant

Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."395 For the sake of accomplishing his plan of salvation, God permitted the acts that flowed from their blindness.396

"He died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures"

601 The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of "the righteous one, my Servant" as a mystery of universal redemption, that is, as the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin.397 Citing a confession of faith that he himself had "received", St. Paul professes that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures."398 In particular Jesus' redemptive death fulfils Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant.399 Indeed Jesus himself explained the meaning of his life and death in the light of God's suffering Servant.400 After his Resurrection he gave this interpretation of the Scriptures to the disciples at Emmaus, and then to the apostles.401

"For our sake God made him to be sin"

602 Consequently, St. Peter can formulate the apostolic faith in the divine plan of salvation in this way: "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake."402 Man's sins, following on original sin, are punishable by death.403 By sending his own Son in the form of a slave, in the form of a fallen humanity, on account of sin, God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."404

603 Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned.405 But in the redeeming love that always united him to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"406 Having thus established him in solidarity with us sinners, God "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all", so that we might be "reconciled to God by the death of his Son".407

God takes the initiative of universal redeeming love

604 By giving up his own Son for our sins, God manifests that his plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins."408 God "shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."409

605 At the end of the parable of the lost sheep Jesus recalled that God's love excludes no one: "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."410 He affirms that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many"; this last term is not restrictive, but contrasts the whole of humanity with the unique person of the redeemer who hands himself over to save us.411 The Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men

without exception: "There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer."⁴¹²

III. CHRIST OFFERED HIMSELF TO HIS FATHER FOR OUR SINS

Christ's whole life is an offering to the Father

606 The Son of God, who came down "from heaven, not to do (his) own will, but the will of him who sent (him)",⁴¹³ said on coming into the world, "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God." "and by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."⁴¹⁴ From the first moment of his Incarnation the Son embraces the Father's plan of divine salvation in his redemptive mission: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work."⁴¹⁵ The sacrifice of Jesus "for the sins of the whole world"⁴¹⁶ expresses his loving communion with the Father. "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life", said the Lord, "(for) I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father."⁴¹⁷

607 The desire to embrace his Father's plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus' whole life,⁴¹⁸ for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation. and so he asked, "and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour."⁴¹⁹ and again, "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?"⁴²⁰ From the cross, just before "It is finished", he said, "I thirst."⁴²¹

"The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world"

608 After agreeing to baptize him along with the sinners, John the Baptist looked at Jesus and pointed him out as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world".⁴²² By doing so, he reveals that Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the multitudes, and also the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of Israel's redemption at the first Passover.⁴²³ Christ's whole life expresses his mission: "to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁴²⁴

Jesus freely embraced the Father's redeeming love

609 By embracing in his human heart the Father's love for men, Jesus "loved them to the end", for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."⁴²⁵ In suffering and death his humanity became the free and perfect instrument of his divine love which desires the salvation of men.⁴²⁶ Indeed, out of love for his Father and for men, whom the Father wants to save, Jesus freely accepted his Passion and death: "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."⁴²⁷ Hence the sovereign freedom of God's Son as he went out to his death.⁴²⁸

At the Last Supper Jesus anticipated the free offering of his life

610 Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free offering of himself at the meal shared with the twelve Apostles "on the night he was betrayed".⁴²⁹ On the eve of his Passion, while still free, Jesus transformed this Last Supper with the apostles into the memorial of his voluntary offering to the Father for the salvation of men: "This is my body which is given for you." "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."⁴³⁰

611 The Eucharist that Christ institutes at that moment will be the memorial of his sacrifice.⁴³¹ Jesus includes the apostles in his own offering and bids them perpetuate it.⁴³² By doing so, the Lord institutes his apostles as priests of the New Covenant: "For their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth."⁴³³

The agony at Gethsemani

612 The cup of the New Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father's hands in his agony in the garden at Gethsemani,⁴³⁴ making himself "obedient unto death". Jesus prays: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. . ."⁴³⁵ Thus he expresses the horror that death represented for his human nature. Like ours, his human nature is destined for eternal life; but unlike ours, it is perfectly exempt from sin, the cause of death.⁴³⁶ Above all, his human nature has been assumed by the divine person of the "Author of life", the "Living One".⁴³⁷ By accepting in his human will that the Father's will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive, for "he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree."⁴³⁸

Christ's death is the unique and definitive sacrifice

613 Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world",⁴³⁹ and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the "blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins".⁴⁴⁰

614 This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices.⁴⁴¹ First, it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience.⁴⁴²

Jesus substitutes his obedience for our disobedience

615 "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."⁴⁴³ By his obedience unto death, Jesus

accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who "makes himself an offering for sin", when "he bore the sin of many", and who "shall make many to be accounted righteous", for "he shall bear their iniquities".⁴⁴⁴ Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father.⁴⁴⁵

Jesus consummates his sacrifice on the cross

616 It is love "to the end"⁴⁴⁶ that confers on Christ's sacrifice its value as redemption and reparation, as atonement and satisfaction. He knew and loved us all when he offered his life.⁴⁴⁷ Now "the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died."⁴⁴⁸ No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. the existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice for all.

617 The Council of Trent emphasizes the unique character of Christ's sacrifice as "the source of eternal salvation"⁴⁴⁹ and teaches that "his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us."⁴⁵⁰ and the Church venerates his cross as she sings: "Hail, O Cross, our only hope."⁴⁵¹

Our participation in Christ's sacrifice

618 The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the "one mediator between God and men".⁴⁵² But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, "the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" is offered to all men.⁴⁵³ He calls his disciples to "take up [their] cross and follow (him)",⁴⁵⁴ for "Christ also suffered for (us), leaving (us) an example so that (we) should follow in his steps."⁴⁵⁵ In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries.⁴⁵⁶ This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering.⁴⁵⁷ Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven.⁴⁵⁸

IN BRIEF

619 "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (⇒ I Cor 15:3).

620 Our salvation flows from God's initiative of love for us, because "he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (⇒ I Jn 4:10). "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (⇒ 2 Cor 5:19).

621 Jesus freely offered himself for our salvation. Beforehand, during the Last Supper, he both symbolized this offering and made it really present: "This is my body which is given for you" (⇒ Lk 22:19).

622 The redemption won by Christ consists in this, that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (⇒ Mt 20:28), that is, he "loved [his own] to the end" (⇒ Jn 13:1), so that they might be "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [their] fathers" (⇒ I Pt 1:18).

623 By his loving obedience to the Father, "unto death, even death on a cross" (⇒ Phil 2:8), Jesus fulfils the atoning mission (cf ⇒ Is 53:10) of the suffering Servant, who will "make many righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities" (⇒ Is 53:11; cf. ⇒ Rom 5:19).

Biblical Quotes

378 ⇒ Jn 12:42; cf. ⇒ 7:50; ⇒ 9:16-17; ⇒ 10:19-21; ⇒ 19:38-39.

379 ⇒ Acts 6:7; ⇒ 15:5; ⇒ 21:20.

380 cf. ⇒ Jn 9:16; ⇒ 10:19.

381 Cf ⇒ Jn 9:22.

382 ⇒ Jn 11:48-50.

383 Cf. ⇒ Mt 26:66; ⇒ Jn 18:31; ⇒ Lk 23:2, ⇒ 19.

384 Cf. ⇒ Jn 19:12, ⇒ 15, ⇒ 21.

385 Cf. ⇒ Mk 15:11; ⇒ Acts 2:23, ⇒ 36; ⇒ 3:13 14; ⇒ 4:10; ⇒ 5:30; ⇒ 7:52; ⇒ 10:39 ; ⇒ 13:27-28; ⇒ I Th 2:14-15.

386 Cf. ⇒ Lk 23:34; ⇒ Acts 3:17.

387 ⇒ Mt 27:25; cf. ⇒ Acts 5:28; ⇒ 18:6.

388 NA 4.

389 Roman Catechism I, 5, 11; cf. ⇒ Heb 12:3.

390 Cf. ⇒ Mt 25:45; ⇒ Acts 9:4-5.

391 Roman Catechism I, 5, 11; cf. ⇒ Heb 6:6; ⇒ 1 Cor 2:8.

392 St. Francis of Assisi, Admonitio 5, 3.

393 ⇒ Acts 2:23.

394 Cf. ⇒ Acts 3:13.

395 ⇒ Acts 4:27-28; cf. ⇒ Ps 2:1-2.

396 Cf. ⇒ Mt 26:54; ⇒ Jn 18:36; ⇒ 19:11; ⇒ Acts 3:17-18.

397 ⇒ Is 53:11; cf. ⇒ 53:12; ⇒ Jn 8 34-36; ⇒ Acts 3:14.

398 ⇒ 1 Cor 15:3; cf. also ⇒ Acts 3:18; ⇒ 7:52; ⇒ 13:29; ⇒ 26:22-23.

399 Cf. ⇒ Is 53:7-8 and ⇒ Acts 8:32-35.

400 Cf. ⇒ Mt 20:28.

401 Cf. ⇒ Lk 24:25-27, ⇒ 44-45.

402 I Pt 1:18-20.

403 Cf. ⇒ Rom 5:12; ⇒ I Cor 15:56.

404 ⇒ 2 Cor 5:21; cf. ⇒ Phil 2:7; ⇒ Rom 8:3.

405 Cf. ⇒ Jn 8:46.

406 ⇒ Mk 15:34; ⇒ Ps 22:2; cf. ⇒ Jn 8:29.

407 ⇒ Rom 8:32; ⇒ 5:10.

408 ⇒ I John 4:10; ⇒ 4:19.

409 ⇒ Rom 5:8.

410 ⇒ Mt 18:14.

411 ⇒ Mt 20:28; cf. ⇒ Rom 5:18-19.

412 Council of Quiercy (853): DS 624; cf. ⇒ 2 Cor 5:15; I ⇒ Jn 2:2[ETML:C/].

413 ⇒ Jn 6:38.

414 ⇒ Heb 10:5-10.

415 ⇒ Jn 4:34.

416 1 ⇒ Jn 2:2[ETML:C/].

417 ⇒ Jn 10:17; ⇒ 14:31.

418 Cf ⇒ Lk 12:50; ⇒ 22:15; ⇒ Mt 16:21-23.

419 ⇒ Jn 12:27.

420 ⇒ Jn 18:11.

421 ⇒ Jn 19:30; ⇒ 19:28.

422 ⇒ Jn 1:29; cf. ⇒ Lk 3:21; ⇒ Mt 3:14-15; ⇒ Jn 1:36.

423 ⇒ Is 53:7, ⇒ 12; cf. Jer 11:19; ⇒ Ex 12:3-14; ⇒ Jn 19:36; ⇒ 1 Cor 5:7.

424 ⇒ Mk 10:45.

425 ⇒ Jn 13:1; ⇒ 15:13.

426 Cf. ⇒ Heb 2:10, ⇒ 17-18; ⇒ 4:15; ⇒ 5:7-9.

427 ⇒ Jn 10:18.

428 Cf. ⇒ Jn 18:4-6; ⇒ Mt 26:53.

429 Roman Missal, EP III; cf. ⇒ Mt 26:20; ⇒ 1 Cor 11:23.

430 ⇒ Lk 22:19; ⇒ Mt 26:28; cf. ⇒ 1 Cor 5:7.

431 ⇒ 1 Cor 11:25.

432 Cf. ⇒ Lk 22:19.

433 ⇒ Jn 17:19; cf. Council of Trent: DS 1752; 1764.

434 Cf. ⇒ Mt 26:42; ⇒ Lk 22:20.

435 ⇒ Phil 2:8; ⇒ Mt 26:39; cf. ⇒ Heb 5:7-8.

436 Cf. ⇒ Rom 5:12; ⇒ Heb 4:15.

437 Cf. ⇒ Acts 3:15; ⇒ Rev 1:17; ⇒ Jn 1:4; ⇒ 5:26.

438 2 Pt 224; cf. ⇒ Mt 26:42.

439 ⇒ Jn 1:29; cf. ⇒ 8:34-36; ⇒ 1 Cor 5:7; ⇒ 2 Pt 1:19.

440 ⇒ Mt 26:28; cf. ⇒ Ex 24:8; ⇒ Lev 16:15-16; ⇒ 2 Cor 11:25.

441 Cf. ⇒ Heb 10:10.

442 Cf. ⇒ Jn 10:17-18; ⇒ 15:13; ⇒ Heb 9:14; ⇒ 1 Jn 4:10.

443 ⇒ Rom 5:19.

444 ⇒ Is 53:10-12.

445 Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1529.

446 ⇒ Jn 13:1.

447 Cf. ⇒ Gal 2:20; ⇒ Eph 5:2, ⇒ 25.

448 ⇒ 2 Cor 5:14.

449 ⇒ Heb 5:9.

450 Council of Trent: DS 1529.

451 LH, Lent, Holy Week, Evening Prayer, Hymn Vexilla Regis.

452 1 Tim 2:5.

453 GS 22 # 5; cf. # 2.

454 ⇒ Mt 16:24.

455 I Pt 2:21.

456 Cf ⇒ Mk 10:39; ⇒ Jn 21:18-19; ⇒ Col 1:24.

457 Cf. ⇒ Lk 2:35.

458 St. Rose of Lima: cf. P. Hansen, Vita mirabilis (Louvain, 1668).