

xii, 39-40). The striking narrative of Ezechiel xxxvii is a vision of resurrection and restoration of Israel and of the true house of David:

'I will cleanse them,
and they shall be my people and I will be their God.
And my servant David will be king over them;
and they shall have one shepherd.' (23-24.)

Such words find their superlative fulfilment in the new Israel of God with its one fold and one shepherd. The plan of God does indeed bridge the old testament and the new:

'Incline your ear and come to me.
Hear and your soul shall live.
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
the faithful mercies of David.' (Isaias Iv, 3.)

And finally the joy of redemption achieved can well be sung in words of Isaias:

'Rejoice and give praise together,
O ye deserts of Jerusalem,
for the Lord has comforted his people:
he hath redeemed Jerusalem.' (Isaias lii, 9.)
And the redeemed of the Lord shall return,
and shall come into Sion with praise;
and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

They shall obtain joy and gladness:
and sorrow and mourning shall flee away. (Isaias xxxv, 10; cf. li, 11 and cf. Apoc. vii, 17.)

In these, and like, texts, the gospel or good tidings of the old testament find their highest expression.



THE VICTORIOUS SACRIFICE

From St Augustine's 'De Trinitate' (Bk IV, c. 13 and 14)

THE Lord also presented himself to be tempted by the devil, in order to be our Mediator in overcoming his temptations by giving us not only the strength of his help but also the encouragement of his example. But Satan's first attempts after Christ's baptism to steal into the inner citadel of his mind by

every possible entry were foiled, and every form of seductive temptation was used up in the desert without success; he, the spirit of death, had failed to overpower spiritual Life, and so he turned himself, avid for any sort of human death, to procuring the death that he was able and permitted to inflict on that mortal part which the Mediator of life had received from us. And it was precisely here, where he was able to achieve something, that he suffered total defeat; the moment he accepted the power to slay the Lord's flesh from without, the power by which he held us from within was itself slain. For what happened was that the chains riveted by many sins in many deaths were broken by one single man's one single death, which was preceded by no sin at all. Our Lord paid for us this death he did not owe, in order that the death we do owe might no longer hurt us. He himself laid aside the flesh which no power whatever had the right to deprive him of; since he was able not to die if he did not choose to, there can be no doubt that he did die because he did choose to. In this way he made a public example of the principalities and powers, confidently triumphing over them in himself (Col. ii, 15). All the guilt for which the principalities and powers had the right to hold us to the supreme penalty he purged, he effaced, he blotted out by the one true sacrifice of his death which he offered for us; and by his resurrection us whom he pre-destined he called to a new life, whom he called he justified, whom he justified he glorified (Rom. viii, 30).

Thus the devil, who had so to speak acquired full proprietary rights over man by making him consent to his seductions, and who then, being himself encumbered by no corruptible flesh and blood and being every bit as arrogant as his strength and resources seemed to warrant, lorded it over this sorry ragged creature weakened and impoverished by the frailty of this mortal body, thus he lost his human prey by the death of this very flesh. For the sinner, as he fell down, he had thrust into death without following him; and now the Redeemer as he came down he harried to death by pursuing him. Thus the Son of God deigned to become our friend in the companionship of death, from which our enemy being immune he thought himself better and greater than us. 'Greater love', says our Redeemer, 'has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends' (John xv, 13). So the devil even believed himself superior to our Lord, in that our Lord gave

way before him in his sufferings—as it says of him, after all, in the psalm, ‘Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels’ (Ps. viii, 6). But in fact, being slain in his innocence he conquered by the fairest of means the wicked one who seemed to have such a fair case against us; and so he took captivity captive (Eph. iv, 8), he delivered us from a captivity justly incurred for sin, quashing the decree of death (Col. ii, 14) by his just blood unjustly shed, so justifying and redeeming sinners. . . .

For the devil however, though a stranger to the death of the flesh, which is why he bears himself with such excessive pride, death of another sort was being prepared in the everlasting fire of hell, which is capable of tormenting spirits that have airy as well as those that have earthly bodies.¹ As for proud men, who regard Christ as worthless because he died (and thereby bought us for so great a price), besides undergoing the death which all men owe to the sorry condition of nature derived from the first sin, they will also be cast into that other death with the devil. . . .

Such men confidently rely on the slaughter of their sacrificial victims, which they fail to perceive that they are offering to proud and deceitful spirits;² or if they are aware of it, they imagine that they will profit somehow from the friendship of these treacherous and envious beings, whose one thought is to busy themselves with frustrating our return to God’s favour. But it does not occur to them that not even the proudest of these spirits could derive satisfaction from the honour of such sacrifices, unless the one true God, in whose place they wish to be worshipped were owed one true sacrifice; nor that this cannot be duly offered unless by a just and holy priest; and unless what is offered is received from those for whom it is offered; and unless it is without flaw, so that it can be offered for the purification of those who are full of flaws. This is certainly what all people desire, who want to have sacrifice offered for them to God.

1 It was the common view in antiquity that spirits, whether good angels or wicked demons, were not wholly immaterial beings—that was thought to be God’s privilege alone—but had bodies as men do, though less gross, more subtle and tenuous, and made of some airy, ethereal incorruptible substance.

2 The whole context of this passage is a comparison of Christ’s genuine mediation of life with Satan’s deceitful mediation of death under the cloak of false promises. Both mediations are effected by sacrifices—Satan’s by the idolatrous sacrifices of paganism, which were a sort of parody of the one true sacrifice of Christ. While primitive paganism was on the wane in Augustine’s time, there was much fashionable dabbling with the occult by means of sacrificial rituals, which were favoured by the name of ‘theurgy’ in sophisticated neo-Platonic circles. These were ‘the proud men’ he had in mind.

Who then is so just and holy a priest as the only Son of God, seeing that he had no need to atone by sacrifice for his own sins, whether original sin or other sins added in the course of his human life? And what else could be so aptly received from men to offer for them as human flesh? What indeed was so suitable for such a sacrifice as mortal flesh? What so pure for the purification of the faults of mortals as flesh conceived in and born of a virgin's womb without any tarnish of fleshly concupiscence? What could be so graciously, so freely offered and received as the flesh of our sacrifice, which was the very body of our priest who offered it? Thus, there being four things to consider in every sacrifice—whom it is offered to, whom it is offered by, what is offered and whom it is offered for; he the one and only true Mediator, in reconciling us to God by the sacrifice of peace (Col. i, 21; Eph. ii, 13), remained one with him to whom he was offering it, he made one in himself those for whom he was offering it, he was himself one and the same who was offering and what he was offering.



ST FRANCES OF ROME

MARY SHARP

NEAR the Arch of Titus and overlooking the Forum is the Church of St Francesca Romana, or as it is more frequently called, the Basilica di Sta Maria Nuova. In the confession is a statue of a woman with an attendant angel, and in the crypt, in a glass case, are the remains of that woman dressed in a religious habit. Every hundred years the casket is taken to an obscure convent under the Capitol Hill in the Tor di Specchi, which is the house of the order of Oblates founded in 1433. Here the sisters remove the old habit, rotten with age, and dress the skeleton of their revered and beloved founder in a new habit, and the body is then returned to its tomb in the church.