

(161) THE BIRTHDAY OF JESUS:

CHRISTMAS

1. Every newborn is unique

Life does not know repetition. Every newborn is unique. This is true for plants and animals. It is as true for human beings. Every human has his own ancestry and his own history, with the mother and her surroundings, before it is born. This is true for twins as well, even for monovular twins. They are not born in the same time. One was the first, the other the second. Even if there are not other differences, this makes them different.

Thus every new born human is already a miracle in its unicity. It is a miracle of culture, together with nature, or the other way round. It is a miracle in the sense that its being, the manner of being unique in fact is inexplicable and inexpressible. We will never know, what the unicity of this newly born exactly is. It is, on the other hand, a miracle in the sense that we will never be able to produce this unicity. We only can receive it in our life, accept it, or, which ever so often happens, reject it.

Every newly born human has to do with peace. In a deep sense it brings peace. When we see the helplessness of a just born human baby, totally dependent on the care of others, not able to defend itself in any manner, when we come into the mimesis of this helplessness, we come into a realm of peace. Things are as a matter of fact quickly changing. Very soon the newborn fights, in its manner, for its existence and is not any longer a model-model for peace. But as a newly born and, when it really is loved, quite a time after birth, the baby is a model-model for peace. It brings peace amongst those who are standing around and looking at it.

2. The unicity of Jesus

First of all Jesus is unique as all new born were and are unique. At hindsight however it became clear to those who became aware that they were “called”, that his unicity was another one than that of all the other newly borns. He did not “simply” bring peace as a baby. He brought, with and through the whole of his life, the peace “which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4, 7 KJV), “which is so much greater than we can understand” (ibid.Jeruz.Bible), a peace which obviously is not of this world, of this culture.

It certainly took a long time before it became clear to those who “followed” him, what that meant. What it meant when Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you”. (John 14, 27 KJV), and: “Theses things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace.” (John 16, 33: “in the world ye shall have tribulation [Luther translates: Angst, fear]: but be [nevertheless!] of good cheer; I have overcome the world [which gives you these tribulations, this fear]” (KJV). Obviously the peace Jesus gives and is talking about is not the peace we normally are looking for. The peace we are looking for is in a sense just the reverse. It is the peace which is peace, just because there is no tribulation and no fear.

The peace Jesus brings clearly is another peace. The peace we generally mean is the result of the use of the mechanisms of culture, in which peace always is obtained by making victims, by making scapegoats. We put our lack of peace, our violence and hatred on them and send them away, kill them. In that manner we drive our iniquities and chaos out of our

life. It is the peace Caiaphas is seeking and promoting when he says: "(...) you fail to see that it is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed" (John 11, 47 Jeruz.Bible). This sentence obviously is written down by John out of his insight that that is the peace of this world, of culture and because he wished to stress that the peace Jesus brings is another one.

Peace in culture, peace in our life always is obtained by the participants of culture, by humans, at a price. Although often this peace comes like a miracle, as a present which we did not earn and did not even hope for, nevertheless finally it is man-made at a price, paid by humans, by those who are made responsible for the chaos which preceded this peace. The peace Jesus brings is just given. It is a peace from outside of culture, which comes to us through the walls of culture, which surround us and lock us in. It is a peace which breaks the walls around us, opening up the world and bringing us into a new reality, into a new future. It is a peace without a price, it is only given "gratuitously". It just comes to us and reaches us. It surrounds us and takes us in its reality. It comes to us in and by the presence of Jesus.

The peace we are looking for always is a peace, acquired by cultural means, which always comprise scapegoating, driving out the cause of conflict and war by putting the responsibility for the difficulties on a random victim who consequently is driven out. It is a peace which never transcends culture. In this peace the cause of all the difficulties in the world and in everyman's life, the mimesis of desire, remains intact. This peace not only always is a threatened peace. It always is a dependent peace. It is a peace with, on its backside, invisible, the violence which was driven out with the victim, but which never really disappears. Thus peace in this world always is ambiguous. The violence is behind it and always can come from behind the peace into the open again, pushing away the peace.

The peace Jesus is and brings comes from outside of culture. It is the peace which is founded on the freedom and the peace of God. It is a "univoque" peace, with nothing in it or "behind" it as just this peace. It is peace outside of the mimesis of desire and consequently it does not have violence hidden in its backside. This is true the other way round as well: Because Jesus was outside of the mimesis of desire, only hearing and following his Father, obeying what he learned from Him (cf. John 8, 28; 8, 38), he is in peace, he is peace and he brings peace.

Because it is a peace outside of the mimesis of desire, it brings real freedom. It frees, it delivers from the necessity to desire on which culture is built and thus from the inevitability to bring havoc and to provoke war. It brings into a totally new reality, outside of culture, about which we only can dream, can phantasize, but which "no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of man [which always is cultural..] (...)" (1 Cor. 2, 9 Jeruz.Bible).

It not only is not the same as cultural peace. The second part of John 16, 33 shows that us because we find this peace it might be that we will lose our peace amidst of the people of this world, the cultural freedom we are so desperately longing for. Culture needs, in order to have its peace, time and again new scapegoats. They will constantly repeat the words of Caiaphas, that it is better that one man dies (or even many women, men and children die, e.g. in Bosnia) than that the whole people perish. It is as old as culture that when scapegoats are sought, always those humans are chosen who are not the same as all others, as the Muslims in Bosnia and the followers Jesus, "Christians" in Western Europe. Thus they, those who are looking for scapegoats, may apply the words of Caiaphas to us, binging us in that manner straightaway into the fellowship of Jesus. He knew that and already predicted that we would get, with everything, persecutions as well (cf. Marc 10, 30).

Probably it only became very slowly clear to those who followed him, who Jesus in fact was, in which sense exactly he was not the same as all other people are. In the end they learned it through their reading of Scriptures and by bringing these reading experiences together with their experiences in the relationship with him. In that manner it became more and more clear to them that he really was, and is, the exception, the human being who is the origin of a new life, the new Adam, who is the origin of a new humanity (cf. Rom. 5, 12ff).

Because he was this so exceptional person as a grown up, it was undeniable for them, that God's hand was already at work in his very coming, that it was not simply a human possibility which he just acquired. He could not have been "just born" like everybody else. In a deep sense God must be his origin, his Father. But in the same time his mother, who bore him, with whom he was during the nine months, who bore him with her love, certainly was very important. If she would not have been a very special woman, very free of desiring, although certainly not wholly free (cf. Matth. 12, 46ff), in that sense "pure", a "virgin", it again would be incomprehensible that Jesus was the man he really was.

In the whole process of thinking and reconsidering who Jesus was, these stories, about his birth and youth, necessarily came into existence. They are stories, "narratives", which are written in order to make it possible for us to join in, to join those who carry these stories with them, who go through his life and this world with (something of) a knowledge about the reality of Jesus, which he brings, which he gives. There are no myths, as is so often thought. Myths always are about the peace which was a result of a succeeded scapegoating. They are about cultural peace. The stories in the gospel are narratives about the way of Jesus through life, which just is a life without scapegoating, without harming anybody, a life which gives peace and freedom, because it is outside of the mimesis of desire.

3. Christmas

Mass is the past participle of the Latin verb *mittere*, to send, to send away. Mass is: To be sent away. Christmas is the celebration of Christ being sent into the world, into our life, in order that we can find peace and follow him. But the word mass further has its own meaning. "(...) many hold that its application to a service results from a transference of meaning in phrases such as *Ite, missa est*, Depart, it is the dismissal (i.e. the service is at an end), *Et missae fiant*, And let the dismissals be made (at the end of an office)." (The Oxford Dictionary of Etymology, 1966, 559/60). Thus at Christmas we are sent into the world, knowing about the birth of this new reality to life, having met him, who is and gives the peace which is about all human understanding and thus gives a new manner to understand life and to live.

We celebrate (mass too means: festival, feast day) that Jesus is born, that this new manner of life, this new horizon of life, came and comes to us. We celebrate in the same time our own new birth. In our meeting Jesus in his birth we meet in him the new possibility to live. Looking at him, being with him in the stable, being in the mimesis with him, "believing him", we are reborn, we become in a new manner human. Thus Christmas fills us with a new joy, a new expectation. It gives us a new world and a new future. We are born, time and again, with him. He and we, we are born together, or it is not really Christmas.

Of course this is true and real. But it is as true and real, be it in another manner, that we are part of this world, of culture and that we remain part of it as long as we live. When we celebrate Christmas we seek time and again the peace of culture, quietness around, in these horrible times we are now living in. And we are sentimental, as we so often are with just born children, seeing all the possibilities in them which we lost and spoiled. We are

celebrating, eating and drinking, dancing and making music and mirth, we make in some manner carnival out of it, hoping, without knowing consciously anything about it, that we will get, ritually, out of the chaos we are organising and provoking, the cultural peace we are, in the world and in our personal life, so painfully missing.

Christmas is full of misunderstandings, because very often we cannot distinguish between the different possibilities of peace, nor between the different roads to arrive at peace. The very fact that we celebrate Christmas at midwinter, when the time is turning again to the light, equalising in that manner Christmas with the ritualisation of myth, deepens the misunderstandings. Our Christmas trees and candles belong to that ritual, to cultural peace, about which we despair and nevertheless seek with these cultural means.

Cultural peace, of course, is wonderful. Without it, we would not be able to live. It is in the same time breaking down everywhere around us and in us. We deeply long for it. In that culturally hopeless situation Christmas means that Jesus says to us: Here am I as a helpless child. I remained in the cultural sense as helpless during the whole of my life, because I never desired, but just because of that I was and am peace. Follow me, be with me, accept this peace from me and come with me to a new world, of which I am the anointed King, Christ. Coming with me you will experience that I make all things new (cf. Apoc. 21, 5).

Hengelo, 18.12.93

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