



St. John the Beloved  
LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

**REDEMPTION  
AS A RESOLUTION  
OF CONTRADICTION**

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The problem I am currently studying is in regard to the many contradictions and dilemmas with which we are confronted during our life on this earth. These conflicts and contradictions require, indeed demand, a resolution, and often we are at a loss how to arrive at them. I have come to some general principles on which these resolutions might be based, and it is these I wish to offer to you.

Religion is concerned with ultimate concepts, with transcendental things, and surely the ultimate question we all come to at some time in our life is the question of the meaning of life itself. This question wells up from the depths of self-reflection at that time when the self is confronted with a contradiction, an absurdity, a catastrophe, or an injustice.

Philosophers suggest that the solution of the contradiction will not be a logical one. It cannot be arrived at by any physical science or use of rational thought, as it requires a "redemption" that comes from the realm of transcendence, from the Kingdom that is 'not of this world'. Hence it is a "religious" solution, for it is arrived at through our 'tie' (*re-ligio*) with the transcendent, through our dependence on the Absolute.

All the great Religions of the world have been religions of Redemption and the Christian Religion is the example par excellence. The founders of these Religions were aware of the fact that misery, suffering, other dilemmas of life and their tragic contradictions, create in us the need for redemption, a resolution of the paradox or mystery.

There are basically two types of redemption/solution, and I appreciate that I am offering an oversimplification:

(a) The Eastern form of Redemption

Many in the East believe that we ought to withdraw and evade the contradictions that way; to flee from the contradictory world, allowing this world to dissolve into an "illusion" (*maya*). This is their way of resolution.

(b) The Christian/Hellenic Approach

This approach is to thrust oneself into the contradiction, into the battle of opposites, to oppose the hostile forces as a tragic hero (the Greek myths are a wonderful source of such stories). This solution may be seen as one which can be obtained 'here and now', or in the 'hereafter', and the various Christian Churches and sects have adopted one of these alternatives.

The East and West, then, see the world's contradictions and paradoxes differently, and in different degrees. The Lord Buddha, for example, saw the tragic in the visions of sickness, old age, and death, that humanity must suffer and die. Therein lies the essence of the tragic in the Hindu conception. But, is this the supreme experience of the tragic? Is it not more tragic to suffer and die unjustly, like Prometheus, Socrates, Job and Christ? Here, I believe, the contradiction is seen more profoundly. For humanity wants to live and yet must die; wants to be healthy and happy, and yet must suffer. But, it is even more tragic to die unjustly, when a person, deserving of the highest honour, is sentenced to death. This is the extreme of the tragic; when the precious, the sacred, even the divine, is despised, humiliated, destroyed.

According to our Dispensation, the height of the tragic is attained in Golgotha. Here we have the archetype of the tragic situation, the dialectic, for here we have the unjust sentence, the treachery of the mob, the inquisition of the priests, the failure to recognise the sublime and godly in the "son of man"; the disloyalty and betrayal of the disciples, and finally God-forsakenness, the silence of the heavens ("my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"; "O Lord my God, O lord my God, O Lord my God, is there no help for the Widow's son?")

In this extreme situation, the tragic contradiction becomes intolerable for anyone; and accordingly it is here that the solution - redemption - must be found. Also, in this contradiction we find the remarkable dialectic, for an unbearable tragic fate is borne by the tragic hero, the holy martyr, or in Western terms, by the suffering God. And on the height of Golgotha, his profoundest fall from grace coincides (as though in a pre-ordained way) with his supreme "justification" and glorification. Is this not a

paradox? Is this not the dialectic? Here, in the story of Christ, we have the tragic contradiction, a dilemma on a vast scale, for we believe that the life of our Lord is also a re-presentation of the eternal sacrifice, the Lamb that was slain at the foundation of the world, for they are both one and the same. As I have said, in this situation, in the midst of tragedy and paradox, it may be in the world of matter and form, or in the world of pure spirit (or indeed both), that the individual will find the necessary redemption. Each of us, we are told, will be tested in this way. To give one recent example, I refer to the life and work of Teilhard de Chardin. He discovered his solution to the tragic and the paradoxes that the Creator had presented him while in the trenches in France during the 1st World War. (Indeed, the greatest discoveries of scientists, the heights of creation reached by composers and artists, have often coincided with their own personal crises. Surely this can be no coincidence.)

What do we seek? Redemption. Where do we hope to find it? On the Centre. Where is this Centre? Surely it is to be found on the Middle Road, for the wise say that it is on this path that we find the solution to the paradox, to the dilemma. For this Middle Way, or Middle Pillar of the Kabbalah, that balance of opposing forces which is achieved by ascending Jacob's Ladder (the Middle Pillar), will in fact provide us with what seems to be the impossible, the resolution of opposites and the consequential redemption of the Soul. Yet here we do not destroy either of the opposing or contradictory forces and principles. In fact, we create a new synthesis, which gives us a balance of opposites (not a static balance I might add, but one which is a dynamic equilibrium, a creative tension if you like). The Pivot or Centre on the Middle Way or Middle Pillar, is Christ Himself (at the sephira *Tiphereth*); for did He not say "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"? Figuratively speaking, the centre of the Middle Pillar in Man is the heart, and thus the heart of Christ has always been associated with the Redemption and Salvation of all people.

Contradiction is considered by Western man in particular as having a negative value, and since the opposites cannot tolerate each other, they become for him the source of much suffering and tragedy. Western man seeks to create a situation whereby he can establish a harmony of opposites. With this in mind the early Greek fathers of the Church, quite

rightly, saw Christ as the true example of coincidence of opposites, of the divine and the human in particular. Thus, the very same elements of 'being' which have been "at war", now enter into another, 'complementary' relationship; indeed, they merge and create something new (a new Man in this case – Christ is described as the new Adam). Also, the story of our Lord's life demonstrates the axiom: the greater the diversity, the greater the unity; the greater the tragedy, the greater the redemption.

This redemption is sometimes called "perfection", i.e. spiritual perfection, and for us we see it as the realisation of "perfection in Christ". This, we are told, is a truly mystical event which occurs at the end of our long, arduous journey, along the Middle Way to the very Centre. This is also represented by the "sacred marriage" of the elements of the Alchemist.

And thus on this plane the 'universal harmony' of the world is another way of describing the Kingdom of God.

This approach on the spiritual level is supported by the work of modern analytical psychologists where they attempt to bring about "mental health" in the individual, i.e. to overcome the conflicts of the psyche and thereby establish an equilibrium in the patient (i.e. integration or 'individuation' of Jung). This in itself relates it to 'the problem of salvation', although in a restricted sense, since it too seeks a solution of the contradictions which the individual faces. I believe that many of the mental illnesses in people today are the direct result of not coping with these conflicts and paradoxes they have experienced. But in saying this, we must not forget that none of us is immune from these personal challenges, nor from the results of dis-equilibrium they can produce.

There are also cosmic paradoxes and catastrophes of one kind or another (some of which were reflected in the life and work of our Lord), as well as the biological, sociological and national conflicts of this world. What desires to be saved and "redeemed" is, above all, the Soul. It too must 'rationalise' (though in a non-verbal way) and somehow come to terms with dissonance, with the insoluble, with the ineffable.

Plato represented the Soul as a Chariot drawn by a white and black horse. The reins were likened to the strings of a lyre; ideally they are properly attuned. This "tuning" is thus shown as a tension of opposites, a dynamic balance to which I referred earlier. And in accordance with the Teachings of our Tradition, it is the Christ who shows us how to attune properly these forces within.

In the East, this 'universal harmony' or 'Kingdom of God', is regarded as an illusion, a fundamental fallacy. For example, the Hindus do not believe in universal harmony in the way we do, as it represents for them a passing state, because they believe that it must suffer and collapse; nothing is permanent or stable. This is indicated in their attitude towards the experience of sickness, old age, death and suffering. But then again, it is also their view that freedom from opposition and contradictions of this world is in fact the essence of pure being, of Brahma. In this ultimate unity in the absolute then, all opposition and contradiction vanish. Hence there is no suffering, as in 'transcending' the self (i.e. the personality) we can thereby transcend all opposition, and all contradictions disappear. This does not mean a death but immortality, for death is the opposite of birth.

This view seems to differ in detail to the Christian idea of immortality and salvation. But I suspect that, in the ultimate sense, there is no real difference, as mystics of all faiths have had remarkably similar experiences and revelations regarding the nature of man and his special understanding of the Universe, its Creator and that of Redemption. On the other hand, the Christian view is to see the world around us as anything but an illusion; for us it is a work of art, fashioned by God as a "cosmos". All the diverse forces and elements of 'being' are intrinsically good and valuable: "And God saw that it was good." (Gen 1:25)

Christianity is basically dialectical, as you will have noticed from what I have said that it moves in the realm of ultimate concepts, and these are often contradictory. Even a casual reading of our Lord's sayings show this. St Paul was the first Christian philosopher, and he was a great dialectician. He discusses the great spiritual problems forthrightly, such

as the striving for the ultimate unity of the ultimate opposites, i.e. the unity of heaven and earth, of God and Man.

In this context, St. Paul teaches us a great deal about human nature, although he did not have the technical jargon we have and use today. He grapples with the problem of the conflict between the conscious and the unconscious. He sees the conflict between the higher and lower Self as one which is resolved, not by destruction of one or the other so much, but rather by the harmony of opposites, by sublimation, by the spiritualisation of the body and soul, the developing of finer vibrations, as we would say in this Church.

Finally, then, there is an ascent on a steep, tortuous path to this universal experience of universal harmony. This ascent is seen by many as a dialectical one. It leads from despair of classical tragedy, from Hindu resignation, to the 'tragic optimism' of Christianity. Faith in a "new heaven" and a new earth remain in force, stronger than ever. To the Alchemist of today, the '*lapis philophalis*' can mean nothing other than the principle of universal harmony; and he finds the philosopher's stone in Christ himself.

In our personal lives and in our daily meditation, as we endeavour to resolve our personal conflicts and dilemmas, or try to come to terms with conflicts on a global scale, as well as the universal contradictions of the cosmos (as referred to in our spiritual writings), we should remember that our Lord came from both the heights and depths (Spirit and Matter) of Existence Itself. He came as the great Reconciler of all opposites, the Healer, the Great Repairer, for He is Peace and Harmony. And to experience the Christ within, as St. Paul reminds us, is to experience the Harmony that re-establishes within us that balance we so urgently need. And thereby we will realise our true inheritance, the Kingdom of Heaven within, which is the purpose of our own incarnation.

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