

CHRIST THE KING

from a sermon of St Augustine on Psalm 44

The first five verses of this psalm, from 'My heart has uttered a good word' to 'Your right hand will conduct you wonderfully', Augustine has interpreted as being addressed to Christ, partly by God the Father, who utters a good word when he eternally begets the Son, and partly by the psalmist speaking prophetically. Then he continues in the same vein:

YOUR arrows are sharp, very potent.' It means his words, piercing the heart, arousing love. As the bride says in the Canticle, 'I have been wounded by charity' (Cant. ii, 5). She means that she is in love, that she is on fire, that she is sighing for the bridegroom whose words have pierced her like arrows. 'Your arrows are sharp, very potent', both piercing and effective. 'Peoples will fall beneath you.' They have been struck and have fallen. But while we see peoples subjected to Christ, we do not see them falling, do we? He explains where and how they fall: 'in the heart'. That is where they drew themselves up against Christ, and where they fall before Christ. Saul used to blaspheme Christ, he was drawn up to his full height; now he prays to Christ, he has fallen down, he has been laid low. He has been killed as Christ's enemy in order to live as Christ's disciple. An arrow was shot from heaven and struck Saul in the heart. He was still Saul, not yet Paul, still drawn up to his full height, not yet laid low. He was hit by an arrow and fell in the heart. It was not when he was knocked flat on his face that he fell in the heart, but when he said 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' (Acts ix, 6). Why, just now you were out to bind Christians and deliver them to punishment, and are you now saying to Christ, 'Lord, what do you want me to do?' What a sharp, potent arrow it must have been at which Saul fell, to become Paul!

As with him, so with the peoples. Look at the nations, look at them subject to Christ. So 'the peoples will fall beneath you in the heart of the king's enemies'—that is in the heart of your enemies. It is him he is calling king, him he recognizes as king. 'In the heart of the king's enemies.' They were enemies, but they were hit by

your arrows, they fell before you, from enemies they were made into friends. As enemies they died, as friends they live.

'Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever.' The throne of the Jewish kingdom was only for a time, it belonged to those who were under the law, not to those who were under grace. He came to deliver those who were under the law and set them up under grace. Now his throne is for ever and ever. Why? Because it is God's, and God could not have a throne that lasts only for a time.

'A sceptre of straightening is the sceptre of your kingdom.' It is a sceptre of straightening because it puts men straight. They were bent and twisted, they wanted to reign over themselves, they were in love with themselves and their evil deeds. They would not subject their wills to God, but wanted to bend God's will to their own lusts. The sinner is often angry with God for the dry weather, but God mustn't be angry with him for being a true waster. It happens practically every day, men sitting around finding fault with God. He ought to have done this, it was wrong of him to do that. You, I suppose, see what is to be done, and he doesn't? You are twisted, he is straight. When did you ever fit something twisted to something straight? You cannot align it. If you place a bent board on a level floor, it does not fit or stay steady. The floor is level all over, but the board is bent and uneven. God's will is level, yours is bent. To you his will seems bent because you cannot be made to fit it. Straighten yourself to it, instead of wanting to bend it to you. You cannot do that anyhow, so it is a waste of time to try. His will is always straight. Do you want to stick tight to it? Then be straightened. In this way the sceptre of him who rules you will be a sceptre of straightening. A king is a person who rules; he rules by putting things straight. For this reason Christ our king is a king of straight people. Just as he is our priest by sanctifying us, so he is our king by ruling us. But what does it say in another psalm? 'With the holy you will be holy, and with the innocent man you will be innocent, and with the choice man you will be choice, and with the crooked you will be crooked' (Ps. xvii, 26). Not that he really is crooked, but crooked men think he is. The good pleases you, you find God is good; the good annoys you, you find God seems warped. God is bent as far as you are concerned, but it is the bends in you make him seem so; his straightness is always the same. Listen to another psalm: 'How good is the God of Israel to the straight of heart' (Ps. lxxii, 9).

'A sceptre of straightening is the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved justice and hated iniquity.' There is his sceptre of straightening for you: 'you have loved justice and hated iniquity'. Take this sceptre as your rule, let Christ be your king. Let this sceptre rule you, or else it will break you. It is made of iron, that sceptre, rigid and unbending. What does it say about it—'You will rule them with an iron sceptre, and like a potter's vessel you will crush them' (Ps. ii, 9)? It rules some, crushes others, rules spiritual people, crushes carnal. So make this sceptre your standard.

Is there something about it you are afraid of? But this is all there is to it: 'you have loved justice and hated iniquity'. So what are you afraid of? Perhaps you used to be iniquitous, is that it? You hear about your king that he hates iniquity, and you are afraid. Well, there is something you can do about it. What is it he hates? Iniquity, not you. But there is iniquity in you, is there? God hates it; then hate it yourself, so that you will both be hating the same thing. You will be God's friend if you hate what he hates. In the same way you will love what he loves. Let your iniquity displease you in yourself, and God's creation please you in yourself. This is the position; you are an iniquitous man. Two words, 'iniquitous' and 'man'; one signifies a nature, one a fault. God made one for you, you yourself have made the other. Love the one God made, hate the one you have made, because God hates it too.

See now how you are already beginning to fit into God when you hate what he hates. He is going to punish sin, because a sceptre of straightening is the sceptre of his kingdom. It is simply not possible for sin not to be punished. Sin has to be punished—otherwise it would not be sin. Then get in before him; you don't want him to punish it, so punish it yourself. That is why he still goes on putting it off, holding his hand, stretching the bow, that is uttering his threats. Do you think he would shout so much about his going to strike you if he really wanted to strike you? He is holding his hand from your sins then; see you don't hold yours. Get busy punishing your sins, because sins cannot go unpunished. Punishment must come either from you or from him. You acknowledge them and he will pardon them, you look at them squarely, and he will overlook them.

'A sceptre of straightening is the sceptre of your kingdom.' None of us should beguile himself too much with God's mercy

—it is a sceptre of straightening. Am I saying God is not merciful? What could be more merciful than he who spares sinners so, he who does not care what their past contains once they have been converted to him? But you must love his mercy in such a way that you value his truthfulness. His mercy cannot do away with his justice, nor his justice with his mercy. Meanwhile as long as he bides his time, do not you bide yours; for a sceptre of straightening is the sceptre of his kingdom.



GAMALIEL

(Questions should be addressed to Gamaliel, c/o the Editor, 'THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT', Hawkesyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs.)

Q. I am prompted by the question on the creation in the July LIFE OF THE SPIRIT to ask another which has been worrying me for a long time. We are told in Genesis that God made the green herb on the third day, but the sun was not made until the fourth day. If, as we are told, each day of creation lasted for some millions of years, how did the green herb grow at all, let alone become green or ripen its fruit, without the sun?

Does this knock the bottom out of evolution? If the days of creation were really days one could understand it, otherwise it would indeed be a miracle.

N.D.D.

(National Diploma in Dairying)

A. May I refer you again to what I said in reply to the question in the July issue, 'that the account of creation in Genesis is not a scientific description, but an imaginative dramatic picture'.

And so, to answer your second question first, no interpretation of Genesis can either knock the bottom out of evolution, or put the bottom into it, because evolution is a scientific theory, advanced to explain a huge collection of data, supported by much evidence, in which however there are gaps. Genesis advances no