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THE
PROTESTANT
FAITH

THE PRESIDENT'S MURDER

by
D. B. KNOX

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The tragic events in Texas profoundly shocked and moved each one of us. The whole world was stirred with grief; because President Kennedy's death was so unexpected, so senseless. It cut short with an irrevocable suddenness the hopes of the world, which the late President's abilities, his courage and strength of will, his liberal mindedness and his youth had called out. His death closed those hopes, and reminded us that the world's utopia is not to be looked for here.

Humanity's problem will not be solved by an ever growing material prosperity, because our basic problem is not the lack of possessions, but an evil will which is not subject to God. This is ultimately the cause of all our trouble, whether private or national, and we all share in the same evil will. This fact was underlined in the second murder, when Ruby took the law of God into his own hands, and shot the suspected assassin. Now the only reason why he was able to fire that revengeful shot was that publicity was being given to the transference of the prisoner from one gaol to another - a prisoner not yet convicted, though suspected, and who should have been treated with the courtesy due to our common humanity and not subjected to the curious gaze of television audiences. But who among us has never viewed for entertainment, things he ought not to have viewed? We are all involved in the guilt of this second murder, because it was for our entertainment that the improper opportunity for it arose. Those T.V. cameras were in the prison basement only in order to satisfy the unrestrained lust for entertainment, which tears down all modesty. Every time that any of us, for the sake of mere entertainment, reads of, or sees on the pictures or on television, scenes, whether of violence or sexual lust, which depict actions in themselves hateful to God we show that we ourselves are involved in the world's problem of the evil will. For God hates sin with utter intensity

and we are not to entertain ourselves by looking at it or by reading about it. What God hates is not to form the content of our entertainment. This second murder is simply the outcome of the disobedience in which the whole of our Western civilization is involved, and the root evil is the evil will which is in all of us and which will not subject itself to the will of God. Our human nature is shot through with rebelliousness. There can be no Gospel for humanity which does not tackle this basic problem of the evil will. Education and material progress are certainly the gifts of God, but in themselves, they are no final solution to humanity's problem, and the events in Texas starkly remind us of this fact.

On the other hand the Christian Gospel deals with this problem of the evil will. Its message is that Jesus Christ has overcome the evil will; and that in a twofold way. Firstly, He alone of all men has submitted His will perfectly at every point to the will of God, so that of Him alone God the Father has declared "Thou art my beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased". And secondly, by His death on the cross, which was the final test of His perfect obedience, He has borne our sins and so has abrogated the claims of evil and of the prince of evil, which were against us. "He bore our sins in His own body" and so overturned the claims and destroyed the power of the devil. As St. Paul puts it, He nailed the accusation that was against us to His cross. Jesus Christ alone has done this, and so it is through Him alone that our fundamental problem - our evil will - may be dealt with - our will which refused to subject itself in all things to God. It needs forgiveness, and it needs to be changed; and both are provided through Christ and through Christ alone. We are not surprised then that Christianity is an exclusivistic religion. Jesus said clearly "No man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6) and again, "No-one knows the

Father save the Son and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt.11:26), and St. Peter told the religious leaders of his day quite clearly "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:12) and there are many other verses to the same effect. The reason for this exclusiveness is quite simply that man's fundamental problem has never been dealt with except by Christ on Calvary so that there is no other way back to God except through the cross.

But we constantly forget this simple truth, and this forgetfulness takes two forms. Firstly, we forget who Christ is, that He is God Himself, Who for the forgiveness of our sin, came down from Heaven, so that it is quite impossible to think that we can come back to God some other way; and secondly we forget our own desperate sinfulness and the stubborn rebellion of our will. We are inclined to think that humanity in general and ourselves in particular is not as bad as the Scriptures make out. But the Scriptures describe us as God sees us, which is ultimately the only true situation, and the Scriptures are very clear. I will only quote one of the many passages, but in Ephesians 2 St. Paul describes the ordinary person as follows. (He is speaking of the Ephesians before they were converted.) "You were dead through your trespasses and sins. That was when you followed the fashion of this world, when you acknowledged the prince whose domain is in the lower air, that spirit whose influence is still at work among the unbelievers. We too, all of us, were once of their company, our life was bounded by natural appetites and we did what corrupt nature or our own calculation would do, with God's displeasure for our birthright, like other men." A little later St. Paul goes on, "In those days there was no Christ for you, you were outlaws from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to every covenant, no promise to hope for but the

world about you, and no God. ... You were far away from God". Here the description of our natural state with regard to God as given is clear; we are dead, under the power and direction of Satan. The God of this world blinds the eyes of unbelievers, says St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:4. All this results from Adam's first disobedience in which mankind turned away from God and all of us ever since have inherited an evil will which rejects God's will when it is contrary to what we want ourselves. We do not follow God's will, but take our affairs into our own hands, not subjecting ourselves to the will of God. But as I say, we have a natural inclination to alleviate this sombre picture, and to attribute to our own abilities more strength with regard to the things of God, than the Scriptures or the facts warrant. The consequence is that the uniqueness of Christ as the only way of salvation is lost sight of.

One of the criticisms to be brought against Roman Catholic doctrine is this very point, that by taking an over-optimistic view of our own powers it has displaced Christ from the central uniqueness of the position that He should rightfully occupy. This too optimistic view of our human nature may be illustrated from Ludwig Ott's "Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma" p.113 where he says that our human nature has not been intrinsically affected by the fall, though certain privileges have been lost. His words are: "The person who is born in original sin is to the human nature in a pure state of nature, as one stripped of his clothes is to the unclothed". Ott's illustration amounts to this, that our human nature is in itself unaffected by the fall though we deserve punishment for losing certain gifts through the fall, in the same way as a person who has lost his clothes does not differ from a person who has no clothes in the first place, except that he deserves punishment for his loss if he has lost them negligently. But the facts of course are quite different. Mankind's fall into sin has affected our will and brought it under the domination of the devil so we are no longer in the position which we were in in

an ideal state of nature before sin entered. This is why there can now be no possibility of our contributing to our own salvation, because all that we do apart from Christ springs from a will which at its basic root is in rebellion against God. An evil tree, said Jesus, cannot bring forth good fruit. Christ alone can save us and in saving us He changes our will at its root so that from henceforth we are able to please God. But you will see straight away that our own efforts cannot contribute to our salvation, because until we are saved by Christ, our own efforts spring from an evil will and hence on strict analysis are ultimately displeasing to God however much on the surface these acts of ours may reflect many noble qualities. As is well known, Roman Catholics couple our own works with the work of Christ in our salvation. This is expressly taught in Canon 11 of Session 6 of the Council of Trent. The placing of our own moral life alongside the work of Christ as a ground of our acceptance with God is a natural consequence of an optimistic view of our moral ability, for as I say, the sense of the uniqueness of Christ as a way of salvation is closely linked with the realisation of the seriousness of our plight as sinners. Lessen the sense of that seriousness, and we immediately move Christ from the central unique position to make room for our own moral efforts, either co-ordinate alongside of Christ, or if we depart still further from the Christian faith, as a substitute for Christ. This tendency of displacing Christ from His unique central position is not confined to Roman Catholicism, but springs up whenever we begin to weaken the biblical view of the sombreness and seriousness of our sinful state. Thus it is a foolish thing to think that we can learn about God from men of other religions, or from men who do not acknowledge God at all. The true knowledge of God is found only in the Bible, because it is found only in Christ, for in Christ the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. We must never turn aside from this unique source and centre of true

religion. Other religions, the Bible says in Romans 1, are man-made, and spring from disobedience, and are the result of God giving up those who will not have Him in their knowledge. We are not to turn aside from Christ to listen to what they have to say about God, as the recent Toronto Conference suggested we should.

Again, if we lessen the Biblical picture of the hopeless state of the sinner, we tend to worship God as creator and architect of the world, omitting reference to Christ as Saviour, as with our masonic friends. But we must not seek to worship God apart from Christ. We fail to see the seriousness of our predicament when we by-pass the only solution, namely Christ's work for us, relying to some extent on our own goodness. Worship is displeasing to God when Christ is deliberately bypassed, because Christ is God's own solution to our problem, for we read: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself", and "The Father sent the Son", or as John 3:16 puts it "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him should not perish". This gift of God in Christ would not have been made, had it been possible to worship God apart from Christ, so that there is nothing strange in our Lord's clear statement (which sounds so exclusive) "He who honours not the Son honours not the Father", and "no man comes to the Father but by Me".

When Jesus Christ is no longer the absolute centre of our approach to God, then we ourselves with our own works; come in to occupy some of that limelight. Indeed, we may say that Christ will never be the absolute and exclusive centre of our religion, as the Bible stresses He should be, so long as we are forgetful of the hopeless predicament that we are in through our evil will. We cannot save ourselves because we cannot solve this basic problem of the evil will and the fearful events

from Dallas are a reminder of this sombre truth. But
the Lord Jesus is able to save completely those who
come to God by Him.

8th December, 1963.

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