

The Sword that pierced the Soul of Mary

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*Behold, this (child) is destined for the downfall
and resurrection of many in Israel,
to be a sign that will be opposed;
and you yourself will feel a sword pass through your soul,
that the secret thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

Luke 2: 34 - 35

According to the teaching of the prophets (Isaiah 8: 14 and Ezekiel 4: 7-8) it is the LORD himself who is the stumbling block to his people. His presence among his people requires choice. In the words of the hymn 'Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide' or in the rather quaint lines from the old version of the Methodist Covenant Service 'Upon your present choice depends your immortal lot'. It is the awesome paradox of the Christian gospel that it brings both reconciliation and division. 'Choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house we will serve the LORD.' (c.f. Joshua 24: 15)

Commitment to the living God is both personal and corporate. In the missionary strategy of God and his church whole tribes and nations have turned to Christ. But individuals too must say 'Yes' to Christ. Families are baptised one at a time. Jesus warned the first disciples that loyalty to him would divide families – even his own! Was Simeon warning Mary of that? The creed of our baptism asks us what we turn from and what we turn to. From darkness to light. From Satan to Christ The Christian's path is the martyr's road. The faith of Mary and of all our ancestors is the faith of Christ crucified.

So God inflicts upon his people a sword. The sword passes through Mary – through Calvary – through the Church. It has been said that the sword to which Simeon refers is the 'stage whisper' to Mary about Calvary.

The sword passes through Mary at the foot of the cross because she is the representative of faithful Israel. Just as, in the beginning, all creation waited for Mary to say 'Yes' to God in the presence of the Angel Gabriel – so all creation waits at Calvary for Mary to say 'Yes' at the final moment of our salvation. At the cross Mary makes her own 'yes', of total and final surrender, to the saving work of the Father through his Son.

At the foot of the cross Mary undergoes a double agony. First she shares in the pain of Christ's agony as he carries the weight of his own body and the burden of the sin of the whole world. But the other aspect of Mary's agony is that at the foot of the cross she is the Daughter of Zion. For Luke

Mary is the great representative of a people who will be divided in two, torn apart, rent asunder by the choice that Israel must make about a crucified God.

This is the most decisive moment for the people of God. The sword of God's judgement is about to pass through the entire people but it begins by passing through the soul of their representative, the mother of their Redeemer.

Mary receives the sword on behalf of the new Israel as much as the old. The sword that passes through the soul of Mary also passes through the soul of the church.

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