

The Texts of the Convivium

IS IT RIGHT TO SPEAK ABOUT “EXPIATION”?

The authority of a monarch, or of a government, appeals to the good will of its subjects, those governed or administered. However it is not always possible to rely on them. One therefore equips oneself with a weapon: he who does not comply with the law is threatened with punishment; suffering is inflicted on him.

The primitive-archaic religiousness consecrates every reality and every act of man. Punishment itself is consecrated. The person who sins offends a sacred law, which is also personified in a certain way. Furthermore, it is deemed as right that the offended Personality revenges himself by inflicting punishment that restores the initial equilibrium.

The idea is often expressed in the figure of a pair of weighing scales, which is precisely rebalanced by applying a second weight on the opposite arm that has to be equivalent to the first.

And so we have “expiation”. The Authority defends itself, it supports itself first by laying down the laws and admonishing; then, if this is not enough, by punishing, making him “expiate”. In what way? In all the ways that the human imagination could come up with bordering on the sadistic. It imposes pecuniary penalties, often in forms of “sacrifices” offered to the Divinity, which the Leviticus (ch. 6) also calls “expiation sacrifices”. It inflicts physical suffering, which is often atrocious. It takes people’s lives. Today, for the most part, one is satisfied with depriving people of their freedom, so that, in order to express the concept using prison language, the condemned person is “restricted in expiation of punishment”. Where the word “expiation” takes up its triumphant course once again.

When every recourse to friendly manners turns out to be in vain, the Authority has to make up its mind to make some people suffer, the violators, the refractory: it is a sad necessity. But one really cannot understand how this concept could also be of use in the spiritual ambit.

Here “sin” is definable as an act, which, before harming others and the environment, degrades the person himself who commits it. What follows is the need to repair the damage that the subject has inflicted on himself.

He who has harmed others - therefore, before anything else, himself – will improve his own personal condition not only by becoming aware of the evil he has committed, but by asking for forgiveness and rectifying. Insofar as his gain of consciousness will make progress, each one of these positive acts will make him feel better.

It is difficult to imagine such acts detached from any sufferance. To acknowledge one’s own mistakes is certainly painful. To ask for forgiveness or to apologize is painful self-humiliation. To rectify calls for hard work and disbursement. Needless to say the suffering is proportionate to the degree of the damage or harm caused.

Finally, what is to be included in the harm or damage that the subject causes to himself is that vice, which is born or grows as the negative action is reiterated until it becomes a habit, until it heavily influences, affects the personality of the subject.

How painful it also is to free oneself of a vice, like every well repeated habit, has become almost second nature! And how much pain results from negative and guilty action! To all of this suffering which proves in the end to be beneficial, redeeming, do we really want to add, by throwing on to the scales’ pan, extra useless, futile and fruitless suffering, as an end in itself, inflicted for a pure maniacal need?

Once and for all let's forget this famous pair of weighing scales; and, as far as "expiation" is concerned, we should nevertheless leave it in the dictionary, but defined in such a way so as to point out how distasteful it sounds and so decidedly archaic and obsolete.