

# The Chalice of Gethsemane

## On Bitterness as the Path to Consciousness

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October 31, 2025

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#### I. Mirror of Our Dual Nature

In the Garden of Gethsemane, on the night before the crucifixion, Jesus prayed with words that pierce through the ages: *“Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt”* (Mark 14:36). This chalice – full of bitterness, suffering, and impending death – contained something more than personal agony. It contained a reflection of us all.

When the priest during Mass raises the chalice and speaks the words of consecration: *“This is the cup of my blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins”* (cf. Matthew 26:28), something much deeper occurs than symbolic remembrance. This is not merely a memorial of a sacrifice from two thousand years ago. It is a profound, bodily experiencing of our collective guilt – drinking from the same chalice that Christ asked to pass from him.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come”* (1 Corinthians 11:26). Some must do this in His remembrance – the community needs someone who will bear the burden of memory, who will witness to our capacity for both evil and good.

## **We Are All in the Crowd**

*“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23) – Paul wrote. It wasn’t “they” who crucified Christ – Pilate, the priests, the Romans, the crowd from two thousand years ago. It was us. Each of us is in that crowd. I am Pilate when I see injustice but *“take water and wash my hands”* (Matthew 27:24). I am High Priest Caiaphas when I claim that *“it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people”* (John 11:50). I am Peter when *“I begin to curse and swear: I know not this man”* (Matthew 26:74). I am part of the crowd shouting: *“Crucify him! Crucify him!”* (Luke 23:21).

Hannah Arendt, analyzing Adolf Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem, called this phenomenon the “banality of evil.” Ordinary people, bespectacled bureaucrats, bureaucratic machinery – systematically murdering millions. But this mechanism was not new. The crucifixion was the first fully documented case of systemic evil – no one individually wanted to kill an innocent man, but the system killed. Everyone performed their small part. Everyone had a justification. Pilate acted in the name of public order, the priests in the name of religious purity, the soldiers were following orders, the crowd was driven by emotion.

Arendt wrote: “Evil is not radical, only extreme, and possesses neither depth nor demonic dimension.” The same systemic evil that two thousand years later led to the Holocaust had already revealed itself in Jerusalem. Except that then we didn’t yet have the language to name and recognize it.

## **II. The Chalice of Nations and Consciousness of Sin**

### **Hiroshima – America’s Chalice**

On August 6, 1945, Paul Tibbets, pilot of the Enola Gay bomber, dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Until the end of his life, he claimed he didn’t regret his decision, but his co-pilots and crew members bore this burden differently. Robert Lewis, the co-pilot, wrote in the flight log: “My God, what have we done?” Claude Eatherly, pilot of the reconnaissance plane, struggled with guilt for the rest of his life, repeatedly being admitted to psychiatric hospitals.

Two hundred thousand civilians – women, children, elderly – incinerated in an instant. America lost its innocence. The “good” can commit absolute evil. It was a calculation – it was estimated that an invasion of Japan would cost a million American casualties and many more Japanese. But perhaps it was

also – though this sounds provocative – an unconscious act of drinking from the chalice of bitterness, so that after the war there would be no clean division between good and evil. Without Hiroshima, World War II would have had morally innocent victors, which could have led to American triumphalism, to fascism based on “the nation’s special role in history.”

Hiroshima became a vaccine – terrible, painful, but a vaccine against national pride, against a third world war. Thor’s Hammer – the weapon of gods capable of destroying mountains and felling giants – began to weigh heavy in our hands.

### **Other Chalices of Bitterness**

Every nation received its chalice to drink. Japan – Unit 731 and experiments on living humans, a horror that had to be acknowledged and accepted. Germany and Europe – the Holocaust, the industrialization of death. “*How is it possible that we, civilized Europeans, could do this?*” – this question forces every civilization to reckon with itself. Russia – the Gulag and Stalinist crimes. Poland – its own participation in the feudal system, the suffering of serfs, treating Ukraine as an object, not a subject.

“*There is none righteous, no, not one*” (Romans 3:10) – Paul wrote. Every nation bears its cross, its chalice of bitterness. And this is good – because bitterness teaches.

## **III. Jesus, Game Theory, and the Pragmatism of Love**

### **Two Swords Are Enough**

Christ understood our dual nature. He knew we were a species that had traveled the path from prey to predator. For three million years we were hunted, then we learned to hunt. We carry within us the psyche of prey – fear, trauma, capacity for empathy – and the abilities of a predator – weapons, cooperation, deadly effectiveness.

Therefore His teaching contains an apparent contradiction. On one hand: “*Love your enemies, and pray for them which persecute you*” (Matthew 5:44). On the other, during the Last Supper: “*He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one*” (Luke 22:36). When the disciples answered: “*Lord, behold, here are two swords,*” Jesus said: “*It is enough*” (Luke 22:38).

Two swords – not zero (naivety), not all (militarism). Enough to defend, not to attack. This is the doctrine of minimal deterrence, game theory two

thousand years before von Neumann and MAD strategy (mutually assured destruction).

When Peter drew his sword in Gethsemane, Jesus stopped him: *“Put up thy sword into the sheath: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword”* (Matthew 26:52). You use violence → you receive violence → everyone dies. The only winning strategy is not to start. But you must be ready to defend yourself, for *“if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched”* (Matthew 24:43).

This is not pacifism, but neither is it glorification of violence. It is prudence, insurance, warning. Jesus knew we wouldn’t give up weapons – our species history, millions of years of struggle for survival, are written too deeply in our nature. But He also knew we could learn not to use them. He gave us time for this – two thousand years.

### **Good and Evil in One Heart**

*“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”* (Mark 8:36). Jesus saw in us the capacity for the highest good. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) shows a man helping a national enemy. Archaeological evidence from the Paleolithic shows that even our ancestors healed the wounded despite the cost to the group.

But He also saw our evil. *“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness”* (Mark 7:21-22). He knew we couldn’t quickly overcome evolutionary psychology – fear, aggression, tribal thinking. But He didn’t want our destruction.

## **IV. Bitterness as a Catalyst for Consciousness**

### **The Hammer Begins to Weigh**

*“For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body”* (1 Corinthians 11:29). Every sip from the chalice is bitterness – the burden for sins we have committed, for individual and collective evil, for cowardice, betrayal, indifference, violence.

But this bitterness makes us better. If we feel bitterness – it means we regret. If we regret – we have preserved conscience. If we have preserved conscience – we can change.

The experience of sin combined with bitterness leads to moral development.

History confirms this: - After Hiroshima – The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty - After the Holocaust – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Geneva Conventions - After the Gulag – awareness that utopia can lead to hell - After Rwanda – The International Criminal Court

We don't learn immediately. We don't learn easily. Humanity learns from mistakes – slowly, painfully, but it learns. We needed two thousand years of development in science, philosophy, psychology to begin understanding the warning from Gethsemane. Only now, when Thor's Hammer – our atomic weapon capable of destroying mountains like the weapon of Nordic gods – begins to weigh on us, do we understand the weight of the words: *"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God"* (Matthew 5:9).

### **The Ritual of Memory**

The Eucharist ensures we don't forget. Every week the priest drinks from the chalice for us. Every week we remind ourselves: we are capable of monstrosity, but also of good. This awareness of duality – deep, embodied, not abstract – is a vaccine against forgetting.

*"This do in remembrance of me"* (Luke 22:19) – not only to remember His sacrifice, but to remember who we are. To drink weekly from the chalice of bitterness. For conscience to grow. For the Hammer to weigh ever more. For humanity, slowly, step by step, to learn from mistakes.

## **V. Forgiveness Despite Everything**

On the cross, Jesus spoke words that are key to understanding all of history: *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). We committed collective evil upon Him. And yet He forgave.

He saw good in us. He saw that we are children – imperfect, learning, making mistakes. *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:3). He also knew we couldn't immediately overcome our nature – fear, aggression, tribal thinking forged by millions of years of evolution.

But He gave us time. Two thousand years. And a tool – a ritual that reminds us who we are. Good and evil simultaneously. Capable of the highest sacrifice and the worst crimes. *"For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do"* (Romans 7:19) – Paul wrote, expressing the eternal drama of the human condition.

## Conclusion: How Many More Chalice?

When we drink from the chalice, we accept responsibility. We don't flee from the truth about ourselves. We look in the mirror and see monsters – but also people capable of regret, transformation, good.

Communion after drinking bitterness, after accepting guilt, allows us to unite. *“For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread”* (1 Corinthians 10:17). As one body – imperfect, but aware of its limitations. Bearing the Hammer that weighs. Learning slowly not to use it.

Two thousand years have passed. How much more do we need? How many more chalices of bitterness must we drink? It depends on us – whether we will remember, whether we will let bitterness teach us, whether the Hammer will be heavy enough not to be raised in anger.

The Chalice of Gethsemane awaits every generation. Bitterness is medicine for pride, for forgetting, for repeating evil. In this bitterness is paradoxical hope – that through awareness of our capacity for evil, we can choose good. That Thor's Hammer, ever heavier in our hands, will remain unraised.

*“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come”* (Matthew 24:42). Let us watch – not only for His coming, but over ourselves. Over our capacity for evil. And over our equally real capacity for transformation.

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*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also* (Matthew 6:21)