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Renaissance Commentaries on the Passion

Ἡ τὸ θεῖον πάσχει,
ἢ τῷ πάσχοντι συμπάσχει

The progress of the sciences since the later part of the XVIIth century has so altered our *conception of nature* that it is difficult to recapture the spirit that informed the minds of individuals prior to that time. At present the earth is thought to belong to man “not by any medieval reason of Heaven’s gift but by right of growth of mind”¹. Nor do we seem able to discern the footsteps of a benevolent Deity in the natural order: nature rather shrieks with ravine, and in spite of her beauties and joys which no one can absolutely deny, she is normally regarded as “burdened with conflict like a nightmare”, as infested with “a blight of suffering”².

1.

Yet long since, when *the Hebrews* and the early Christians looked on nature, they were overwhelmed with a sense of God’s presence behind her veil. Each and every portion of the created order was affirmed to proclaim the beneficence of the Most High. In the psalmist’s words (Ps. 19: 1–2),

The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament sheweth his handywork.
Day unto day uttereth speech,
And night unto night sheweth knowledge.

More than this, the Old Testament repeatedly maintains that the purposes of God are fully reflected in the natural order. To the Hebrews, we have been informed, “when Nature was charred or darkened or torn asunder by fire and tempest and earthquake, the judgments of God were abroad in the earth. When Nature was cheered and refreshed and transformed by breezes and showers and sunshines, the mercies of God were being renewed. The Hebrew was

¹ Sir Charles Sherrington, *Man on his Nature*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge 1951), p. 286. Throughout the present study, the place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

² *Ibid.*, p. 262.

convinced that in some way the singularities and discontinuities of Nature occupied a place of vital importance in God's purposes for mankind³." Accordingly, when the psalmist meditated on the righteousness of God, he alluded spontaneously to the joys of nature (Ps. 96: 10–12):

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
 Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof.
 Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein:
 Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice.

Conversely, the anger of God was associated with convulsions in nature (Hab. 3: 10–11):

The mountains saw thee, and they trembled:
 The overflowing of the water passed by:
 The deep uttered his voice,
 And lifted up his hands on high.
 The sun and moon stood still in their habitation.

Similarly in the celebrated Song of Deborah (Judg. 5: 4–5):

Lord, when thou wentest out of Seir,
 When thou marchedst out of the field of Edom,
 The earth trembled, and the heavens dropped,
 The clouds also dropped water.
 The mountains melted from before the Lord.

Underlying this and similar affirmations was the conviction that the omnipotent Most High has total and final jurisdiction over every aspect of nature. This belief, while most magnificently phrased in

³ F. W. Dillistone, *Christianity and Symbolism* (1955), p. 68. On the Biblical view of nature, see Dillistone, Ch. II; P. C. Sands, *Literary Genius of the Old Testament* (Oxford 1924), Ch. VIII; Adam C. Welch, *The Psalter in Life, Worship and History* (Oxford 1926), Ch. I; Edward C. Baldwin, *The Prophets* (New York 1927), pp. 118ff.; Duncan B. MacDonald, *The Hebrew Literary Genius* (Princeton 1933), Ch. XII; C. C. Martindale, *The Sweet Singer of Israel* (1940), Ch. II; H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Nature-Miracles of the Old Testament", *Journal of Theological Studies*, XLV (1944), 1–12, and *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford 1946), Ch. I–III; E. C. Rust, *Nature and Man in Biblical Thought* (1953), Ch. III–VII; Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (1955), Ch. III (ii); Harold Fisch, "The Analogy of Nature", *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., VI (1955), 161–173; C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (1958), Ch. VIII.

God's address to Job out of the whirlwind⁴, was also stated more briefly, though as poetically, by Amos (Am. 5: 8):

Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion,
And turneth the shadow of death into the morning,
And maketh the day dark with night:
That calleth for the waters of the sea,
And poureth them out upon the face of the earth:
The Lord is his name.

The same attitude toward nature was shared by the *early Christians*. Throughout the New Testament, the terms of total reference appropriate to the omnipotent God are employed again; and again we find nature reacting benevolently or adversely, in either case reflecting the inclination of Divine Purpose. Thus, to cite the most striking manifestation of this attitude, the Synoptic Gospels maintain that the death of Jesus was accompanied by violent upheavals in the natural order. The fullest account is in the Gospel according to Matthew (Matth. 27: 45–54):

From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour... Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God"⁵.

I propose to consider some of the *Renaissance commentaries* on these verses⁶, partly because they help to clarify the Biblical view

⁴ Job 38–41. For other outstanding poetic passages of similar tenor, see esp. Ps. 74 and 104, and Is. 40.

⁵ Mark 15: 33–39 and Luke 23: 44–47 do not mention the earthquake or the resurrection of the dead; and only Luke suggests the possibility of an eclipse and speaks of the universality of darkness (discussed *infra*). The Fourth Gospel is altogether silent.

⁶ Robert Allen, *The Doctrine of the Gospel* (1606), II, 191f., 226ff.; Anon., *The Passion of our Lord* (1508), sig. gl^v; Samuel Austin, *Avstins Vrania* (1629), pp. 3–4; Fulk Bellers, *Jesus Christ the Mystical or Gospell Sun* (1652), pp. 26ff.; Matthew Brookes, *The Sacred and Most Mysterious History of Mans Redemption* (1657), pp. 252f.; Calvin, *Tvvo Godly and Notable Sermons*, Engl. transl. Anon. ([1576]), sigs. F7¹f.; Méric Casaubon et al., *Annotations upon... the Old and New Testament* (1645), sig. C3^v;

of nature, partly because they indicate the changes that set in since the time of "primitive" Christianity—and in either case affording us an opportunity to glance at the preoccupations of expositors during the vital period of theological interpretation that was the Renaissance.

2.

The *Renaissance* view of *nature* coincides with the Biblical viewpoint if not in detail at least in general terms. One of the finest orthodox formulations during the Renaissance, penned by Sir Walter Raleigh, begins with a violent censure of the "monstrous" impiety involved in confounding God and nature, and proceeds to a detailed exposition of their respective spheres of jurisdiction⁷:

Walter Charleton, *The Darknes of Atheism* (1652), pp. 149ff.; Miles Coverdale, *Fruitfull Lessons* (1593), sigs. S3¹ff.; Richard Crashaw, *The Glorious Epiphany of our Lord God*, ll. 144ff.; John Denison, *The Sinners Acquittance* (1624), pp. 20f.; John Donne, *infra* (Note 23), IV, 333, and X, 247–248; John Falconer, *Fasciculus Myrrhae* ([St. Omer], 1633), pp. 122–123; Daniel Featley, *Clavis Mystica* (1636), pp. 233, 721; Giles Fletcher, *Christs Victorie and Triumph*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1632), p. 60 [Pt. III, St. 38–39]; Thomas Fortescue, *The Foreste* (1571), fol. 94^v, being the English translation of Pedro Mexía's *Silva de varia lección* (Valladolid 1542); Daniel Heinsius, *The Mirrovr of Hvmilitie*, Engl. transl. by John Harmar (1618), pp. 79ff.; Charles Herle, *Contemplations and Devotions* (1631), Ch. XXIII–XXIV; Thomas Heywood, *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angells* (1635), pp. 316–319, being largely a translation of Cardinal Bellarmine's *De septem verbis* (Cologne 1614), Bk. II, Ch. I; Barten Holyday, *Three Sermons vpon the Passion* (1626), pp. 31ff.; William Hull, *The Mirrovr of Maiestie* (1615), p. 84; Arthur Lake, *Sermons* (1629), II, 153; Edward Leigh, *Annotations upon all the New Testament* (1650), pp. 76, 138; John Lightfoot, *The Harmony, Chronicle and Order of the New Testament* (1655), p. 72; John Mayer, *A Treasvry of Ecclesiasticall Expositions* (1622), pp. 336ff.; Thomas Milles, *The Treasurie of Auncient and Moderne Times* (1613), p. 643; George Petter, *Commentary, vpon... Mark* (1661), II, 1546–47; Gilbert Primrose, *The Christian Mans Teares* (1625), I, 126; Francis Quarles, *Hosanna* (1647), ed. John Norden (Liverpool 1960), pp. 14–15; Robert Rollock, *Lectvres, vpon... the Passion* (Edinburgh 1616), pp. 204–209; Samuel Rowlands, *The Betraying of Christ* (1598), sig. G3¹; Samuel Walsall, *The Life and Death of Iesvs Christ* (1607), sig. F2¹; Sir Henry Wotton, *Reliquiae Wottonianae*, 2nd ed. (1654), p. 322; and the works cited *infra*, Notes 12, 14–16, 27.

⁷ "The Preface" to *The History of the World* (1614), sig. E2^v. See Lemnius's parallel statement, quoted by D. B. Wilson, *Ronsard: Poet of Nature* (Manchester 1961), p. 59.

It is God, that only disposeth of all things according to his owne will... It is Nature that can dispose of nothing, but according to the will of the matter wherein it worketh. It is God, that commandeth all: It is Nature that is obedient to all. It is God that doth good vnto all, knowing and louing the good he doth: It is Nature, that secondarily doth also good, but it neither knoweth nor loueth the good it doth. It is God, that hath all things in himselfe: Nature, nothing in it selfe. It is God, which is the Father, and hath begotten all things: It is Nature, which is begotten by all thinges; in which it liueth and laboureth; for by it selfe it existeth not.

Raleigh's explicit subordination of nature to the Divine Will forms the best possible introduction to the Renaissance commentaries on the *Passion*, wherein we repeatedly encounter the Biblical conviction that nature—in Chaucer's accurate terms, "the vicaire of the almyghty Lord"⁸—reflects God's purposes adequately. Hence John Donne's variety of metaphorical references to nature as God's vice-regent, commissioner, foreman, and lieutenant⁹—the last uttered, specifically in connection with the *Passion*, in a celebrated poem¹⁰:

What a death were it then to see God dye?
It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,
It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke.

A host of writers agreed that nature's violent reaction upon the crucifixion was "an undoubted signe" of God's wrath against the enormous injustice committed, "a doleful Sermon" addressed to sinful humanity: the darkness indicated that the heavens were "abashed to behold the Lord of glory so abased"; the eclipse testified that the sun was "ashamed" to witness the tragedy at Calvary; the cleft rocks expressed "a lamentation on their makers behalfe"¹¹. As Thomas Aylesbury proclaimed before his congregation on Good Friday of 1626¹².

⁸ The Parliament of Fowls, l. 379.

⁹ The four references: Sermons (infra, Note 24), III, 215; Devotions, ed. John Sparrow (Cambridge 1923), pp. 47 and 87; and infra (next note).

¹⁰ "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward", ll. 18–20.

¹¹ Seriatim: Mayer (n. 6), p. 336; Allen, II, 192; Denison, p. 20; Hull, p. 84; Coverdale, sig. T3¹. Lightfoot (p. 72) establishes an interesting analogy: the three hours' darkness at Calvary was "the very space of time of the day that Adam lay in darknesse without the promise, from the time of his Fall till God came and revealed Christ to him" – namely, by means of the promised "seed" (Gen. 3: 15).

¹² The Passion Sermon at Pavls-Crosse (1626), pp. 26–27. Charles Herle, in *Wisdomes Tripes* (1655), II, 22, takes an interesting – and cheerful – view

The very dumbe Creatures cry out of these paines; the renting of his body rends the vaile of the Temple; the digging into his side opens the Monuments; the cry of him dying awakes the dead; the immouable earth doth quake for feare of those feares; the Sun is ashamed to shew his brightnesse, when the Father of lights was darkned with such disgrace; the Heauens discolour their beauties, and suiting themselues to their makers fortune are in mourning robes when the lampe of heauen is extinguished: Ingratefull Nation, the Sunne will not shine vpon them, but is immantled with a miraculous eclipse, and Sympathizing with the Sunne of Righteousnesse, will not appeare in *Glory*, when the *Lord of Glory* is thus disgraced.

The same attitude is encountered in the drama. In Hugo Grotius' tragedy of the Passion, translated into English by George Sandys in 1640, a messenger reports the events that followed Christ's death in terms reminiscent of the parallel passage in the even greater tragedy by St. Gregory of Nazianzus¹³. According to Grotius¹⁴,

Terroures, which with Nature war, affright
Our peacelesse Souls. The World hath lost its Light:
Heaven, and the Deeps below, our Guilt pursue:
Pale troops of wandring Ghosts now hurrie through
The holy Citie; whom, from her unknown
And secret Wombe, the trembling Earth hath thrown.
The cleaving Rocks their horrid jawes display:
And yawning Tombes afford the dead a way

of nature's convulsions: such was the wisdom displayed in the reconciliation of Mercy and Justice by means of the Cross, that the achievement "dazled the Sun to look on it, ... shook the earth, clave the rocks, rent the veil, rais'd the dead, bowed the heavens into astonishment". But elsewhere Herle accepted the conventional interpretation (*supra*, Note 6).

¹³ St. Gregory, *Χριστός πάσχων*, ll. 1203ff.; ed. J. G. Brambs, *Christus patiens* (Leipzig 1885), pp. 96f. But see also Nicodemus' report in the miracle play *The Passion*, ll. 877–884, in *Chester Plays*, Early English Text Society: Extra Series, CXV (1914), p. 317. On Shakespeare, see Edgar C. Knowlton, "Nature and Shakespeare", *PMLA*, LI (1936), 719–744; Robert E. Heilman, *This Great Stage* (1948); John F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* (1949); Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, 2nd ed. (New York 1951); and Robert Speaight, *Nature in Shakespearean Tragedy* (1955).

¹⁴ *Christus patiens*, IV, 243–266; Engl. trans. by George Sandys, *Christ's Passion. A Tragedie. With Annotations* (1640), p. 52. The play's particularly pertinent sections are pp. 49ff., 105ff. For the use of the tradition in epic poetry, see Hojeda's *La Cristiada*, esp. XII, 490: 25ff.; discussed by Sister Mary Edgar Meyer, *The Sources of Hojeda's "La Cristiada"*, University of Michigan Publications, Language and Literature, XXVI (1953), pp. 193f.

To those that live. Heaven is the generall
 And undistinguisht Sepulcher to all.
 Old Chaos now returns. Ambitious Night
 Impatient of alternate Rule, or Right,
 Such as before the Dayes etheriall birth,
 With her own shady People fills the Earth.

Renaissance commentators on the Passion were particularly fond of quoting the statement reportedly made by Dionysius the Areopagite upon the *eclipse* of the sun: “either the God of nature doth now suffer, or the frame of the whole world shall be dissolved”¹⁵. Since Dionysius was not in Palestine during the crucifixion but at Heliopolis, his deduction inevitably impressed the theologians of the Renaissance as quite remarkable. Nevertheless John Sherman, the platonizing preacher at Cambridge, was of the opinion that the Areopagite’s observation was “no argument of any extraordinary knowledge”; after all, he pointed out, it was extremely “easie” for any one at the time to conclude that “the eclipse then was supernaturall, it being not then conjunction-time of sunne and moon, and also in regard of the continuance of the eclipse, as Thomas Aquinas observeth”¹⁶.

Sherman’s implied assumption is, of course, that the eclipse was a miracle—which is also the general view of Renaissance theologians, even though not quite the attitude of the early Christians. For if primitive Christianity, leaning heavily on Hebraic thought, upheld nature’s “living relatedness” to God¹⁷, a profound change gradually set in that resulted in a divorce between the natural order and the divine realm. St. Augustine, who represents the earlier Christian view, affirmed a “continuous chain of causality”, refusing to separate nature from supernature, but preferring to regard them as “inter-

¹⁵ Apud Donald Lupton, *The Glory of their Times* (1640), p. 31. The Greek quotation in the headnote, *supra*, is the version of Dionysius’ statement given by “Suidas” (*Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne [Paris 1894], CXVII, 1251). For other Renaissance quotations of this statement, see Bellers, p. 26; Fletcher, st. 39; Fortescue, fol. 94v; Walsall, sig. F2¹. An earlier version occurs in Caxton’s *Mirroure of the World*, ed. O. H. Prior, *Early English Text Society: Extra Series*, CX (1913), p. 142.

¹⁶ *A Greek in the Temple* (Cambridge 1641), p. 14. Sherman’s reference is to the *Summa theologica*, III, xlv, 2.

¹⁷ Evgueny Lampert, *The Divine Realm* (1946), p. 115.

penetrating one another in all the phenomena of the world”¹⁸. Accordingly, Augustine asserted that every aspect of the created order is “miraculous”, though familiarity has deprived them of their “wonder” for us. As he observed in a memorable statement, “Is not the world a miracle, yet visible, and of His making? Nay, all the miracles done in this world are less than the world itself, the heaven and earth and all therein.” Indeed, he went on, “though these visible miracles of nature be now no more admired, yet ponder them wisely, and they are more admirable than the strangest: for man is a greater miracle than all that he can work”¹⁹. But this viewpoint was slowly replaced by the theory that nature is a created order fundamentally distinct from supernature. Thus by the end of the thousand years intervening between St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, nature became “a sort of closed order”²⁰. Upon the creation of the world, it was argued, God delegated to the natural order certain powers that in a sense became autonomous; and accordingly, whenever God intervened in the created order directly and not through nature, the immutability of the created order was “violated”. Hence the statement of St. Thomas that miracles are “against the order of the whole created nature” in that they are “works that are sometimes done by God outside the usual order assigned to things”²¹. Hence also the Renaissance view that God’s providential supervision of the creation is—in the words of Sir Francis Bacon—“not immediate, and direct, but by compass, not violating nature”²²; while a miracle, on the other hand, is “against”

¹⁸ T. A. Lacey, *Nature, Miracle and Sin* (1916), pp. 72, 31.

¹⁹ *De civitate Dei*, X, 12; Engl. transl. by John Healey (1610), revised by R. V. G. Tasker (1945). On the Biblical attitude toward miracles, see Arthur C. Headlam, *The Miracles of the New Testament* (1914), Ch. I; H. W. Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Oxford 1946), Ch. III; C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (1947); Robert M. Grant, *Miracle and Natural Law* (Amsterdam 1952), Ch. XI–XIII; E. C. Rust, *Nature and Man in Biblical Thought* (1953), pp. 81–94; Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Engl. transl. by A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (1958), pp. 223–226; et al.

²⁰ Lacey (n. 18), p. 86.

²¹ *Summa theologica*, I, cx, 4, and *Summa contra gentiles*, III, ci (respectively); Engl. transl. by the English Dominican Fathers. Cf. *supra*, Note 16.

²² *The Confession of Faith* (1641), p. 4.

or “above” nature²³, a special interference of God in order to effect some end which the natural order was not originally endowed with the ability to perform. In Donne’s summary statement, “Gods ordinary working is by Nature, these causes must produce these effects; and that is his common Law; He goes sometimes above that, by Prerogative, and that is by miracle”²⁴. It was in this sense that Sherman termed the eclipse “supernaturall”—though more accurately, as other Renaissance expositors maintained, the eclipse was in fact “myraculous, contrary to the order of Nature”, “above, nay against the fundamental constitutions of Nature”²⁵.

3.

Of other aspects of the events at Calvary that concerned Renaissance commentators, three in particular attracted considerable attention: the extent of *the darkness*, the opening of the graves, and the renting of the veil. In each case the interpretations, though from various quarters and variously stated, coincide to a marked degree. Thus, despite the fact that only Luke states that the darkness extended over “all the earth” and he alone suggests the possibility of an eclipse (“the sun was darkened”), the limiting evidence of Matthew and Mark—who speak merely of a “darkness” covering the “land”—was disregarded in favor of a darkness encompassing “all the world”, a “vniuersall obscurity” that made it “more then midnight to the *Antipodes*”²⁶. This persistent neglect of the evi-

²³ Henry Lawrence, *Of our Communion and Warre with Angels* ([Amsterdam?] 1646), p. 34; George Carleton, *Ἀστρολογομανία* (1624), p. 99; Richard Bernard, *The Bibles Abstract* (1642), p. 25; Peter Sterry, *The Teachings of Christ in the Soule* (1648), p. 29; et al. Thus also John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana*, in *Works* (New York 1933), XV, 91 and 95.

²⁴ *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. E. M. Simpson and G. R. Potter (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1953–1962), III, 229. See also II, 309, and V, 292.

²⁵ Milles (n. 6), p. 643, and Charleton, p. 149 (respectively). Thus also Tycho Brahe, in *De nova stella* (*Renaissance Reader*, ed. J. R. Russ and M. M. McLaughlin [New York 1953], p. 594). On the problems that “miracles” – including the eclipse at Calvary – presented to the proponents of the mechanical view of nature, see Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven 1958), Ch. IV.

²⁶ *Seriatim: Bellers* (n. 6), p. 26; Milles, p. 643; Charleton, p. 151. Curiously enough, opinion was divided on whether or not the earthquake was also universal: while most writers speak of the “generall conquassation of

dence is justified only in the case of Salluste du Bartas, who had his own reason—namely an inability to resist the “epic catalogue”—for claiming that the darkness was observed throughout the world, as by²⁷

the swarty *Moors*,
 That sweating toyl on *Guinnes* wealthy shoars:
 Those whom the *Niles* continuall Cataract
 With roaring noise for euer deaf doth make:
 Those, that suruaying mighty *Cassagale*,
 Within the Circuit of her spacious Wall
 Do dry-foot dance on th' Orientall Seas...
 Those that, in *Norway* and in *Finland*, chase
 The soft-skind Martens, for their precious Cace;
 Those that in Ivory sleads on *Irelands* Seas
 (Congeal'd to Crystall) slide about at ease;
 Were witness all of his [the sun's] strange grief; and ghest,
 That God, or Nature was then deep distrest.

Equal agreement was expressed in connection with the opening of *the graves*; in Miles Coverdale's representative view, the dead were resurrected as “evidence” of Christ's own resurrection²⁸. Finally, as regards the renting of *the veil*, nearly all commentators concurred that the event was a symbolic affirmation of the abrogation of “all legall Ceremonies”²⁹. Additionally, however, other interpretations were proposed, as that “the way to heauen [was] more plainly laid open”, that “the *middle wall of partition* between the *Iew* and the *Gentile* was broken down”, and that “the Verities of Faith, hidden before, were to be afterwards to the Gentils, openly reuealed”³⁰.

the earth” (i.e., Heinsius, pp. 83–84), some were “doubtful and uncertain” about the matter (i.e., Petter, II, 1077).

²⁷ Deuine Weekes and Workes, Engl. transl. by Joshua Sylvester (1613), p. 112 [1st Week, 4th Day, ll. 792ff.].

²⁸ Sig. T3^v. I have encountered only one writer who raised the embarrassing question, “What became of those bodies which arose and went into the City?” Robert Rollock's (n. 6) valiant reply was: “I will not bee curious in this purpose: But in my judgement, they were taken vp to the heauēs with Iesus Christ, to be an argumēt of our resurrection & going to the heauēs” (p. 208).

²⁹ Petter (n. 6), II, 1546. This idea goes at least as far back as Origen's Commentary on the Song of Songs, II, 8 (in *Ancient Christian Writers*, XXVI, 154).

³⁰ Seriatim: Casaubon (n. 6), sig. C3^v; Brookes, p. 252; Falconer, p. 123. Sandys (n. 14), in his annotations on Grotius, lists some of the legends that had accumulated about the rent veil (p. 108).

4.

The conception of nature, I said at the outset, has altered drastically since the XVIIth century. On occasion, however, we *still* hear distinct *echoes* of the traditional viewpoint—as in the impressively imaginative novel of the life of Christ by Nikos Kazantzakis, whose account of the nailing on the Cross unfolds in these terms³¹: “As the hammers were lifted and the first blow was heard, the sun hid its face; as the second was heard, the sky darkened and the stars appeared: not stars, but large tears which dripped onto the soil.”

It may well be that nature is God’s viceregent on earth after all.

C. A. Patrides, York

³¹ The Last Temptation of Christ, trans. P. A. Bien (New York 1961), pp. 458–459 [Ch. XXXI]. In another novel, Pär Lagerkvist’s *Barabbas*, there is only a brief mention of the darkness at Calvary (“all at once the whole hill grew dark, as though the light had gone out of the sun”); but in Christopher Fry’s film version, the same event occupies a distinctly prominent place.