

## The King of the Jews, Christ of God, is condemned

## Sequence D2: Luke 22,54–23,25

This sequence is formed of seven passages; around the central question (71), the two panels each has three passages, which correspond to each other in mirror fashion.

Peter denies	Jesus	three times	22,54-62
<i>The high priest's guards</i>		<i>mock Jesus</i>	63-65
The Sanhedrin	interrogates	Jesus	66-70
<b>JESUS' JUDGMENT</b>			<b>71</b>
The governor	interrogates	Jesus	23,1-5
<i>Herod and his soldiers</i>		<i>mock Jesus</i>	6-12
Pilate	defends	Jesus	three times
			13-25



*INTERPRETATION*

## Close but separate

Peter follows Jesus, he is his disciple; but he follows him from afar (54c); he is within sight of his master (61ab), no doubt within earshot, but he is separated from him. Of all the disciples, he is the closest to Jesus at the time of trial, but he is not really with him. He is in the courtyard (55a) of the house of the high priest where Jesus was taken (54b); they are near but not together. And it is at the very moment when he has just denied any connection with Jesus that that link is re-established at the Lord's glance (61b). Becoming then aware of the reality of his situation, he moves away. Abandoning any false proximity (54c), he physically makes the separation (62a). He will then be able to find his Lord in repentance and tears.

## The primacy of Peter

Simon had been the first of the apostles to be called by Jesus when with his companions they were cleaning their nets (Luke 5,3). He it was who was chosen to be head of the group of the Twelve (Luke 6,14). He it is who will have to lead them when Jesus is gone (22,32). And here he is, by denying Jesus, also denying the group he belongs to: «I am not of them!» (58d). He has joined another; sitting in the midst of them, he deals with those who have arrested Jesus (55c). The group of the disciples having broken up, he tries to ally himself with another group, at the cost of denying his former companions. In the light of the fire (55a), he seeks the warmth of a contact. Twice Peter denies having been with Jesus (56-57.59-60); at the height of the test (58), he also denies being one of those who followed him. And yet Jesus had declared to him: «Three times you will have denied me» (22,34). That is because denying the disciples means denying the master. Of all those who will abandon the community of the disciples and leave the Church of Christ, Peter will have been the first.

## Truth and lying

Peter speaks the truth while at the same telling a lie. He is recognized by three witnesses all three of whom are telling the truth: he was with him (56.59), he was one of the group of Galileans (58). Peter frankly denies it. In just over an hour, with three lies he goes back on three years of faithfulness. But his lie rings true. It is true that he is not, that he is no longer «among them» (58); he is separated from Jesus and the other disciples are far away. He no longer belongs to their group; on the contrary, he has joined another group, he sits with those who arrested Jesus (55). Peter is also right when he states that he does not know Jesus (57.60). Yet it was he who, first of all, recognized Christ in him (Luke 9,20). Without wishing it, he nevertheless recognizes that he is unknown to this Jesus who is going to be put to death. Because, in spite of his oaths some hours

earlier (22,33), he is not yet ready to follow him that far. At cock-crow (60d) and thanks to the glance from Jesus (61b), he realizes that the master was speaking the truth and he weeps (62b).

## 2. THE HIGH PRIESTS' GUARDS MOCK JESUS (22,63-65)

### COMPOSITION

+ <sup>63</sup> And the men		the-ones guarding him
+ WERE-MOCKING	him	<b>beating.</b>
-----		
- <sup>64</sup> And having-covered	him,	
- they-asked		saying:
:: «Prophesy!:		
:: Who is		the-one <b>striking</b> you?»
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+ <sup>65</sup> And many	other	INSULTS
+ were-saying		to him.

### INTERPRETATION

The guards question Jesus (64) but he says nothing. Do they expect an answer? They get no more of an answer through their mockery (65) than they do through their blows (63). Despite their ferocity, their many insults cannot break through Jesus' silence. The prophet whose mission is to see what others do not perceive, to say what others do not know has his eyes blindfolded and remains with his mouth closed. He will not give them the sign they ask for because they do not really want it. Jesus cannot join in the perverse game of those who ask him to see while doing everything needed to stop him from doing so (64).

## 3. THE SANHEDRIN INTERROGATES JESUS (22,66-70)

### COMPOSITION

As it often happens, the centre is occupied by a quotation of the OT.

### BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Jesus' declaration at the centre of the passage refers to the person of the «Son of man» in Dan 7,13 and takes up in particular the image and the very terms of the first verse of Ps 110 (see p. **Errore. Il segnalibro non è definito.**):

Of David, a psalm.

The Lord said to my Lord:

«*Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.*»

+ <sup>66</sup> And as it-became day,	
+ were-gathered	THE ELDERS OF-THE PEOPLE, HIGH-PRIESTS AND SCRIBES,
+ and they-led him into	THEIR SANHEDRIN, <sup>67</sup> saying:
	- «If you are <b>THE CHRIST</b> , say to-us».
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= He-said	to them:
	: «If to-you <i>I-might-say</i> , you would-not-believe.
	: <sup>68</sup> If instead <i>I-might-ask</i> , you would-not-answer.

<sup>69</sup> FROM NOW ON IT-SHALL-BE,	<b>THE SON OF MAN</b> SITTING
AT THE-RIGHT OF-THE POWER OF GOD».	

+ <sup>70</sup> THEY	said:
	- «You then are <b>THE SON OF GOD?</b> »
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= He, to them	<i>was-saying</i> :
	: «You <i>say</i> that I am».

This reference to Ps 110 is clearer still in Acts 2,34-35 where, in his speech at Pentecost, Peter explicitly quotes the psalm: «For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says: «The Lord said to my Lord: “*Sit at my right hand,* <sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool”.»»

#### INTERPRETATION

##### The things must be said

The truth must be done; that is why the Sanhedrin met. Jesus does not take the initiative in presenting himself as the Christ; he does not lay claim to the title of Son of God. It is the others who ask the questions (67b) who call upon him to declare himself (70b). It is they who put forward the glorious names of «Christ» (67b) and «Son of God» (70b). Jesus, however, does not shy away from the truth. But before recognizing straight out the kingship that has been given him (69), he faces his interlocutors with their own truth (67d-68). Jesus says who he is (69), but before that he says who they are: they are not motivated by the desire for truth, because they are not prepared to hear it (67d) nor to utter it (68), but by the desire to do away with him.

##### No more mistake possible

In spite of its evil plans, the Sanhedrin is still the supreme authority in Israel and Jesus submits to its power. The Sanhedrin has the right to ask every member of the

public the reason for what they say and do; it has the right to make enquiries and put questions. Now that he is their prisoner, that the outcome is certain and that there is no longer any risk of misunderstanding over his destiny and his title of «Christ» (67b), Jesus can declare himself openly (69). He could not do so before, for fear of being taken for the king that he is not. Now that he is destined for suffering and death, he can reveal that he is «the Son of man» (69b), the suffering servant destined for glory (69c), that he is «the Son of God» (70b).

#### 4. THE JEWISH PHASE OF THE TRIAL (22,54-70)

##### COMPOSITION OF THE EXTREME SUB-SEQUENCES

<sup>54</sup> Then they seized him AND LED HIM AWAY, bringing him *into the high priest's house*. Peter followed at a distance; <sup>55</sup> and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. <sup>56</sup> Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said:

«THIS MAN ALSO WAS WITH HIM».

<sup>57</sup> But he denied it, saying: \* «*Woman, I do not know him*».

<sup>58</sup> And a little later someone else saw him and said:

«YOU ALSO ARE ONE OF THEM».

But Peter said: \* «*Man, I am not*».

<sup>59</sup> And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying:

«CERTAINLY THIS MAN ALSO WAS WITH HIM; FOR HE IS A GALILEAN».

<sup>60</sup> But Peter said: \* «*Man, I do not know what you are saying*».

And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed.

<sup>61</sup> And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, «*Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times*». <sup>62</sup> And he went out and wept bitterly.

<sup>63</sup> Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him;

<sup>64</sup> they also blindfolded him and asked him,

«**Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?**»

<sup>65</sup> And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him.

<sup>66</sup> When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; AND THEY LED HIM AWAY *to their Sanhedrin*, <sup>67</sup> and they said:

«**IF YOU ARE THE CHRIST, TELL US**».

But he said to them, «If I tell you, you will not believe;

<sup>68</sup> and if I ask you, you will not answer.

<sup>69</sup> \* **But from now on**

**the Son of man shall be seated**

**at the right hand of the power of God**».

<sup>70</sup> And they all said:

«**ARE YOU THE SON OF GOD, THEN?**»

And he said to them,

\* «*You say that I am*».

*INTERPRETATION*

## Peter denies, Jesus admits

To the three questions put to him about his being a disciple (56c.58b. 59b), Peter gives a negative answer (57.58c.60a); Jesus, on the contrary, does not refuse to answer the two questions put to him about his identity (69.70c). In the first passage, Peter is asked not only about his relation to Jesus (56c.59b), but also about his links with the other disciples (58b); in the last passage, Jesus is questioned on his relation to God whose «Son» he is (70b), but also about his relation to his people: he is the «Christ» (67b), which means «Messiah», that is to say «Anointed» by God as «king» to reign over Israel. Whereas the disciple's three denials take place at night (55-56), like the insults and blows of the guards with which Jesus is afflicted, the two confessions of the Christ, Son of God, take place during the day (66), in broad daylight.

## Mockery and prophecies

The fact that this scene of mockery (63-65) is in the centre of the construction underlines its character as comedy or as tragic farce, marking out the whole sub-sequence; by refusing to recognize Jesus as his master, Peter is mocking him in a more cruel way than the guards; especially as Jesus who is within sight seems to have heard him, since he turns at the precise moment when his prophecy has just been completely fulfilled (61); the members of the Sanhedrin are also playing out the comedy of the trial and Jesus' first reply (67c-68) — which is proper to Luke — shows quite well that he is no pawn in their game. Besides, right in the centre (64), Jesus is called upon to «prophesy». The prophecy he had made to Peter the day before (61) has just come true; the prophecy he will soon make before the Sanhedrin (69) will therefore not fail to come true either.

## B. THE ROMAN PHASE OF THE TRIAL (23,1-25)

The last sub-sequence comprises three passages:

- «The governor interrogates Jesus» (23,1-5),
- «Herod and his soldiers mock Jesus» (23,6-12),
- «Pilate defends Jesus three times» (23,13-25).

## 1. THE GOVERNOR INTERROGATES JESUS (23:1-5).

## COMPOSITION

<sup>1</sup> And having-stood-up the whole of the multitude of them  
they-led him before Pilate.

+ <sup>2</sup> *They began to accuse him, saying:*

= «This-one we found	<b>perverting</b>	<b>our nation,</b>
. and preventing to-give taxes to	CAESAR	
. and saying himself to-be	CHRIST THE KING».	

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- <sup>3</sup> *PILATE asked him, saying:*

«ARE YOU	THE KING OF THE JEWS?»
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Having-answered to him, he said:

«YOU SAY (SO)»
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- <sup>4</sup> *PILATE said to the High-Priests and to the crowds:*

«NO GUILT I FIND	IN THIS MAN».
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+ <sup>5</sup> *But they were-persisting, saying:*

«He	<b>stirs-up</b>	<b>the people,</b>
. teaching by the whole of Judea		
. and beginning from Galilee	until here».	

## BIBLICAL CONTEXT

## Paying tribute to Caesar

At their first appeal to the governor (2), the members of the Sanhedrin accuse Jesus of preventing paying taxes to Caesar. This refers to the third of the controversies between the «high priests, scribes and elders» (Luke 20,1) and Jesus, a few days before, in the Temple (Luke 20,20-26). According to Luke's account, to the question: «Are we allowed, yes or no, to pay taxes to Caesar?», Jesus had not said that taxes should not be paid to the emperor; he had, so to speak, displaced the question and faced his questioners with their own responsibilities: «Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's» (Luke 20,25). And Luke concludes his story thus: «And they could not find fault with him before the people in his words and, surprised at his reply, they kept silence» (Luke 20,26).

The answer has indeed something «surprising» about it; its enigmatic character surprises and hence calls for reflection. The listeners are turned back on themselves and required to do some personal discernment: what is Caesar's?

and what is God's? Jesus does not say. However, it is permissible to consider that, as regards what is Caesar's, the answer is fairly simple: paying taxes was the subject of the question. But what must be given to God as his due? This second problem is more difficult. The image and the words inscribed on the coin that Jesus has asked to see are easily identifiable and no one can have the slightest hesitation. However, the second part of Jesus' answer certainly poses the most urgent question, the one that constitutes the real point at issue: who is Jesus? What does he represent? Or, better still: whom does he represent? Of whom is he the «the image and inscription<sup>1</sup>»? The question asked today by the governor is not of a different kind.

#### *INTERPRETATION*

##### Lying mixed with truth

All the accusations brought against Jesus are true except one. It is true that Jesus taught in all Judea after starting in Galilee (5cd); it is also true that he has just called himself «Christ the king» (2d.3c). In one sense it is not false that he subverts and stirs up the people (2b.5b); on the days before, in the Temple, all the people came to him to hear him (21,38), abandoning their traditional guides, high priests, scribes and elders. One point is false: Jesus never stopped anyone from paying tax to Caesar. A few days earlier, to those who asked him explicitly about this, he replied that they must «give to Caesar what is Caesar's» (Luke 20,25). Among all the complaints the Sanhedrin had, this is the only one that had any chance of carrying any weight: must not this Jesus who is contesting the power of Caesar be dealt with by Pilate, the representative at Jerusalem of the power of the emperor?

##### The unmasked lie

Pilate does not let himself be taken in and knows how to distinguish between truth and falsehood. He has his own sources of information of course. Be that as it may, he refuses to believe the accusations of subversion (2b). He brings the problem back to strictly local dimensions within the Jewish world (3b). The Sanhedrin wanted to show Jesus as a dangerous opponent of the power of Rome (2b), posing as a rival to Caesar (2c), claiming the absolute title of king (2d). Pilate, when speaking of «king of the Jews» (3b) tones down the claim. Not only that, but when Jesus replies that he does not reject such a title (3c), Pilate does not take offence and in the judgement he gives (4b) even seems to accept it. In the confrontation between the Jewish authorities and the governor, it is the pagan who unmasks the lie of the Jews.

<sup>1</sup> See sequence C8, p. 653.

## The truth recognized

Jesus does not take the initiative to proclaim himself king of the Jews, but he does not refuse to recognize before Pilate what he truly is (3c). If he had not done so until that moment when, in chains, he knew he was committed to an imminent death, if he does it now in the presence of the governor, as he had done a little earlier before the Sanhedrin (22,69), it is because there is no longer any likelihood of his interlocutors' misunderstanding the real meaning of his kingship. It is certainly not of this world.

## 2. HEROD AND HIS SOLDIERS MOCK JESUS (23,6-12)

## COMPOSITION

+ <sup>6</sup> PILATE	having-heard	asked		
. if the man	is	a Galilean;		
+ <sup>7</sup> and having-learned				
. that he-is under	the authority	of HEROD,		
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<b>HE SENT-BACK HIM</b>		<b>TO HEROD</b>		
Being him also	in Jerusalem	in those days.		
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- <sup>8</sup> HEROD	having-seen	Jesus,		
- rejoiced	greatly			
: for he was for a	<i>considerable</i> time	wanting	to see him,	
- for he heard	about him.			
: and was-hoping	to-see	some sign	come from him:	
-- <sup>9</sup> he was-interrogating him		with <i>considerable</i>	words,	
-- but he	<b>NOTHING</b>	answered	to him.	

<sup>10</sup> Stood there	the chief-priests	and the scribes,
intensely	accusing	him.

- <sup>11</sup> Having-DESPISED him	HEROD with his troops
- having-mocked (him), having-adorned-him (with) radiant	clothes,

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**HE SENT-BACK HIM TO PILATE.**

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+ <sup>12</sup> They-became friends both HEROD and PILATE on the same day	with one-another
+ there-was-formerly existing enmity	between them.

*INTERPRETATION*

## An eloquent silence

To the many questions from Herod (9a), Jesus answers not one word (9b). This is because the tetrarch is not looking for anything to be said but for a «sign» (8e). He wants «to see» (8c.e) the one of whom he has heard that he performed miracles; he does not want anything else from him; he certainly does not want to hear any real utterance from him. He has already had experience of the prophetic voice of John (Luke 3,19), that voice which denounces sin and requires conversion and tells the truth, the truth of the one he is addressing. Herod's words, his many words, therefore only achieve what they really seek, i. e. «nothing» (9b). Jesus' silence shows the emptiness of what the tetrarch says and falsity of his desire. That silence is not contemptuous dumbness, is the revelation of the heart of the other person.

## Joy and contempt

Jesus' silence reveals the truth about Herod. The joy and the expectation of the king are then transformed into contempt and mockery (11). More precisely, they had already been so, and Jesus' attitude only goes to show it. Calling for a sign for himself, trying to see out of curiosity, without hearing, is tempting God; it is making him a mockery and despising him (11b); it is setting him at naught (11a). Derision, under the outward show of misapprehension, conceals a rejected truth, a rejection of any real encounter. The joy and laughter of contempt reveal — by the very attempt made to hide it — the hurt undergone although denied. One never laughs at what does not touch. In spite of them, the cloak he puts on Jesus in jest (11b) reveals exactly what he wants to rebuff, the kingship which they are making fun of; it reveals especially the futility of the royal garment that Herod wears; it cannot conceal the emptiness of his power.

## A show of reconciliation

The occasion is a good one for the Roman governor to be reconciled with the local king through a gesture that recognizes his authority over Galilee (6-7b) and flatters his vanity. He no doubt hopes to kill two birds with one stone by ridding himself of one embarrassing case while doing a rival potentate a good turn. Herod, having satisfied his vanity, if not his curiosity, returns the favour by then withdrawing from the case (11c) and thereby recognizing the governor's juridical pre-eminence. This reconciliation (12) based on reciprocal flattery is certainly not the one Jesus will bring about between Jews and pagans. Rather, it is a laughable image of it. No full and durable reconciliation can be achieved without any encounter, without the exchange of words that speak the truth. An exchange of polite gestures at a distance, not without craft and ulterior motive, at the expense, moreover, of an innocent party, can only be a show of reconciliation,

especially when it is known from elsewhere that only the power of the true king will really be able to reconcile those who will recognize him.

#### The accusation of the men of God

The political game of the governor and the king, as well as Herod's particularly perverse way of treating Jesus, might cause those accompanying their captive to Herod to be overlooked. There they are, right in the middle (10), vehemently accusing him. Their standing as high priests and scribes recalls, if it were needed, what is at stake in the final trial, which is not a political one, despite the hearing before the political authorities, Roman and local, but a religious one, because the accusation is brought by the higher religious authorities of the people of Israel. In this way they continue to play politics aimed at something quite different. Jesus does not answer their questions any more than he did Herod's. Their aim is indeed more perverse than his.

### 3. PILATE DEFENDS JESUS THREE TIMES (23,13-25)

#### *COMPOSITION*

At the very centre, omitted by several ancient manuscripts, verse 17 is often considered as a gloss.

#### *INTERPRETATION*

##### The parody of the Passover

The governor had to release a prisoner on the occasion of Passover (17). This release coincided with the celebration which for Israel relived its deliverance from servitude in the land of Egypt. But an amnesty like that, granted every year, was but a parody of the Passover; it was not really a matter of snatching the innocent person from the hands of the oppressor, as happened at the time of the Exodus, but rather, at least in the case of Barabbas, of freeing a culprit, and a culprit who had to answer for a crime involving bloodshed (19). That amnesty, which has no foundation in repentance, or in conversion and return to God, is only a fake pardon that neither improves the person freed (25ab) nor those who call for his release (18) and which in no way solves the problem of violence, since it simply puts back in circulation a terrorist who is probably only waiting for a chance to be able to return to crime. The annual repetition of the amnesty cannot break the recurrent cycle that sees pardon coming after crime, and crime after pardon. By calling for the release of the guilty, high priests, chiefs and people are simply making the falsity and stupidity of the Passover amnesty explicit; by calling for the death of the innocent instead of and in the place of the guilty, they are radically perverting the meaning of Passover.

<p><sup>13</sup> PILATE, having-called the chief-priests and the rulers of the people,  <sup>14</sup> said to them:</p> <p>+ «You bring to-me this man  + as one-misleading the people.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>. And, behold, <i>before you,</i> having-investigated  .. <i>NOTHING I-FOUND</i> <i>IN THIS MAN</i> <i>OF-THE GUILT</i>  .. for-which you accuse him.</p> <p>- <sup>15</sup> Nor-did <i>Herod</i>  - for he-sent-back him <i>to us.</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>- And, behold, nothing worthy of-death has-been-performed by-him.  - <sup>16</sup> <b>Having-chastised him, then I-will set (him) free».</b></p>
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[<sup>17</sup> HE-WAS-OBLIGATED TO-RELEASE FOR-THEM, FOR THE FEAST, SOMEONE.]

<p><sup>18</sup> The multitude shouted-out, saying:</p> <p>+ «Kill <b>THIS-ONE</b>  :: and <i>RELEASE</i> for-us <b>Barabbas».</b></p> <p><sup>19</sup> <b>Who, for a-revolution</b> that happened in the city <i>and-for murder, had-been-thrown into prison.</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>- <sup>20</sup> Again PILATE SHOUTED to-them,  - wanting to-release Jesus.</p> <p>. <sup>21</sup> <i>They</i> WERE-SHOUTING, saying:  . «<b>CRUCIFY,</b> <b>CRUCIFY-</b> him!»</p>
<p><sup>22</sup> He, for a-third-time, said to them:</p> <p>- «What evil did this-one?  .. <i>NO GUILT</i> <i>FOR DEATH</i> <i>I FOUND IN HIM.</i>  - <b>Then, having-chastised him, I will release (him)».</b></p>
<p>. <sup>23</sup> <i>Now, they</i> persisted with great SHOUTS,  . demanding him <b>TO-BE-CRUCIFIED;</b>  . and were-prevailing their SHOUTS.</p> <p>- <sup>24</sup> And PILATE judged  - to-grant their request.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>:: <sup>25</sup> He <i>RELEASED</i> <b>the-one</b> that through the revolution and murder had-been-thrown into prison,  :: who they demanded.</p> <p>+ But <b>JESUS,</b> he he-gave-over to their desire.</p>

### Subversion

Everything is upside down. Jesus is wrongly accused of subverting the people (14c); he is made to bear the crime of one who had fomented a riot in the city and had committed murder (19). Barabbas, the riotous murderer, bears a name that is Jesus', Bar-Abba, «Son of the Father». Pilate, the pagan, strives to defend

the just man (14e.22c), while the people chosen by God to be the witness to his justice calls for the freeing of the unjust (18c-19) and the death of the innocent (21-23). And it is Jesus the innocent one who is ultimately condemned to the death that Barabbas deserves (25), and not only Barabbas, but also chiefs and high priests because they are doing precisely what they reproach Jesus for: they are subverting the people; with their renewed shouts (21.23) they are fomenting a riot and eventually achieve their aim by having Jesus murdered. Jesus is condemned not only for Barabbas's sin, but also for that of the high priests and the chiefs, and that of the whole multitude of the people.

#### The perversion of justice

The people and those in charge of them perform a parody of forgiveness and pervert the meaning of Passover. To this perversion of what pertains to religion there corresponds, on Pilate's part, the perversion of what pertains to politics. If Jesus is not guilty of what he is accused of, why chastise him before releasing him (16.22d)? Pilate is trying, by means of this compromise, to cool things down by partly satisfying the hatred for Jesus. His complacency leads him to make a parody of justice; chastising the accused while admitting his innocence, wanting to combine a half-truth with a half-lie seems to him of course political shrewdness. In fact it is just the admission of his weakness and inertia. And the multitude is not taken in; if the governor is ready to give up half of justice, it will be enough to shout louder (23) to get him to give up all of it (24). He will do so quite quickly, but without going back on his declarations that proclaim Jesus' innocence (14e.22c). Jews and pagans in this way join with him in the perversion.

#### 4. THE ROMAN PHASE OF THE TRIAL (23,1-25)

##### *COMPOSITION OF THE SUB-SEQUENCE*

Three time Pilate declares the innocence of Jesus by (4c.14d.22c).

##### *INTERPRETATION*

##### Authorities and power

At his arrest in Jerusalem by the religious chiefs of his people, Jesus is brought by them before the Roman political authority in Judea, the governor Pilate (1), the representative of Caesar who presides over the destiny of all the empire. But, as he is a Galilean (6), Jesus is also led to appear before the tetrarch of Galilee, Herod Antipas (6-12). All these authorities, Roman and Jewish, come together in the holy city for the feast of Passover. All the powers are led to pronounce upon the authority of the one who is disturbing all powers, Jesus the Christ (2c), the king of the Jews (3). Falsely accused of subversion (2b.5a.14b),

Jesus is finally condemned to death, instead of and in the place of Barabbas, the real rioter who did not stop short of murder (19.25) in order to get the power of violence to prevail over the established authorities. The authority and power of Jesus are not of that order; he is completely stripped of them, led and sent back in accordance with the will of others (1.7b.11b.14ab.25b). And yet, in the centre of the first passage (3), he does not hesitate to admit before the Roman governor that he is indeed «the king of the Jews».

23,<sup>1</sup> *THEN THE WHOLE MULTITUDE OF THEM* arose, *AND BROUGHT HIM BEFORE PILATE*.<sup>2</sup> And they began *TO ACCUSE* him, saying: «We found this man **PERVERTING our nation**, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king». <sup>3</sup> And Pilate asked him, «Are you the King of the Jews?» And he answered him, «You have said so». <sup>4</sup> And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes:

«**I FIND NO GUILT** (for condemnation) **IN THIS MAN**».

<sup>5</sup> *But they were persisting*, saying «**HE STIRS UP the people**, teaching throughout all Judea, from *Galilee* even to this place».

<sup>6</sup> When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a *Galilean*. <sup>7</sup> And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. <sup>9</sup> So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer.

<sup>10</sup> The *CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE SCRIBES* stood by, vehemently *ACCUSING* HIM.

<sup>11</sup> And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

<sup>13</sup> Pilate then called together *THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE RULERS AND THE PEOPLE*,<sup>14</sup> and said to them, «*YOU BROUGHT ME THIS MAN* as one who was **PERVERTING the people**; and after examining him before you, behold:

**I DID NOT FIND IN THIS MAN ANY GUILT** (for condemnation)

of which you *ACCUSE* HIM; <sup>15</sup> neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; <sup>16</sup> I will therefore chastise him and release him».

[<sup>17</sup> He felt obligated to release someone to them during the feast] <sup>18</sup> But they all cried out together, «Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas»—<sup>19</sup> a man who had been thrown into prison for an **INSURRECTION** started in the city, and for murder. <sup>20</sup> Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; <sup>21</sup> but they shouted out, «Crucify, crucify him!» <sup>22</sup> A third time he said to them, «Why, what evil has he done?»

**I HAVE FOUND IN HIM NO CRIME DESERVING DEATH.**

I will therefore chastise him and release him». <sup>23</sup> *But they were insisting*, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> He released the man who had been thrown into prison for **INSURRECTION** and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.

## Jews and pagans

While all the Jewish authorities band together against Jesus (10.13), Pilate the pagan finds himself alone to defend the accused. To be sure, Herod does not seem to have paid much attention to the accusations of the high priests and scribes (10) and Pilate will interpret the fact that he sent Jesus back to him as a declaration of innocence (15). Still, it must be admitted that the tetrarch not only took care to get involved, but took the side of the accusers; by asking Jesus for a sign (8) and clothing him in a magnificent cloak (11), he made a mockery of the Messiah, king of the Jews. Pilate, on the contrary, does not accept the accusation of subversion made against Jesus, and will come back to it «three times» (4c.14d.22d); however, fearing a disturbance, he ends up by giving way (25). Luke stresses the contrast between Pilate's attitude and that of the Jews by ending his account with this short sentence, full of meaning: «he delivered him up to their will» (25b).

«He opens not his mouth»

All the protagonists at the trial keep talking, «accusing», «shouting»: the Jews who, from the start (2), accuse Jesus before Pilate and start «persisting» (5) again after the governor's declaration (4), Herod, in the central passage, who «questions him at length» (9), the high priests and the scribes «accuse him vehemently» (10), again Herod and his soldiers «mock» Jesus (11), Pilate, in the last passage, who, at length (14-16), addresses the high priests, the chiefs and the people (13), the multitude roars (18a), shouts (21), «insists with a loud voice» — and «their shouts got louder» (23); Pilate «shouts» also (20), speaks again «for the third time» (22a) and in the end «gave sentence that their demand be granted» (24). Meanwhile, Jesus does not speak, he makes no answer (9b); even at the beginning, when he answers Pilate's question (3), in a way, he simply refers the governor back to his own words: «It is you who said it». In doing so he accepts the title attributed to him, but by the silence he keeps thereafter, «not opening his mouth» (Isa 53,7.8), he proclaims that his kingdom is not of this world, but that he is waiting to receive it from his Father, like the Servant of the Lord.

C. THE KING OF THE JEWS, CHRIST OF GOD, IS CONDEMNED  
(22,54–23,25)

*COMPOSITION OF THE SEQUENCE*

Symmetries of the passages two by two

The first and last passages (22,54-62; 23,13-25) contrast the denials of Peter with the confessions of Pilate; in both cases the text stresses their number («three times» in 61c, «for the third time» in 22a). Moreover, the synonyms translated

by the same «insist» (59a.23b) can be noted and even the recurrence of «to shout» (60b.61b; 20.21a.23 twice, and nowhere else in the sequence).

22,<sup>54</sup> Then they seized him and LED HIM AWAY, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance;<sup>55</sup> and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.<sup>56</sup> Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said: «This man also was with him». <sup>57</sup> But he denied it, saying, «Woman, I do not know him». <sup>58</sup> And a little later someone else saw him and said: «You also are one of them». But Peter said, «Man, I am not». <sup>59</sup> And after an interval of about an hour still another INSISTED, saying, «Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean». <sup>60</sup> But Peter said, «Man, I do not know what you are saying». And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. <sup>61</sup> And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, «Before the cock *crow*s today, you will deny me *THREE TIMES*». <sup>62</sup> And he went out and wept bitterly.

<sup>63</sup> Now the men who *WERE GUARDING* him mocked him and beat him; <sup>64</sup> *they also covered him* and asked him: «Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?» <sup>65</sup> And they spoke many other *INSULTS* against him.

<sup>66</sup> When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and THEY LED HIM AWAY to their council, and they said, <sup>67</sup> «If you are **THE CHRIST**, tell us». But he said to them, «If I tell you, you will not believe; <sup>68</sup> and if I ask you, you will not answer. <sup>69</sup> But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God». <sup>70</sup> And they all said, «Are you **THE SON OF GOD**, then?» And he *said* to them, «**You say that I am**».

<sup>71</sup> And they said:

«What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips».

23,<sup>1</sup> Then the whole company of them arose, and LED HIM before Pilate. <sup>2</sup> And they began to accuse him, saying, «We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is **CHRIST A KING**». <sup>3</sup> And Pilate asked him, «Are you **THE KING OF THE JEWS?**» And he answered and *said* to him, «**You have said so**». <sup>4</sup> And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, «I find no crime in this man». <sup>5</sup> But they were urgent, saying, «He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place».

<sup>6</sup> When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup> And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup> When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. <sup>9</sup> So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer. <sup>10</sup> The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. <sup>11</sup> And *HAVING DESPISED HIM*, Herod with his soldiers, *MOCKED HIM*; then, *adorned him* in radiant apparel, he sent him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.

<sup>13</sup> Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, <sup>14</sup> and said to them, «YOU BROUGHT ME this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; <sup>15</sup> neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; <sup>16</sup> I will therefore chastise him and release him». [<sup>17</sup> He felt obligated to release someone to them during the feast] <sup>18</sup> But they all cried out together, «Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas»— <sup>19</sup> a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder. <sup>20</sup> Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; <sup>21</sup> but *they cried-out*, «Crucify, crucify him!» <sup>22</sup> *A THIRD TIME* he said to them, «Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him». <sup>23</sup> But they INSISTED, demanding with loud *cries* that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.

The second and the last passage but one (63-65; 6-12) both mention the insults received by Jesus («to make fun of» in 63a and 11a; «insult» in 65 and «despising» in 11a) from his guardians (63) and Herod's soldiers (11); in both cases Jesus is «interrogated» (64b.9a) by being asked for a sign, in both cases he is «veiled» (64a) or «enveloped» (11b; same prefix *peri-* for both verbs), in both cases Jesus makes no reply.

The third and fifth passages (66-70; 1-5) both recount Jesus' confession, firstly before the Jewish Sanhedrin, then before the Roman governor. Each time he is asked whether he is «Christ the king» (67a; 2c.3b) and he replies with a similar statement (70b.3bc), introduced by the same «he declared». Note also the repetition of the same «interrogate» (68.3a).

#### In the centre

The question in 71 is at the centre of the sequence: the Sanhedrin now has the proof, «the testimony», it was looking for, since Jesus has just clearly admitted his claims.

#### The setting

Apart from the short central passage (71) and the second and the last but one passages, the four other passages are introduced by a narrative sentence (54.66.1.13). The verb «to lead» is there, except the last time where, however, it is called to mind in «you have brought me» in 14a in the mouth of Pilate who this time summons the crowd. In this way the different stages of the trial are clearly marked out: at the high priest's residence during the night (54), then at the Sanhedrin in the morning (66), then with Pilate (1.13) with the interludes of the guardians (63-65) and Herod (6-12).

In the upper panel, the only people to speak are the authorities, «high priest» (54), «the men guarding him» (63) and the members of the Sanhedrin (66), while in the lower panel the latter are joined by «the crowds» (4), «the people» 7 (13), to form a «multitude» (1.18a). «People» (5a.14b) or «nation» (2b) are implicated in the matter by the members of the Sanhedrin.

22,<sup>54</sup> Then they seized him and LED HIM AWAY, bringing him into the high priest's house. Peter followed at a distance;<sup>55</sup> and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.<sup>56</sup> Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said: «This man also was with him». <sup>57</sup> But he denied it, saying, «Woman, I do not know him». <sup>58</sup> And a little later someone else saw him and said: «You also are one of them». But Peter said, «Man, I am not». <sup>59</sup> And after an interval of about an hour still another INSISTED, saying, «Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean». <sup>60</sup> But Peter said, «Man, I do not know what you are saying». And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. <sup>61</sup> And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, «Before the cock *crows* today, you will deny me *THREE TIMES*». <sup>62</sup> And he went out and wept bitterly.

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<sup>13</sup> Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, <sup>14</sup> and said to them, «YOU BROUGHT ME this man as one who was perverting the people; and after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him; <sup>15</sup> neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Behold, nothing deserving death has been done by him; <sup>16</sup> I will therefore chastise him and release him». [<sup>17</sup> He felt obligated to release someone to them during the feast] <sup>18</sup> But they all cried out together, «Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas»— <sup>19</sup> a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city, and for murder. <sup>20</sup> Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus; <sup>21</sup> but *they cried-out*, «Crucify, crucify him!» <sup>22</sup> *A THIRD TIME* he said to them, «Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no crime deserving death; I will therefore chastise him and release him». <sup>23</sup> But they INSISTED, demanding with loud *cries* that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. <sup>24</sup> So Pilate gave sentence that their demand should be granted. <sup>25</sup> He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will.

*INTERPRETATION*

## Peter and Pilate

The first of the apostles, the one to whom Jesus had given the name «Peter» (6,14) by reason of the solidity to which he was called, gives way at the first serious test. Called upon to declare himself, he breaks down when faced with the first servant woman who comes along (22,56). He will likewise fail on the occasion offered him a little later (22,58) and about an hour after that, before the «insistence» of a third accuser (22,59), he will give way for the third time (22,61) in his denial. Pilate the pagan, on the contrary, does not hesitate to proclaim, also three times (23,22), the innocence of Jesus. Despite the accusations (23,2) and the shouts (23,21) of the multitude, despite the risks he runs of being accused of weakness in the defence of the order he is entrusted with, he is resolute in rejecting the false accusations of which Jesus is the object (23,4.14.22). It could even be thought that Peter risked undergoing the same fate as his master if he admitted to being his disciple, and that on the other hand Pilate's position would make it easier for him to resist the pressure from the high priests and the people. Nevertheless Pilate's attitude can be a lesson for the disciple. However, in the end, the governor also will not resist fear and, in the face of the «insistence» of the multitude (23,23), he will abandon Jesus (23,24-25), while Peter will come back from his denial in tears of repentance (22,62).

## Jesus is silent

During Peter's interrogation (22,54-62) as during all the final scene that opposes Pilate to the multitude (23,13-25), not one word of Jesus is reported. His silence is very noticeable when he is confronted with the men guarding him (22,63-65); it is heavily stressed when he is confronted with Herod and his soldiers (23,9). He who hitherto had spent his time teaching no longer says a word, because anything he might say would not be received by his interlocutors. With Peter, there is no time to speak, but let the prophecy be fulfilled to the end; whereas a simple glance will be enough to bring back to mind what was said the day before (22,61). The guards do not wait for an answer to their question (22,64) any more than they do to their insults (22,65) and their blows (22,63). As for Herod, he demands a sign (23,8), certainly not any words. Sent back to Pilate, Jesus fades completely into the background and the talking is taken over by the governor to whom the cries of the multitude reply (23,13-25). No word can be addressed to the one who is not expecting it. This is also because the time for silence has come, the silence of the Word who in the Passion speaks to faith more than any word. On seeing Jesus dumb like the lamb led to the slaughter bearing with the insults and the jeers of his adversaries, the disciple will recognize in him the Servant destined to save the multitudes (Isa 52-53).

### The last testimony

Peter could have testified to what he had seen and heard, and what he had confessed a long time ago: «You are the Christ of God» (9,20). The members of the Sanhedrin also had all the necessary means for condemning Jesus: had he not given himself out to be the beloved son of the master of the vineyard and his heir (20,13-14)? And yet it is necessary that at this last moment Jesus himself should bear witness. He will do so unambiguously and before the supreme Jewish authorities (22,69) and before the highest representative of Roman power (23,3), before God and Caesar. All must hear it from his lips and receive his testimony (22,71). He alone is entitled to confess the truth of his unique relation with the Father. It is only that voice that all must hear. No other can answer for him.

### The judgement of Jesus

During his trial, Jesus says very little; nothing throughout the night when Peter denied him (22,54-62) and when the guards ill-treat him (22,63-65), nothing when with Herod who despises him (23,6-12) nor before the crowd demanding his condemnation (23,13-25). And yet, in the centre of the sequence, the question of the members of the Sanhedrin rings out: «What need have we of further testimony, for we ourselves have heard it from his lips?» (22,71). It is true that he has just replied straightforwardly to the Sanhedrin that he admitted to being the Christ (22,67), the Son of God (22,70) and that he will be seated at the right hand of the Power (22,69); it is also true that he will again accept, in the presence of Pilate, the royal title of Christ (23,3). But, in doing so, he sends those interrogating him back to themselves each time: it is they who said that he was the Son of God (22,70), Christ the king (22,67; 23,3); Even before declaring himself before the Sanhedrin, he does not hesitate to judge their intentions clearly (22,67-68). It is true that he is the accused who has to respond before his judges. But it is also true that, in Luke's construction, he appears as the only witness (22,71), and even as the one before whom are judged, or will judge themselves, all the others taking part in the drama. Peter refuses to witness for Jesus; he is the first to judge himself by not recognizing him who was his master; and yet it is the prisoner who, with only a glance (22,61), judges the one who will escape arrest, not indeed to condemn him, but to get him «to come back» (22,32). Jesus' silence before the tetrarch (23,6-12) as before his guards (22,63-65) is not a contemptuous refusal; it reveals the stupidity of their mockery and the futility of their demands. Finally, before the enraged multitude (23,13-25), Jesus has no need to speak so that they may judge themselves out of their own mouths; without realizing it, they declare themselves guilty before Jesus of the subversion of which they are accusing him. Judged by all, Jesus brings out the truth concerning each one, whether they open their mouths or are silent; he thus reveals himself as their judge, their true king.