

Water.<sup>1</sup> Though St John nowhere speaks explicitly of the two great Christian sacraments in the gospel—probably due to the discipline of the secret then considered binding—no Christian would have missed the strong sacramental associations of this and other sayings and signs strewn about the gospel. In this way, as we saw at the beginning, the text speaks on two levels : to those who having ears could not or would not hear, and on the other hand to the baptised intelligence of those who have received the Spirit ; and the need of the Christian of today to quench his thirst at the mystery of Christ participated through the sacramental life of the Church is no less great than that of John's Christians at Ephesus.

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THE LORD IS WITH YOU

THE last few lines of St Matthew's gospel are familiar, perhaps too familiar to every apologist. Indeed they are part of his stock in trade. They are quoted to demonstrate so many points of Catholic teaching. This, of course, is not surprising when we consider how comprehensive a text Mt. 28:18ss. is. In the space of two verses Matthew tells us of the extent of Christ's authority, the mission of the Apostles, the importance of baptism ; he names the three Persons of the Trinity, and ends with Christ's promise to be with his Apostles until the end of time. So concise a text deserves to be familiarly known. And yet, while the first parts of this text are often explained at length, the last sentence is apparently somewhat neglected. 'Behold I am with you all days until the end of the world.' This phrase is quoted usually in connection with the stability and infallibility of the Church, but it is very seldom that very much comment is passed upon it. The reason for this is probably that the words are so clear in themselves that any comment would seem to be superfluous. In fact it is difficult to express what they say in any simpler words. Of course we can start with this phrase as a premise, and argue to further conclusions—that the Church will last until the end of time for instance, or that Christ will always protect his church. But such are conclusions and not comments on the meaning of the words themselves.

<sup>1</sup> We might mention here a curious ascription to Thymoteus, one of the early Manichaeans, 'About baptism he spoke in the same way, namely, that the Lord Jesus Christ was himself the Baptism and that there was no other, in accordance as it is written : I am the Living Water.' This is found in Petrus Siculus, *Historia Manichaeorum*, PG 104, 1284 ; where it was written must remain a matter for speculation.

To understand this phrase fully, we must first ascertain what it meant to those who first heard it from Christ. In the context, they have just received the mission of preaching the Gospel to the whole world. They are to make disciples of the whole world—an enormous task which has not yet been completed, and a task which must have seemed impossible to these eleven ordinary men. Surely some of the difficulties involved must have crossed their minds when they thought of what Christ had said. 'He charges them to make the hardest of all conquests, and what he requires of them is to all appearance impossible, indeed inconceivable. There are but a dozen workers, obscure, timid, knowing nothing of the great world, and he wills that they shall scatter over the world, face powerful forces, triumph over enemies, over hostility to their race, over sarcasm and mockery, that they shall stifle hatred and win souls and hearts.'<sup>1</sup>

With such a task ahead of them it is easy to imagine the Apostles asking, 'How are we to achieve this? We are not capable of so difficult a task.' Matthew does not give us the Apostles' question, their doubts or fears, but he does give us Christ's answer to that question, whether it was asked or not: 'Behold, I am with you.'

For this situation was not a new one, except in the particular details of the command. Throughout the Old Testament God carried out his designs, by appointing envoys to speak on His behalf, and make known his will. And it was not an uncommon thing for these envoys to protest that they were not capable of carrying out their allotted task. It is in these and similar contexts that we find God encouraging them with the promise 'I will be with you.'

Thus God chose Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand the release of God's chosen people. Moses is certain that such a mission is beyond him: 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt? But He said, I will be with you. . . .' Again Moses protested, 'Oh my Lord I am not eloquent . . . I am slow of speech and of tongue.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Go and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you will speak' (Ex. 3:12; 4:10). And a similar promise is made to Moses and Aaron together. It is clear that God's promise to be with Moses is meant to encourage him and remove his fear. It is a promise of definite positive assistance, for God will put the words in the mouth of Moses. And it is with this assurance that Moses sets out and accomplishes his mission. On the death of Moses, God chooses Joshua to succeed to his position and to lead the chosen people into the promised land. Again it is a formidable undertaking, involving many difficulties. Once more, therefore, God promises his help:

<sup>1</sup> Leon Cristiani, *Why We Believe*, p. 9

## THE LORD IS WITH YOU

No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life ; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you, and I will not fail you or forsake you. . . . Have I not commanded you ? Be strong and of good courage ; be not frightened, neither be dismayed ; for Yahweh your God is with you wherever you go. (Jos. 1:5ss.)

Similarly, we read in Isaias :

You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off, fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God. (Is. 41:10)

Fear not for I am with you, I will bring your offspring from the east and from the west I will gather you. (Is. 43:5)

Hence we can see that the promise to be with a person or a group is intended to remove fear and apprehension. And the fear is removed precisely because God promises positive assistance. He promises that the mission will be a success despite the shortcomings of the chosen envoy. This element of success is already clear to some extent in the quotations given above. However in others it is more evident still. In Genesis, for instance, the promise is made to Jacob in these words : ' Behold I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land ; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you ' (Gen. 28:15). God therefore intends to see that Jacob achieves his mission. It is perhaps worth noting also, that that of which God has spoken to Jacob is the spread of His chosen people all over the world : ' and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north and to the south,' a passage not unlike that of Mt. 28. A more striking parallel still, however, is to be found in the call of the prophet Jeremias :

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying . . . ' I appointed you a prophet to the nations.' Then I said, ' Ah Lord God, behold I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.' But the Lord said to me, ' Do not say I am only a youth ; for to all to whom I shall send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.' . . . ' Arise, and say to them everything that I command you. Do not be dismayed by them, lest I dismay you before them. And behold, I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, against the whole land. . . . They will fight against you ; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you.' (Jer. 1:4-19)

The situation here is indeed quite similar to that at the end of Matthew's Gospel. In both instances there is the command to preach, and to preach only what they are told to preach. In both God promises to be with them. In the quotation from Jeremias we have his protestation and a fuller description of the help that God will give to him. Moreover he is warned that there will be opposition to his message, whereas the Apostles are left to presume it. To meet this opposition

Jeremias is promised great strength and power, so that his enemies will not gain the victory. His success is guaranteed. And the guarantee is precisely the fact that God will be with him. . . . If the promise made to Jeremias carries with it this guarantee of success, and the strength to achieve it, that to the Apostles must be just as great : Jeremias's mission is to one nation, the Apostles' to all nations.

In Deut. 20 we find instructions on how the Jews are to prepare for battle. Here again God promises His assistance, even to the extent of fighting for them :

When you go forth to war against your enemies . . . and see an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them ; for the Lord your God is with you . . . and the priest shall say to them : ' Hear O Israel, you draw near this day to battle against your enemies ; do not fear, or tremble or be in dread of them ; for the Lord your God is He that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.' (Deut. 20:188.)

Once again the promise is made to those facing a difficult situation—a battle with the odds against them. But they are assured of victory because God is with them. On the other hand, when God is not with them in battle, they are defeated ; as, for instance, in Num. 14:4188., where we are told explicitly that God was not with them, and the battle was lost.

Taking the phrase ' I am with you ' therefore, in these contexts, it is seen to imply a promise that God will bring to a successful conclusion the work that He has entrusted to men, giving them the necessary strength and power to achieve it. Moreover, there is an impression that God will intervene in a special way, giving them positive assistance in their mission, an assistance over and above His ordinary concurrence in every human action.

What then did the Apostles understand by this phrase when it was spoken to them by Christ ? What did Matthew's readers understand by it, remembering that they were Jews, familiar with the Old Testament ? Surely they would be well aware of its significance and its history, and remember how and where it had been used in the past. And we presume that Matthew intended them to do just that. For as we have said, the situation was new only in detail, and this phrase might help to make that clear. Once again God is choosing His envoys and sending them out to fulfil a difficult task. Once more He is promising to be with them in their work. Consequently they can proceed with confidence and be certain of success. They need have no fear. He will teach them what to say—just as He was with the mouth of Moses He will be with their mouths ; they shall speak what He has commanded, just as Jeremias spoke the words of Yahweh. There will be opposition, but it will be ineffective, against the strength

and power given to God's new envoy the Church. In a word it is a promise that the mission Christ entrusted to his Apostles will be successful in all its aspects.

Consequently it is a pity that when this text is used in Apologetics, its use is so frequently restricted to showing that the Church will last for all time. It is a guarantee of much more than that. Because the Church's mission is to all men, it is a guarantee that the Church will reach all men. Because the mission of the Church is holy, this promise is a guarantee that the Church will never lack holiness. It is a guarantee that the Church will always receive that power and divine assistance she needs to achieve her end. On the other hand, it is not a promise that the Church will never fall into difficulties. Christ never promised that there would be no bad popes, no schism, no heresy, or no persecution. Indeed he prophesied there would be false teachers who would deceive even the elect. But in promising to be with his Church he was in effect saying, 'When these things happen, I will be with you to deliver you.' And the facts of history bear this out. Take for example the Great Western Schism, which rocked the Church from top to bottom. Yet she survived where any merely human society would have collapsed, because Christ was 'with her.' In the course of the Church's history there have been bad priests, bad bishops, even bad popes, and every generation sees a considerable number of Catholics lapse and apostatise; yet the Church continues because Christ is 'with her.' Far from contradicting the promise of Christ, these objections to the sanctity of the Church only go to emphasise the fact that he has kept it. Indeed they can be used to convince the unbeliever of the power of God in the Church. Looking at the varied history of the Church, seeing her survival despite attacks from within and without, the unbeliever should have to confess of the Church what Nicodemus confessed of Christ: 'We know you are a teacher come from God; for no-one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him' (Jn. 3:2).

It may now be asked in what way Christ gives this power promised in the phrase, 'I will be with you all days to the end of the world.'

Shortly before the Ascension the Apostles, showing a lack of understanding of the mission of Christ, ask him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?' Christ does not answer that question directly, but in a polite way tells them to mind their own business, and then he adds, 'but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth' (Ac. 1:6, 8). This tells us more or less the same truth which is contained in the last verse of Matthew's Gospel. But there is this

difference : Matthew gives us a command and a promise, Luke in the Acts gives us a prophecy. A prophecy that the Church will spread throughout the world, and it will do so by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit of truth that is to take the place of Christ when Christ has returned to the Father. Christ had already promised to ask the Father to send this Spirit 'to be with you forever. . . . The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send, in my name, will teach you all things and bring to your mind all that I have said to you' (Jn. 14:16, 26). It is by the Spirit, therefore, that the Apostles will be enabled to fulfil the command of Christ to teach all nations. This is not surprising, when we recall that the Spirit is often the instrument of God's power in the Bible, and that, as has been said, the promise of Christ to be with his Church is in effect a promise to give the Church the power to carry out its task. Furthermore, there are many examples in the Old and New Testaments at least suggesting that there is a definite connection between the promise of God to be with someone and the reception of the Spirit by that person. Thus in Sam. 10:6ss., 'Then the Spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you . . . and you shall be turned into another man . . . for God is with you.' In Jg. 6:11ss., in the story of Gideon, we read :

And the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and said to him, 'the Lord is with you, you mighty man of valour . . . go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of the Midian.' . . . And the Lord said to him, 'I will be with you and shall smite the Midians as one man.'

A little later we find that 'the Spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon,' and he defeated the Midians, although they greatly outnumbered his troop. A similar passage appears in the New Testament, and is indeed one very familiar to us :

The angel Gabriel was sent by God . . . to a virgin . . . and he said to her, 'Hail O favoured one, the Lord is with you . . . do not be afraid, for you have found favour with God. . . . The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most High will overshadow you. . . .' (Lk. 1:26ss.)

It would seem, therefore, that the presence of God and His assistance implied in the phrase 'the Lord is with you' are accomplished through the power of the Spirit. And by this power the Church continues, and will continue to the end of the world, to fulfil the command of Christ to bring salvation to all men. What is more, she can be certain of success in this work. With confidence the Church can say : 'The Lord is with me ; I do not fear ; what can man do to me ? The Lord is with me to help me ; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me' (Ps. 117:6-7).

In the course of time 'the Lord be with you' has become perhaps

the commonest of all Christian greetings and prayers. St Paul uses it frequently at the end of his epistles (2 Cor. 13:11 ; Phil. 4:9, etc.), and it is found also in the Old Testament, as for instance in Ru. 2:4. Nowadays, however, it is heard so often that it tends to have little or no meaning at all. Seven times in the Mass the priest says *Dominus vobiscum*, and the same little phrase appears countless times throughout the Breviary. In general, it is found almost always before every collect or set of collects in the Church's Liturgy. In English 'God be with you' has unfortunately been contracted to 'goodbye' and hence has lost all meaning for us. Yet these phrases do mean something. From their biblical contexts we can see that in themselves they are prayers for the success of the undertaking in hand. The *Dominus vobiscum* is in fact a prayer that Christ will join the prayers of the Church to his own, and thus ensure that they will be granted.

B. EAGER

### BOOK REVIEWS

L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St Paul*. Tr. by Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker. Herder and Herder, New York ; Nelson, Edinburgh 1959. pp. 419. 45s.

What is the Church? Or more exactly, what is the *res Christiana*—is Church in fact the best name for it? What sort of a grouping or community is it? What are the exact relative relationships between Christ, the individual Christian and other Christians?

These must be fascinating questions for any Christian; and they have a special importance today. But surely the first prerequisite to any discussion or any philosophical or even theological study of the question must be a knowledge of what revelation has to say about it. And in the first place this will surely mean a knowledge of what St Paul has to say about it.

That is what Mgr Cerfaux's great work is concerned with—simply to find out what St Paul thinks about the Christian community. He is, he says, 'not concerned with the fact of the Church so much as with St Paul's idea of it.' This marks the extent and the limits of his work.

Certain limits are therefore obvious; he is not concerned with Church organisation, liturgy, apostolate, sacraments and so on. But this does not reduce the book to a simple list of statements—the sort of thing anyone could do, given a good concordance and patience.