

Apostolate is a co-operation in the harvest by which, on the last days, all the nations must be gathered for the Lord.

Therefore the apostolate has first a universalistic character: the field is the world. The Good Tidings announced first in Galilee must resound throughout the world and the saving activity has to reach all the nations.

Secondly, it has an eschatological aspect: the harvest is the end of the world. While men think that 'there are yet four months and then only will the harvest come', the work of the apostles shows that the fields 'are already white for the harvest'. The day has come for the harvesters to enter the field: the judgment has begun and becomes actual wherever the voice of the apostle can reach.

Lastly, it has an angelic value: the harvesters are the angels. The missionary is an angel in the literal sense of the term, an *angelos*, a messenger. He is even as much superior to the angels as the message he has been entrusted with is superior to any message ever entrusted to angels. For this message is the eternal and substantial Word of God, total expression of God's redeeming love.

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PRIESTS AND PEOPLE

Any reflection on the role of the Church, the people of God, must begin with the Exodus. It was by the Exodus that God redeemed Israel and at the same time created them as His people. It was by the Exodus that He revealed His loving choice of them. This was the beginning of a new relationship between God and man; God became again their Father, He begot them, they became His first-born sons (Ex. 4:22); like a shepherd, He led them through the wilderness to food and rest (cf. Ps. 80:1), He was their leader in battle, their king. But the supreme expression of this relationship was the covenant, by which God became 'God with them', God in their midst, with the tabernacle as the sign of His dwelling among them.

This covenant was not merely an agreement which God made with the nation; it was the focal point and principle of unity of their national existence. How true this is can be seen from recent studies into the tribal origins of Israel, which suggest that these were not quite so simple as it might appear, not simply a matter of descent from Jacob-Israel. The Bible itself lets it be seen that others besides the descendants of Jacob could be incorporated into the nation: Rahab of Jericho, for

example, or the Midianite family of Jethro father-in-law of Moses. What counted in Israel was not in the first place blood-relationship, but the covenant; this was the decisive factor constituting the bond of union between the tribes.

Israel was chosen. This implies privilege. But even more it implies responsibility. The people of God is not merely chosen out of the rest, it is chosen for something. And what it is chosen for is God's purpose, not its own glory. If God is with them, it is in order that through them God may be with men. This is even implicit in the promises which are Israel's privilege. The promise of a land is not, basically, simply a reward for services rendered, expressed in a form suitable to the limited vision of a semi-nomadic people; it is a hope for the blessing of the God of all good; the land flowing with milk and honey is a return to the garden of Eden where God walked with man in the cool of the evening. The hope for children is the hope for a life which transcends our mortality, the life of God Himself, the living God. The law, similarly, was not a burden binding the Israelites to obedience so that from this obedience they could claim a reward. It was a revelation of God Himself, a 'testimony' to God: *testimonium Domini; illuminans oculos*. And it was a revelation which was intended to be a guide not to Israel only but to all men: 'The days will come when people will say: Let us go to the mountain of God so that He may teach us His ways, so that we may follow His path; for the law goes forth from Sion' (Is. 2:3). The very concept of covenant has the same implication; for it does not mean that the Holy God is bound to Israel, as it were imprisoned in an inseparable bond; it means that through them God is present to the world.

If one were to try to sum up in a phrase this purpose for which God has destined Israel one might think of the words of Exodus 19:5-6, that Israel is 'a kingly priesthood'. Israel exists in order that God may be worshipped, and in order that through them His dominion may be established over the world. The Holy of Holies is the sanctuary where God is worshipped, but also the throne-room from which He reigns. And since God must first be known before He can be adored, we have these three qualities of revelation, worship, dominion. God must be known, adored and served; and Israel must proclaim His name, lead the chorus of praise and be the means by which He reigns. Israel is prophet, priest and king.

This is the role of Israel, the people of God. One thing which must strike us as we reflect on this people is the very subordinate part played by the individual in Israel's account of her hopes and ideals. The priestly kingdom is the community as a whole, not the individual. This does not mean that the individual's personal responsibility was

ignored; but his responsibility was primarily to be faithful to the demands of the covenant, so that the covenant people as a whole could faithfully perform its function.

Along with this went a very definite attitude towards authority. God alone was master, and no purely human authority had any rights over God's people. The priests certainly had no authority of this kind. They were primarily functionaries, one might almost say 'employees' (the word for their appointment was 'to fill the hand', that is, to pay them, hire them). The priests had a certain skill in interpreting the law, and in time they came to take over many of the functions of sacrifice;¹ but they were not governors. Even the king had no autonomous authority. It was this which nearly caused a split when the question of kingship was first raised—'It is me that they have rejected, that I should not rule them' (1 Sam. 8:7); and when the split eventually did come about it was partly through suspicion of the encroachment of autocratic monarchy on the independence of the covenant people.² The problem was solved by David through the king being looked on both as the representative of God and as the embodiment of the people, and so a living representation of the covenant itself. But God alone was truly king; and the only men with authority in Israel were those who spoke and acted on the authorisation of God Himself—men like the Judges, filled with the spirit of God, or men like the prophets whose words were the very words of God.

In moving from the Old Testament to the New we are sometimes tempted into a hasty parallel between the old people of God and the new community, the Church. But the parallel cannot be made directly in this way. The climax, the perfection, the justification and explanation of all the Old Testament is one man, Christ: 'not to your seeds, as of many, but to one, Christ' (Gal. 3:16). The chosen people, the holy people, the people set aside are finally perfectly embodied in Christ alone. To the people redeemed from Egypt God said: You are my first-born son. To the king as their representative God also said: You are my son, begotten this day. But the Fatherhood of God is now made perfect in the presence of his only-begotten Son. Israel was the proud possessor of the Law of God which revealed his way; but Christ is 'the end of the law', himself the Way. He is the new Temple. In him the covenant is complete, God and man united in one person.

¹ cf. R. de Vaux, *Institutions de l'ancien testament*, II, 196–210. But obviously, through their role in Israel, the priests did come to have a certain prestige, a certain authority and a certain responsibility. We notice how they incur the denunciation of the prophets along with the kings: cf. Jer. 2:8; 8:1; Ez. 22:26.

² cf. J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 207.

In Christ, then, Israel's destiny of prophet, priest and king is fulfilled. He is the prophet, the witness who proclaims God to the world. He is the priest who offered a completely acceptable sacrifice. He is the king who reigns from the cross and sits at the right hand of the throne of God.

On this true stock of Israel, Christians are grafted; baptised into Christ, we become the new people of God. In him, we fulfil the function of prophet, priest and king. Into each one of us now, not, as in Israel of old, into a few chosen individuals, the Spirit of God is poured so that we may bear witness to the world. Jeremiah had looked for a new covenant in these terms: 'I will put my law in them and write it on their hearts, so that men will not have to say to another, Teach me the knowledge of God; but all of them, from the least to the greatest, will know me' (Jer. 31:33-4). This was the completion of Israel's destiny foreseen by Joel in words taken up by Peter at the first Christian Pentecost: 'I shall pour out my Spirit on *all* flesh' (Joel 3:1, Acts 2:17). In him we are priests, offering ourselves as a sacrifice pleasing to God (Rom. 12:1). United with him, the Risen Lord triumphant over death and sin, we too reign (1 Cor. 4:8).

We are prophets, priests and kings; but only in Christ. This means that we possess these qualities in virtue of our union with Christ, but in the exercise of them too Christ must remain the source and main-spring. Putting it another way, the Church is the Body of Christ, but Christ still remains the head of the Body. He plays a dual role in the Church, and to this dual role corresponds a differentiation of function within the Church. This may help to understand a common difficulty which rises when we speak of the 'priesthood of the laity'.

Christ is prophet; he speaks the word of God, he bears witness to God, he is the Truth. Through baptism, all Christians too become prophets; we possess the Spirit by which we bear witness to the truth. But our witness is not independent of his; and Christ's role as Chief Witness, as permanent rock of truth, is sacramentally present in the Church through those whom we call bishops. For the bishops are the successors of the apostles, and the apostles are those who bear the witness of Christ himself. 'I am not ashamed of the gospel,' Paul writes: 'It is the power of God to salvation' (Rom. 1:16); and again to the Corinthians: 'We preach Christ and him crucified . . . Christ the power of God, Christ the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1:23f.). Christ's work of revealing God perfectly, of proclaiming the truth that saves, was completed on the cross; but all the power of that historical and therefore contingent act is made eternally available in the apostolic witness. In the apostolic witness, Christ's own witness is prolonged.

And in the Church today this witness is continued in the bishops. The prophetic function of the Church, then, is fulfilled in a twofold way, the Spirit is in the Church in different degrees, corresponding to the twofold relationship between Christ and his Church: The completely authoritative, active, guiding witness of Christ the Head is represented in the bishops; it is for the Church, the Body of Christ, to echo this proclamation by our Amen (an Amen, however, which must resound throughout the world).

The same principle holds too for Christ's priesthood. There is only one priesthood in the new law (Heb. 7:23f.); but through baptism into Christ, all Christians become priests in and with him. Just as he offered the sacrifice of himself, so we offer the sacrifice of ourselves—the sacrifice of our bodies (Rom. 12:1), the sacrifice of our charity (Phil. 4:18, Eph. 5:2), the sacrifice of our faith (Phil. 2:17).¹ But our sacrifice of ourselves is only of value in so far as it is united with Christ's own sacrifice. Therefore out of the body of Christ certain men are chosen—to whom especially the name priest is given—who sacramentally represent Christ the head of the Body, daily renewing his sacrifice of himself; so that our sacrifice and his, the sacrifice of the Head and the sacrifice of the Body, may be gathered up together and ascend as a single sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Church, Head and Body.

Christ's role as priest and prophet is represented in the Church by the bishop and the priest. But there is no one who represents his role as king. Bishop and priest do of course have a certain authority within the Church, but this authority must be within the limits of their role and governed by its spirit. St Paul's dealings with the Corinthians presents us with an illuminating example. In 1 Cor. 12 he passes judgment on the part to be played in the Church by charismatic gifts. This immediately is instructive; it tells us that the Church is a visible society with a definite organisation and authority—even though all possess the Spirit, this does not mean that the only authority is the Spirit in each individual. But then we notice first of all on what grounds he exercises authority over the Spirit in the Church—not simply because of his title as apostle, not simply because he founded that Church, not simply because somebody must organise things and he feels he has the right to be that someone: but because, as he says earlier in a similar case (1 Cor. 7:40), 'I too have the Spirit of God'. He claims authority to regulate the manifestations of the Spirit by the Spirit. Secondly, we must note on what principle he makes his decision; he is not acting out of a desire for good order (still less, of

¹ 1 Peter 2:5 also speaks of the Church as a kingly priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices; and it will be noticed that apart from Christ's own sacrifice of himself, these are the only references to Christian sacrifice in the New Testament.

course, out of a desire to impose his own will, out of a desire for conformity); he regulates the position of the various activities in the Church because this Church is the Body of Christ and should represent outwardly what it is inwardly, one body working together with all its variety of gifts to the one end, which is the end of Christ himself, the glory of God: 'There are different gifts, but one Spirit; different services, but one Lord; different activities, but the same God who works all in all' (1 Cor. 12:4).

For this, finally, is the relationship of the various orders in the Church—not distinction, but harmony. We distinguish in order to unite. And the final unity is that of God Himself. The people of God are chosen in order that through them and in them God may take possession of the whole of creation. This has been achieved in principle in Christ: 'He is the first-born of every creature, for all things were created in him . . . and all subsists in him . . . For God has been pleased to make fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile all beings to him' (Col. 1:15-20). What is true in principle in Christ is to be achieved in practice, in reality, through Christ's Body which is the Church. And when this is achieved, 'Then shall be the end, when Christ hands over the kingdom to God and the Father . . . He must rule until all things are put under his feet; but when all things are subjected to him, then he, the Son, will subject everything to God, in order that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 12:24-8). Our Lord is the fulness of God, so to speak—the fulness of the godhead dwells in him, and God would be incomplete without him. But the Church is the fulness of Christ, so that through us God Himself is completed: 'He is the head, the Church is his Body, the fulness of him who fills all in all' (Eph. 1:23). This is the glorious destiny of the people of God, in all its variety of ministries: 'Some are apostles, others prophets, others evangelists, others pastors and teachers, to bind together this holy people for the service of God; to build up the body of Christ, to make up one perfect man according to the measure of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. 4:11-13).

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'Why might not the Hebrews have their mythology, as well as other nations? and why might not their mythologists contrive or improve a system of cosmogony, as well as those of Chaldaea, or Egypt, or