

world," Yahuda, *The Accuracy of the Bible*, p. 183. In one instance the serpent is depicted with human arms and legs, standing upright before a deity and putting a round-shaped cake in its mouth. It was the role of the serpent to supply the gods with food in the nether world. In Palestine itself before the Israelite conquest, we learn from archæology, the serpent was the emblem or attribute of gods or goddesses of fertility and hence of sexual life, *cf.* Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archæology*, and Coppens, *La Connaissance du Bien et du Mal et le Pêché du Paradis*, 1948, Louvain. There would therefore be nothing surprising in the use of the serpent in the Genesis narrative to indicate a superior being, while attaching a somewhat different meaning to it, namely making it stand for Satan himself.

These early chapters of Genesis are admitted to contain a certain amount of symbolism, as is stated in the recent Letter of the Biblical Commission elsewhere in this issue; and since the purpose of this symbolism was to make these profound truths intelligible to the common folk, the actual symbols used would naturally be those with which they were familiar, always provided that they did not in any way militate against the exalted character of the inspired text. Now the Israelites had spent centuries in Egypt and had contact with the peoples of Canaan even before the actual conquest. Hence they must have been acquainted with the symbolism of the serpent.

Whether the serpent of Genesis ch. iii, is to be taken as a symbol or whether Satan actually appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent cannot be decided with any degree of assurance. It has been said that the reply of the Biblical Commission on the historical character of the first three chapters of Genesis (1909) excludes the former interpretation. But this does not appear to be the case. The Commission, in enumerating the nine points which must be taken as historical, mentions the transgression of the divine command at the instigation of the Devil, under the appearance of a serpent (*diabolo sub serpentis specie suasore*). This wording certainly seems to suggest that the appearance under the form of a serpent is to be taken as historical fact; but another explanation is possible. Since the Devil is not mentioned by name in the narrative, the Commission felt it necessary to specify exactly whom they referred to and this might account for the mention of the serpent in their list of historical points, without necessarily implying that it is to be taken as historical fact, *cf.* *Enchiridion Biblicum*, no. 334; Ceuppens, *Genèse* i-iii, p. 153.

R. C. FULLER.

*Why should the mention of the bodies of the saints rising from the dead after Christ's resurrection (Matt. xxvii, 52-3) be inserted here just after Christ's death? What exactly happened and what is its significance?*

The reason for its mention here is probably because of its connection with the earthquake which caused the opening of the tombs. It is hardly

conceivable that they would have risen from the dead on Good Friday and come forth from the tomb only on Easter Sunday. The latter event is explicitly stated not to have occurred until after Christ's resurrection. But the full significance would be lost had they risen earlier. "Christ," as St. Paul tells us "is risen from the dead, the *first fruits* of them that sleep," I Cor. xv, 20.

We learn from I Peter, iii, 18 that Christ, after His death, went down to Limbo, where the souls of the just who died before Him were detained, and brought them the good news of the redemption. On the morning of the Resurrection, He led them into glory, though not of course with their glorified bodies, for they had to wait for the General Resurrection when Christ comes again, before they could possess those. This is the general teaching of the Fathers.

What then is the event Matthew relates? There can hardly be serious doubt that the Evangelist is speaking of real bodies. He gives no indication at all that he is only speaking of phantoms. A large number of Fathers and commentators hold that a certain number of the just, who were buried near Jerusalem, were given glorified bodies on the morning of the resurrection of Christ, that they then appeared to many during the days that followed and that they went up into heaven with their glorified bodies at Christ's Ascension. Thus Epiphanius, Clement of Alexandria, Jerome, Maldonatus, a Lapide. They would thus be a striking exception to the general rule with regard to the Resurrection of the Body at the Last Day.

Others, however, following St. Augustine (and these seem to be in a majority today) prefer to say that they did not receive glorified bodies, but natural bodies which they had on earth during their life, that they appeared to various people in Jerusalem and that after a short time, their bodies returned to the grave to await the General Resurrection, while their souls went up into heaven, now open since the resurrection of Christ. St. Augustine concludes from Hebrews xi, 39-40 that they would not have received their glorified bodies before the rest of mankind. Lagrange, Belser and Poelzl prefer this view.

The purpose of the appearance of these bodies was no doubt to show visibly that Christ has raised us from the death of sin and that at the Last Day we shall possess glorified bodies, as Christ did on Easter Sunday. In other words it was to stress the significance of Christ's death and resurrection.

Explanations of the passage will be found in Poelzl, *The Passion and Glory of Jesus Christ* and in Belser, *The History of the Passion*.

R. C. FULLER.